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NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible

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QUICK START GUIDE

TO THE *NIV CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS STUDY BIBLE*

“Even though the Bible was written *for* us, it wasn’t written *to* us. When we take our Western, modern culture and impose it on the text, we’re putting in meaning that wasn’t there, and we’re missing the meaning that the text has.”

—Dr. John H. Walton

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

—Dr. Craig S. Keener

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

About the *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*

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

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

What Help Do These Study Features Offer?

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

- Book Introductions answer questions about who wrote the books of the Bible, to whom, and when, as well as informing readers about the larger cultural and political context in which a book was written. In the Old Testament, dates of writing and specific authorship for each book are less clear than in the New Testament, where such information is marginally less controversial, although still debated. That’s why the Old Testament introductions include “Key Concepts” and the New Testament Introductions include “Quick Glance” information to help readers orient themselves.
- The New Testament includes a reference feature entitled “Key New Testament Terms” that is designed to help clarify and further define the cultural contexts behind these terms. It’s included as a background feature to define and explain terms that often repeat in the New Testament notes.

- The NIV Center-column Cross Reference system aids in deeper study of the Bible's themes, language and concepts by leading readers to related passages on the same or similar themes.
- Over 10,000 study notes have been placed close to the text that they amplify and explain. These have been designed to provide the reader with a deep and rich understanding of the nuances that the original readers and hearers of the Bible would have intuitively understood. They focus on the land, the literature, and the political and cultural contexts that the Bible's authors lived in, and emphasize how the people of Israel were both influenced by, as well as how they were called to be different from, their surrounding culture.
- Full-color in-text maps, charts and diagrams, along with some 320 essays, summarize and explain important background information and ideas from Scripture.
- Front and end matter features include author information, an author's introduction with helpful questions and answers about this Bible, more information on the NIV translation itself (in the NIV Preface), and many other helpful study tools.
- The NIV Concordance is a tool designed to help readers who remember a key word or phrase in a passage to locate the verses they are looking for. Words and names are listed alphabetically, along with their more significant verse references.
- Color maps at the end of this study Bible complement the color maps in the interior of the Bible to help readers to visualize the geographic context of what they are studying.

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

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AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

TO THE *NIV CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS STUDY BIBLE*

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

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

For whom has this study Bible been designed?

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

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

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

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

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

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

How will understanding the Bible's cultural background improve my faith walk?

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

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

Tell me about the notes in this Bible.

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

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

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

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

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

How was Israelite culture shaped by its surrounding culture?

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

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

Can you provide a modern example of this?

When Americans speak of the philosophy of "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," they are resonating with an idea that has penetrated society over thousands of years rather than

simply borrowing from the writings of Epicurus. In a similar way, an observer from the distant future would fail to understand American culture of the 21st century if they did not understand the foundations of individualism, personal rights, or consumerism (just to name a few of the influences). To offer a more specific example: a reader in the distant future would need some historical background to understand a familiar American question from the early twenty-first century: “Where were you on 9/11?” The question assumes a shared understanding of background that the asker does not bother to state.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But why is the study of cultural backgrounds so important?

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

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

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

Another importance to cultural backgrounds, then, is that by becoming aware of the ways that

ancient people thought, we can see the differences between them and us. If we know nothing of the ancient world, we will be inclined to impose our own culture and worldview on the biblical text. This will always be detrimental to our understanding.

What do I need to know before I begin?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Craig S. Keener, New Testament Editor

Ph.D., Duke University, 1991

M.A., M.Div., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 1985, 1987

B.A., Central Bible College / Evangel University, 1982

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

Craig has authored 20 books, four of which have won book awards in *Christianity Today*. His *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (1993), now in its 2nd revised edition (2014), has sold more than half a million copies (including editions in several languages, including more than fifty thousand copies in Korean). His recent books include *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols., 4500 pages; Baker Academic, 2012–2015); *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (2 vols., Baker Academic, 2011); *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Eerdmans, 2009); *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2009); *Romans* (Cascade, 2009); *1–2 Corinthians* (Cambridge, 2005); *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols., Hendrickson/Baker Academic, 2003).

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

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

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

ABBREVIATIONS

General

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

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

The Old Testament

Genesis	Ge
Exodus	Ex
Leviticus	Lev
Numbers	Nu
Deuteronomy	Dt
Joshua	Jos
Judges	Jdg
Ruth	Ru
1 Samuel	1Sa
2 Samuel	2Sa
1 Kings	1Ki
2 Kings	2Ki
1 Chronicles	1Ch
2 Chronicles	2Ch
Ezra	Ezr
Nehemiah	Ne
Esther	Est
Job	Job
Psalms	Ps
Proverbs	Pr
Ecclesiastes	Ecc
Song of Songs	SS
Isaiah	Isa
Jeremiah	Jer

Lamentations	La
Ezekiel	Eze
Daniel	Da
Hosea	Hos
Joel	Joel
Amos	Am
Obadiah	Ob
Jonah	Jnh
Micah	Mic
Nahum	Na
Habakkuk	Hab
Zephaniah	Zep
Haggai	Hag
Zechariah	Zec
Malachi	Mal

The New Testament

Matthew	Mt
Mark	Mk
Luke	Lk
John	Jn
Acts	Ac
Romans	Ro
1 Corinthians	1Co
2 Corinthians	2Co
Galatians	Gal
Ephesians	Eph
Philippians	Php
Colossians	Col
1 Thessalonians	1Th
2 Thessalonians	2Th
1 Timothy	1Ti
2 Timothy	2Ti
Titus	Titus
Philemon	Phm
Hebrews	Heb
James	Jas
1 Peter	1Pe
2 Peter	2Pe
1 John	1Jn
2 John	2Jn
3 John	3Jn
Jude	Jude
Revelation	Rev

PREFACE

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

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

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

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

Translation Philosophy

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

First, the meaning of words is determined by the way that users of the language actually use them at any given time. For the biblical languages, therefore, the Committee utilizes the best and most recent scholarship on the way Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words were being used in biblical times. At the same time, the Committee carefully studies the state of modern English. Good translation is like good communication: one must know the target audience so that the appropriate choices can be made about which English words to use to represent the original words of Scripture. From its inception, the NIV has had as its target the general English-speaking population all

over the world, the “International” in its title reflecting this concern. The aim of the Committee is to put the Scriptures into natural English that will communicate effectively with the broadest possible audience of English speakers.

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

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

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

A third linguistic principle guiding the Committee in its translation work is the recognition that words have a spectrum of meaning. It is popular to define a word by using another word, or “gloss,” to substitute for it. This substitute word is then sometimes called the “literal” meaning of a word. In fact, however, words have a range of possible meanings. Those meanings will vary depending on the context, and words in one language will usually not occupy the same semantic range as words in another language. The Committee therefore studies each original word of Scripture in its context to identify its meaning in a particular verse and then chooses an appropriate English word (or phrase) to represent it. It is impossible, then, to translate any given

Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek word with the same English word all the time. The Committee does try to translate related occurrences of a word in the original languages with the same English word in order to preserve the connection for the English reader. But the Committee generally privileges clear natural meaning over a concern with consistency in rendering particular words.

Textual Basis

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

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

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

Footnotes and Formatting

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

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

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

Sometimes the chapter and/or verse numbering in English translations of the Old Testament differs from that found in published Hebrew texts. This is particularly the case in the Psalms, where the traditional titles are included in the Hebrew verse numbering. Such differences are indicated in the footnotes at the bottom of the page. In the New Testament, verse numbers that marked off portions of the traditional English text not supported by the best Greek manuscripts now appear in brackets, with a footnote indicating the text that has been omitted (see, for example, Matthew 17:[21]).

Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53—8:11, although long accorded virtually equal status with the rest of the Gospels in which they stand, have a questionable standing in the textual history of the New Testament, as noted in the bracketed annotations with which they are set off. A different typeface has been chosen for these passages to indicate their uncertain status.

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

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

The Committee on Bible Translation

ANCIENT TEXTS RELATING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

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

TITLE	ORIGIN	DESCRIPTION
AMARNA LETTERS	Canaanite Akkadian <i>Fourteenth century BC</i>	Hundreds of letters, written primarily by Canaanite scribes, illuminate social, political and religious relationships between Canaan and Egypt during the reigns of Amunhotep III and Akhenaten.
AMENEMOPE'S WISDOM	Egyptian <i>Late second millennium BC</i>	Thirty chapters of wisdom instruction are similar to Pr 22:17—24:22 and provide the closest external parallels to OT Wisdom Literature.
ATRAHASIS EPIC	Akkadian <i>Early second millennium BC</i>	A cosmological epic depicts creation and early human history, including the flood (cf. Ge 1–9).
BABYLONIAN THEODICY	Akkadian <i>Early first millennium BC</i>	A sufferer and his friend dialogue with each other (cf. Job).
CYRUS CYLINDER	Akkadian <i>Sixth century BC</i>	King Cyrus of Persia records the conquest of Babylon (cf. Da 5:30; 6:28) and boasts of his generous policies toward his new subjects and their gods.



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

Kim Walton, courtesy of the British Museum



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

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DEAD SEA SCROLLS	Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek <i>Third century BC to first century AD</i>	Several hundred scrolls and fragments include the oldest copies of OT books and passages.
EBLA TABLETS	Sumerian, Eblaite <i>Mid-third millennium BC</i>	Thousands of commercial, legal, literary and epistolary texts describe the cultural vitality and political power of a pre-patriarchal civilization in northern Syria.
ELEPHANTINE PAPYRI	Aramaic <i>Late fifth century BC</i>	Contracts and letters document life among Jews who fled to southern Egypt after Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC.
ENUMA ELISH	Akkadian <i>Second millennium BC</i>	Marduk, the Babylonian god of cosmic order, is elevated to the supreme position in the pantheon. The seven-tablet epic contains an account of creation (cf. Ge 1–2).
GEZER CALENDAR	Hebrew <i>Tenth century BC</i>	A schoolboy from west-central Israel describes the seasons, crops and farming activity of the agricultural year.
GILGAMESH EPIC	Akkadian <i>Early second millennium BC</i>	Gilgamesh, ruler of Uruk, experiences numerous adventures, including a meeting with Utnapishtim, the only survivor of a great deluge (cf. Ge 6–9).
HAMMURAPI'S CODE	Akkadian <i>Eighteenth century BC</i>	Together with similar law codes that preceded and followed it, the Code of Hammurapi exhibits close parallels to numerous passages in the Mosaic legislation of the OT.

ANCIENT TEXTS RELATING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT (CONT.)

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

TITLE	ORIGIN	DESCRIPTION
HYMN TO THE ATEN	Egyptian <i>Fourteenth century BC</i>	The poem praises the beneficence and universality of the sun in language somewhat similar to that used in Ps 104.
ISHTAR'S DESCENT	Akkadian <i>First millennium BC</i>	The goddess Ishtar temporarily descends to the netherworld, which is pictured in terms reminiscent of OT descriptions of Sheol.
JEHOIACHIN'S RATION DOCKETS	Akkadian <i>Early sixth century BC</i>	Brief texts from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II refer to rations allotted to Judah's exiled king Jehoiachin and his sons (cf. 2Ki 25:27–30).
KING LISTS	Sumerian <i>Early second millennium BC</i>	The reigns of Sumerian kings before the flood are described as lasting for thousands of years, reminding us of the longevity of the pre-flood patriarchs in Ge 5.
LACHISH LETTERS (OSTRACA)	Hebrew <i>Early sixth century BC</i>	Inscriptions on pottery fragments vividly portray the desperate days preceding the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 588–586 BC (cf. Jer 34:7).
LAMENTATION OVER THE DESTRUCTION OF UR	Sumerian <i>Early second millennium BC</i>	The poem mourns the destruction of the city of Ur at the hands of the Elamites (cf. the OT book of Lamentations).
LUDLUL BEL NEMEQT	Akkadian <i>Late second millennium BC</i>	A suffering Babylonian nobleman describes his distress in terms faintly reminiscent of the experiences of Job.
MARI TABLETS	Akkadian <i>Eighteenth century BC</i>	Letters and administrative texts provide detailed information regarding customs, language and personal names that reflect the culture of the OT patriarchs.
MERNEPTAH STELE	Egyptian <i>Thirteenth century BC</i>	Pharaoh Merneptah figuratively describes his victory over various peoples in western Asia, including "Israel."
MESHA STELE (MOABITE STONE)	Moabite <i>Ninth century BC</i>	Mesha, king of Moab (see 2Ki 3:4 and note on 1:1), rebels against a successor of Israel's king Omri.



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

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com



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

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ANCIENT TEXTS RELATING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT (CONT.)

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

OLD TESTAMENT CHRONOLOGY

Creation

Ge 1-2

Fall

Ge 3

Flood

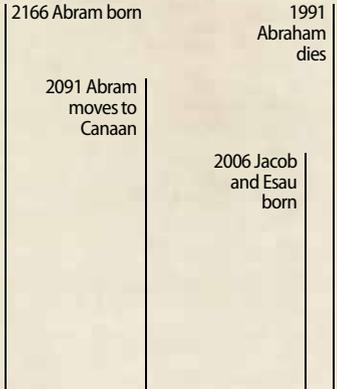
Ge 6-9

Babel

Ge 11

Timeline Header			
?	?	?	?

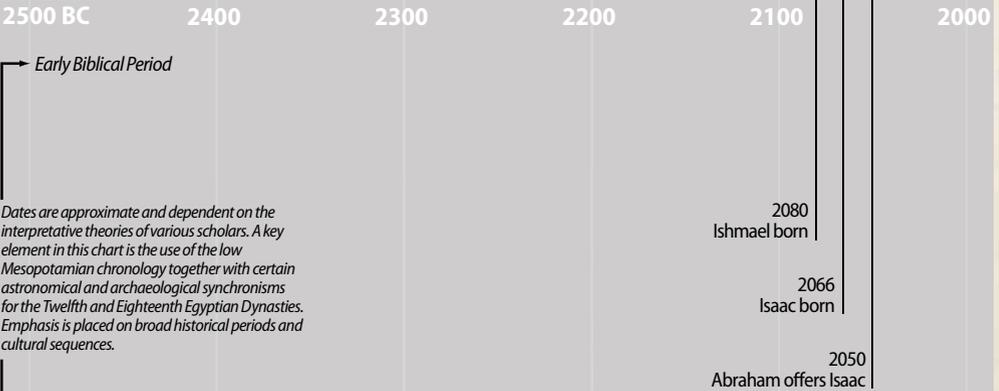
Patriarchs
Ge 12–50



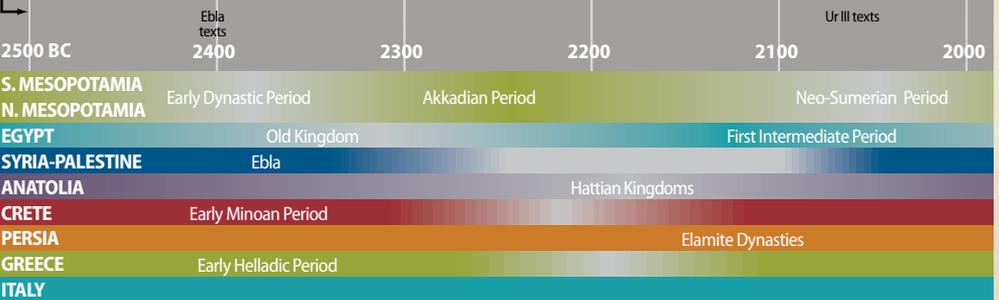
BIBLICAL HISTORY

TRADITIONAL DATES

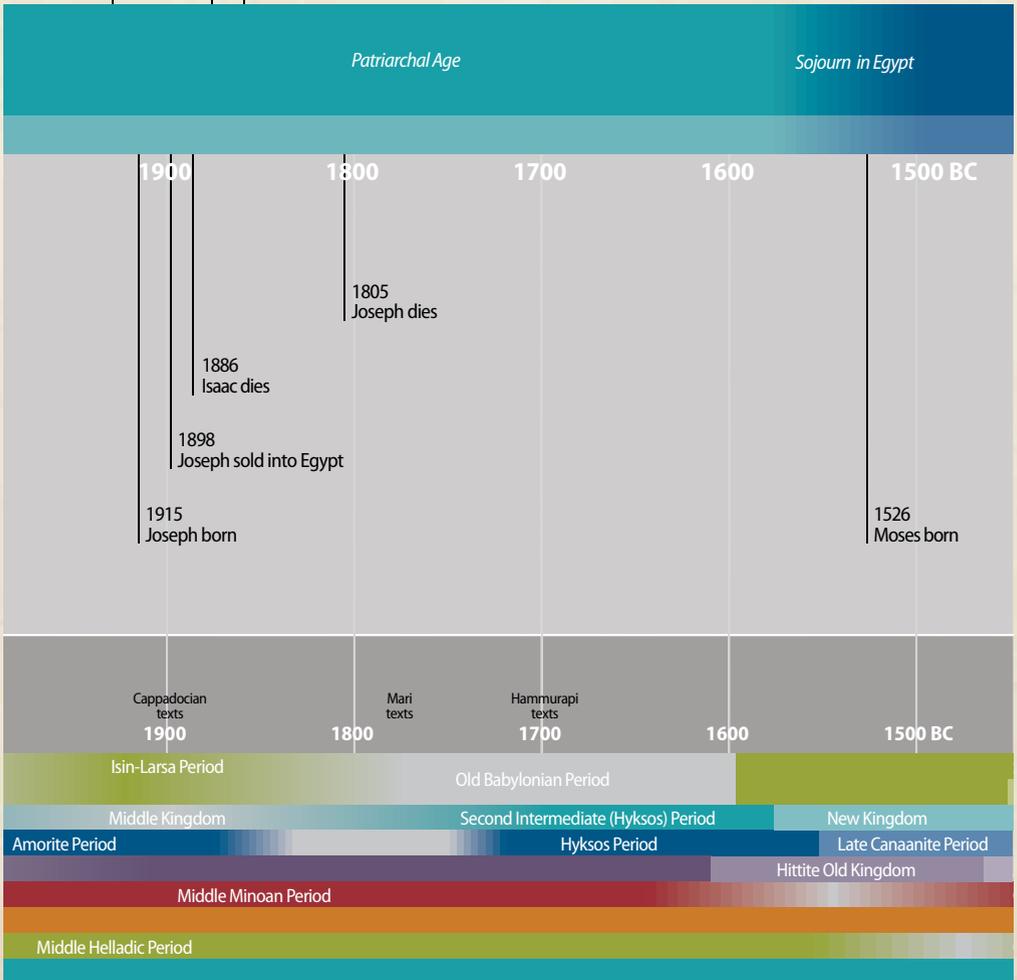
DATES ACCEPTED BY MANY SCHOLARS



WORLD HISTORY



1929 Jacob flees to Haran
 1876 Jacob and family settle in Egypt
 1859 Jacob dies



Exodus and Conquest

Ex 1:1–Jos 24:29

Judges

Jdg 1:1–1Sa 9

1375-1050 Judges

1367-1327
Othniel

1309-1229
Ehud

1209-1169
Deborah

1162-1122
Gideon

United Kingdom

1Sa 10–1Ki 11

1050-1010
Saul

1010-970
David

970-930
Solomon

Exodus and Conquest

Period of Judges

HISTORICALLY
VERIFIABLE DATES

1400 BC

1300

1200

1100

1000

Joshua dies

1105
Samuel born

1406
Moses dies
Joshua appointed leader
Israelites enter Canaan

1078-1072
Jephthah

1446
The exodus, "Red Sea" crossed

1075-1055
Samson

Nuzi texts
Ugaritic texts
Amarna texts

Merneptah inscription

Medinet Habu inscriptions

Shishak inscription

1400 BC

1300

1200

1100

1000

S. MESOPOTAMIA

Kassite Period

N. MESOPOTAMIA

← Mitannian Kingdom

Middle Assyrian Period

EGYPT

New Kingdom

SYRIA-PALESTINE

Late Canaanite Period

Sea Peoples

Phoenician,

ANATOLIA

Hittite Empire

Phrygian Period

CRETE

Late Minoan Period

Dorian States

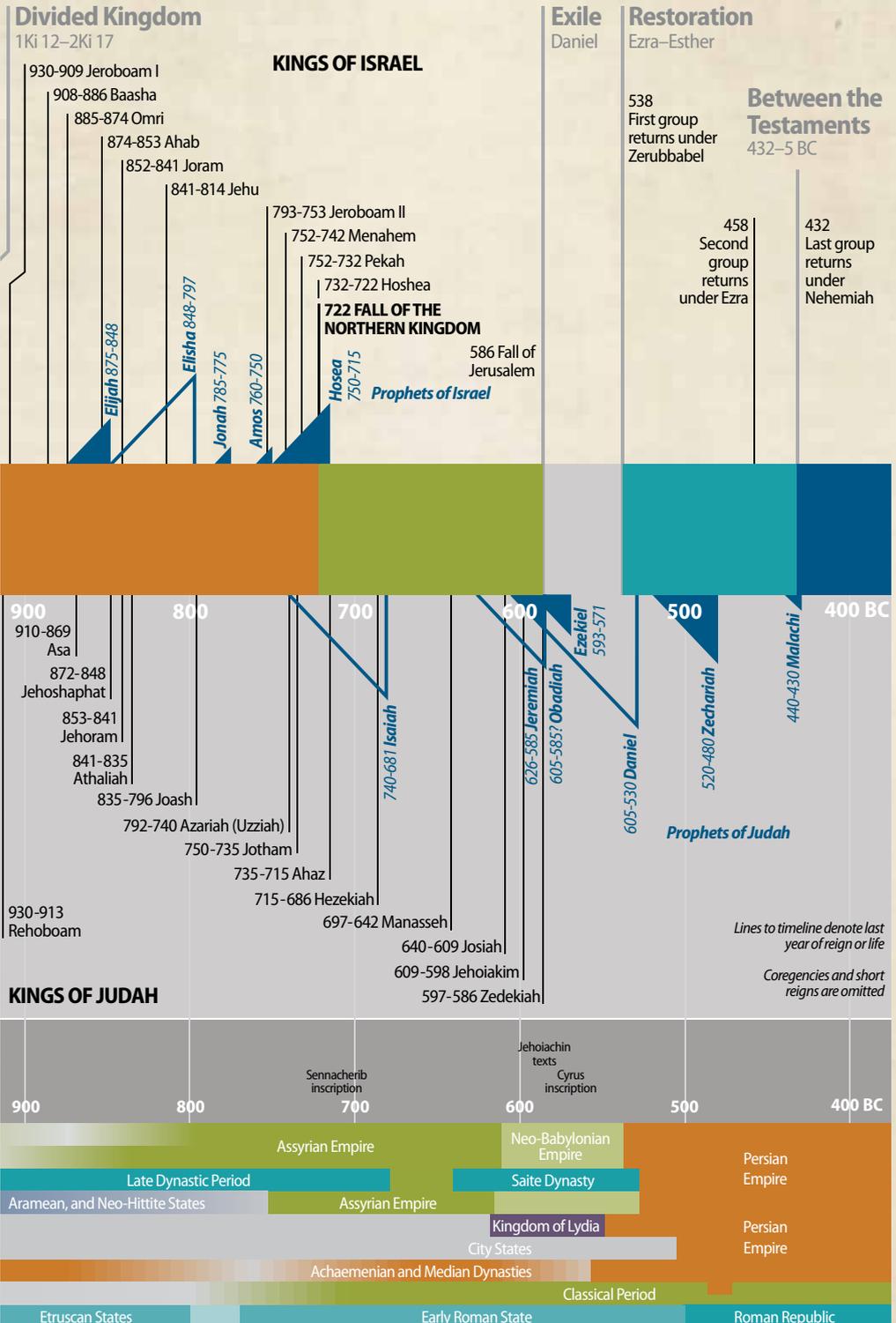
PERSIA

GREECE

Late Helladic (Mycenaean) Period

Dorian States

ITALY



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OLD TESTAMENT



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MAJOR BACKGROUND ISSUES FROM THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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

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

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

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

3. *Gods in Community.* The polytheism of the ancient world was not just a matter of numbers. In the ancient world identity was found in one's community rather than in one's individuality. Like people, gods found their identity in relationship to the group to which they belonged. Each god had a constellation of attributes, just as people have different skills and abilities. As in human communities, the community of the gods called for hierarchy. So the pantheon of the gods was characterized by a hierarchy (cosmic gods, national gods, city patrons, clan deities, ancestral deities) and by differentiation (according to their jurisdiction, manifestations and attributes). Given this cultural reality, we can surmise that it was very difficult for the Israelites to adjust to a single God spanning all levels of hierarchy and all categories of jurisdiction.

4. *Revelation and Manifestation of Deities.* The gods in the ancient world were generally believed to not be forthcoming—that is, they were not believed to reveal themselves broadly (with exceptions in responding to divinatory inquiries). Consequently, one could never be sure exactly what the god expected from people (except to be pampered). Whenever something went wrong, people in the ancient world would assume that they had somehow offended a petty deity. Even though the gods did not reveal themselves or their expectation, they did manifest themselves in diverse ways. The sun, moon, planets and stars, for example, were all considered manifestations of various gods. The most important manifestation of the deity was in the image, which was commissioned by the god, manufactured from the finest of materials with the help of the god, and then ritually energized so that the essence of the god took up residence in the image. The image was not the god, but a manifestation of the god, and therefore it was capable of serving as mediator for the presence of the deity, for the care of the deity and for the worship given the deity. The Israelites were to have no such mediators—no man-made image could accomplish such things and Yahweh had no needs to be met through the image.

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

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

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

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

9. *Religion and Magic.* Religion and magic were not different categories in the ancient world and it is not possible to separate them from one another. Magic entailed the exercise of power (in spells, hexes, exorcisms, sorcery, necromancy, etc.) but operated primarily on the power associated with the name of a person and the name

of a deity. A god's name could be invoked either for effective exercise of power over another person, or for summoning or commanding the god himself. Divination was understood to provide access to information about what the gods were doing (signaled in the stars, terrestrial occurrences, dreams, entrails of sacrificed animals, and in many other indicators). Israelites were forbidden to practice most forms of divination and were not to use God's name to attempt to control him.

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

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

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

OLD TESTAMENT

THE TORAH

.....
GOD ESTABLISHES
HIS COVENANT



INTRODUCTION TO THE TORAH

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

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

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

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

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

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



THE TORAH

GENESIS

Date and Author

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

Literary Setting

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

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

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

KEY CONCEPTS

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

The Beginning

1 In the beginning^a God created the heavens and the earth.^b ²Now the earth was formless and empty,^c darkness was over the surface of the deep,

1:1 ^aJn 1:1-2
^bJob 38:4;
Ps 90:2;
Isa 42:5;
44:24; 45:12,
18; Ac 17:24;
Heb 11:3;

and the Spirit of God^d was hovering over the waters.

³And God said,^e “Let there be light,” and

Rev 4:11 **1:2** ^cJer 4:23 ^dPs 104:30 **1:3** ^ePs 33:6, 9; 148:5;
Heb 11:3

1:1 *In the beginning.* In the OT “beginning” refers to a preliminary period of time rather than the first in a series of events. In English, we might refer to such an initial period as “the primordial period.” This leads us to conclude that the “beginning” is a way of talking about the seven-day *period* rather than a *point* in time prior to the seven days.

1:2 *formless and empty.* Prior to creation the Egyptian texts talk about the “nonexistent.” In their thinking this nonexistent realm continues to be present in the sea, in the dark night sky, and even in the desert — places without role or function (see the article “Creation and Existence,” p. 4). In the Egyptian precreation state of nonexistence there are two elements: primeval waters and total darkness. In Hebrew, “formless” (*tohu*) is also used to refer to the desert (e.g., Dt 32:10). In general it designates a situation in which positive values such as purpose and worth are lacking. As a result, it is more appropriate to translate “without func-

tion” rather than “without form,” the idea being similar to the Egyptian “nonexistent.” This is also apparent in Jer 4:23, where the same pair of Hebrew terms is used to describe a nonfunctional, nonproductive state. *deep.* Hebrew *tehom*; it refers to the primordial or primeval sea. In the precreation period it covered everything. In creation it was pushed out to the edges of the cosmos, where it was restrained by God’s power. There it is identified as the cosmic waters of chaos that can be brought back at any moment if deity requires its services. Although the Hebrew word is the cognate of the Babylonian *tamtu/Tiamat*, it is not personified as a being associated with chaos, nor can it be considered a depersonification or demythologization that is dependent on the ancient Near Eastern texts. It is simply used to describe the “precosmic condition.”

1:3 *Let there be light.* As God calls the cosmos into existence, it is important to remember that it is a functional

GENESIS 1:1



CREATION AND EXISTENCE

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

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

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

there was light.^f ⁴God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.”^g And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

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

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

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

1:3 ^f2Co 4:6*
1:5 ^gPs 74:16
1:6 ^hJer 10:12
1:7 ⁱJob 38:8-11, 16; Ps 148:4
1:9 ^jJob 38:8-11; Ps 104:6-9;
Pr 8:29;
Jer 5:22;
2Pe 3:5
1:11 ^kPs 65:9-13; 104:14

1:14 ^lPs 74:16
^mJer 10:2
ⁿPs 104:19
1:16 ^oPs 136:8
^pPs 136:9
^qJob 38:7, 31-32; Ps 8:3;
Isa 40:26
1:18 ^rJer 33:20, 25
1:21
^sPs 104:25-26

ning, and there was morning—the third day.

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

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

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

1:6 *a vault*. See the article “The ‘Vault’ and ‘Water Above,’” p. 6.

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

1:11 *vegetation*. The indication that the land produces vegetation is not a statement about the land being involved in creation. What is being created by God is a

function whereby the land regularly and characteristically produces vegetation—the principle of fecundity whereby agriculture can exist and food can be grown.

1:14 *signs*. The Hebrew word used for “sign” has a cognate in Akkadian that is used for omens, but the Hebrew has a more neutral sense. The author has emptied the elements of the cosmos of their more personal traits, as he did with the description of the precosmic condition; the sun, moon, etc. are not depicted as gods as they are in Near Eastern literature.

1:21 *creatures of the sea*. In the mythologies of the ancient Near East a variety of terrible creatures inhabited the sea, and these are occasionally associated with the threatening forces of chaos that need to be defeated and harnessed by creator deities. The OT also refers to a number of different cosmic sea creatures (e.g., Ps 74:13–15; Isa 27:1). In Ps 74:13–14 the sea creature (Hebrew *tannin*) is portrayed with multiple heads and is parallel to Leviathan. This depiction of battle is also seen in Isa 51:9, where *tannin*, like “Rahab,” is defeated. Unlike the ancient Near East creation texts, though, Genesis shows no indication of a battle—only that *tannin* is created.

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



THE “VAULT” AND “WATER ABOVE”

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

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

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

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

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

continued on next page

seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.”²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals^u according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us^v make mankind in our image,^w in our like-

^{1:22} ¹ver 28;
Ge 8:17;
^{1:25} ^u Jer 27:5
^{1:26} ^v Ps 100:3
^w Ge 9:6; Jas 3:9

^xPs 8:6–8
^{1:27} ^y 1Co 11:7
^zGe 5:2;
Mt 19:4*;
Mk 10:6*
^{1:28} ^a Ge 9:1, 7;
Lev 26:9

ness, so that they may rule^x over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^a and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷So God created mankind in his own image,^y in the image of God he created them; male and female^z he created them.

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth^a and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the

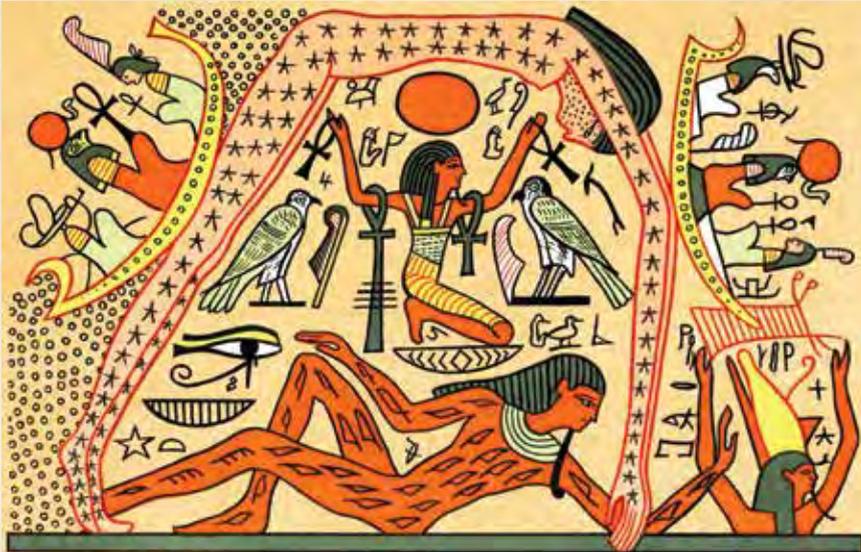
^a 26 Probable reading of the original Hebrew text (see Syriac); Masoretic Text *the earth*

1:28 *Be fruitful and increase in number.* Contrary to concerns about overpopulation that are evident in early Mesopotamian literature, in Genesis God desires

that people multiply without restriction—they may fill the earth. In contrast, in the Akkadian Atrahasis epic, the gods are distressed because, with the multiplica-

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

It should also be noted that an alternative interpretation of the Hebrew word *rāqia* is that it refers to the living space created by the separation of the waters. In this case, a different Hebrew word refers to the vault. ♦



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

Wikimedia Commons

birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.^b ³⁰And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky

^{1:29} ^bPs 104:14

^{1:30}
^cPs 104:14, 27;
 145:15
^{1:31}
^dPs 104:24
^e1Ti 4:4

and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.^c” And it was so.

³¹God saw all that he had made,^d and it was very good.^e And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

tion of people, problems and “noise” also increase. The gods therefore send plagues, famine and drought to counteract the population explosion. *subdue it. Rule over.* The characterization of humans being made in the image of God and the functions listed here reflect a royal role for people since these descriptions would most frequently be applied to kings (see the article “Image and Likeness,” p. 8). They are given the responsibility of bringing order to their world. Again, this is in stark contrast to the role of humanity in the ancient Near East, where they are created to serve. Here we

see the attribution to all people what was the sole prerogative of the king in the rest of the ancient Near East. **1:29** *yours for food.* When people are created in other ancient Near East narratives, it is for the purpose of performing all the menial tasks necessary for providing food for the gods. God as the one providing food for people, rather than the other way around, is not absent from those other ancient Near East accounts, but the theme occupies a more central role here in Genesis (cf. also 2:8–9, where God planted a garden for food).



IMAGE AND LIKENESS

Throughout the ancient Near East, an image was believed to contain the essence of that which it represented. That essence equipped the image to carry out its function. In Egyptian literature, there is one occurrence of people in general having been created in the image of deity, but it is generally the king who is spoken of in such terms. The image is the source of his power and prerogative.

In Mesopotamia there are three categories of significance. (1) As in Egypt, the king is occasionally described as being in the image of deity. (2) An idol contained the image of the deity. (3) Monuments featuring the image of a king were set up in territories he had conquered. In an image, it was not physical likeness that was important, but a more abstract, idealized representation of identity relating to the office/role and the value connected to the image. When Assyrian king Esarhaddon is referred to as “the perfect likeness of the god,” it is his qualities and his attributes that are under discussion. The image of the god did the god’s work on the earth.

The Biblical view is similar as people were created in the image of God, embodying his qualities and doing his work. They are symbols of his presence and act on his behalf as his representatives. The two words used in the text differ in nuance. “Image” refers to the something that contains the “essence” of something else, while “likeness” is more connected to “substance,” expressing a resemblance at some level. ♦

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

²By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.^f ³Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy,^g because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Adam and Eve

⁴This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

2:2 ^fEx 20:11;
^{31:17}; Heb 4:4*
2:3 ^gLev 23:3;
Isa 58:13

2:5 ^hGe 1:11
ⁱPs 65:9-10
2:7 ^jGe 3:19
^kPs 103:14
^lJob 33:4
^mAc 17:25
ⁿ1Co 15:45*

⁵Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth^a and no plant had yet sprung up,^h for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earthⁱ and there was no one to work the ground,⁶ but streams^b came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. ⁷Then the LORD God formed a man^c from the dust^j of the ground^k and breathed into his nostrils the breath^l of life,^m and the man became a living being.ⁿ

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

2:5 *no plant.* The description of an inchoate condition on the earth is paralleled in part by descriptions of a primeval condition in some ancient Near Eastern texts. Unlike Genesis, these texts consider the primeval condition of humans to be primitive and uncivilized. Like the ancient Near East, however, Genesis begins with a time when no irrigation or planting strategies were being carried out by people. In the ancient Near East this resulted in no offerings for the gods. In Genesis God plants the garden and puts people in it. The similarities show the common idea that creation accounts proceed from an unordered, nonfunctional beginning through an ordering process. It does not mean that God had not yet produced any plants.

2:7 *formed a man from the dust.* The creation of humans from dust is similar to what is found in ancient Near Eastern mythology. In Mesopotamia, physical elements from

the gods such as blood and flesh are mixed with clay, while in Egypt it is tears or breath. Genesis, by contrast, represents the divine element in human beings as seen in the image of God and the breath of life (closer to Egyptian than Mesopotamian thinking).

In the rest of the ancient Near East the creation of people focuses on archetypal and often corporate elements. Ge 1:26–27 could be viewed as corporate and generic rather than individual. Here in ch. 2 there are archetypal elements that are identifiable. Man is made from the dust, and since he will also return to dust (3:19), all people can be seen as created from the dust (see Ps 103:14). The creation of Eve from Adam’s side (Ge 2:21–23) likewise expresses a relationship between man and woman that permeates the race. In these Adam and Eve are archetypes representing all of humanity in their creation, just

⁸Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden;^o and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the

2:8
^oGe 3:23, 24;
Isa 51:3

2:9 ^pGe 3:22,
24;

eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life^p and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.^q

Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19 ^qEze 47:12

as they do in their sin and their destiny (death) in ch. 3. Their function as archetypes does not suggest that they are not historical individuals; it only suggests that they function more importantly as representatives of the race. **2:8** *a garden ... in Eden.* Verse 10 indicates that we should understand the garden as adjoining Eden because the water flows “from Eden” and waters the garden. The garden adjoins God’s residence in the same way that a garden of the palace adjoins the palace. Eden is the source of the waters and the residence of God. The text describes a situation that was well known in the ancient world: a sacred spot featuring a spring with an adjoining, well-watered park. The word “garden” here should not make us think of vegetables or even necessarily flowers. Public gardens or a “country garden” convey the idea more accurately as indicating a park with careful landscaping, pools, watercourses, and paths winding among fruit trees and shade trees. Such arboretums, sometimes even contain-

ing animals of various sorts, were a common feature of palace complexes in the ancient world.

2:9 *the tree of life.* In Pr 3:16–18 the tree of life offers an extension of life, which suggests rejuvenating qualities. In the Gilgamesh Epic there is a rejuvenating plant that grows at the bottom of the cosmic river. In the Story of Adapa, the hero is offered food by the god Anu that is eventually identified as “food of life” and “water of life.” He refuses to partake, having been told it was food of death. Thus humankind is prevented from joining the gods in immortality. In Egyptian literature, Amun-Re is the god who created the tree of life, but no further information is given. *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.* Nothing is known of this tree from any of the traditions of the ancient Near East. In the Gilgamesh Epic, the primitive Enkidu becomes wise (possessing reason), not by eating the fruit of a tree, but by engaging in sexual intercourse with a prostitute who was sent to entice and capture him.

GENESIS 2:2



REST

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

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

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

The temple on earth was considered only a type of the larger, archetypal cosmic

continued on next page

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

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

¹⁰A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹²(The gold of that land is good; aromat-

2:14 *Da 10:4

ic resin^a and onyx are also there.) ¹³The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush.^b ¹⁴The name of the third river is the Tigris;†

^a 12 Or good; pearls ^b 13 Possibly southeast Mesopotamia

2:10–14 Most scholars would place Eden in or near the northern end of the Persian Gulf, based on the locations of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The distinction "in the east" (v. 8) merely indicates Mesopotamia, and is typical of primordial narratives. The flow of the rivers and the uncertainty of the location of the Pishon and Gihon (see note on vv. 11–13) has caused some to look near the source of the Tigris and Euphrates and some scholars have identified two other major rivers in that area that might qualify. In such a mountainous region the garden would be in an elevated valley, though for some, the imagery of a well-watered garden where humans do no work and life springs up without cultivation is more suited to the marshy areas around the Persian Gulf.

2:10 *four headwaters.* Genesis uses a familiar picture of fertile waters flowing from the seat of deity. In Egyptian

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

2:11–13 *Pishon ... Gihon.* Attempts to identify these two rivers include: canals, other rivers of Mesopotamia (Balikh, Diyala, Zab, etc.), other rivers outside of Meso-

it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”^s

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

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

But for Adam^a no suitable helper was found. ²¹So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs^b and then closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib^{cw} he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

2:17 ^sDt 30:15, 19; Ro 5:12; 6:23; Jas 1:15
2:18 ¹Co 11:9
2:19 ^vPs 8:7
^vGe 1:24
2:22
^w1Co 11:8,9,12

2:23 ^sGe 29:14; Eph 5:28-30
2:24 ^vMal 2:15
^zMt 19:5*;
Mk 10:7-8*;
1Co 6:16*;
Eph 5:31*
2:25 ^aGe 3:7, 10-11
3:1 ^b2Co 11:3;
Rev 12:9; 20:2
3:4 ^cJn 8:44;
2Co 11:3
3:5 ^dIsa 14:14;
Eze 28:2

²³The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;^x she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

²⁴That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united^y to his wife, and they become one flesh.^z

²⁵Adam and his wife were both naked,^a and they felt no shame.

The Fall

3 Now the serpent^b was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

⁴“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. ^c⁵“For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,^d knowing good and evil.”

^a 20 Or the man ^b 21 Or took part of the man’s side
^c 22 Or part

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

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

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

2:20 names. Names were not given randomly in the ancient world. A name may identify the essential nature of the creature, so that giving a name may be an act of assigning the function that creature will have. In Mesopotamia the assigning of function is referred to as the decreeing of destiny. Decreeing destiny by giving a name is an act of authority. In the ancient world, when a king conquered another country, the king he put on the throne was given a new name. In other cases, the giving of a name is an act of

discernment in which the name is determined by the circumstances. In either case, Adam’s naming of the animals is his first step in subduing and ruling (see 1:28 and note). He is fulfilling the role that he had by virtue of being in God’s image (see the article “Image and Likeness,” p. 8), but it also leads him to realize that among the animals there is no social equal to share his function and place.

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

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

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

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



THE SERPENT

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

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

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

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable^e for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.^f ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking^g in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid^h from the LORD God among

^{3:6} ^e Jas 1:14-15; 1Jn 2:16
^f 1Ti 2:14
^{3:8} ^g Dt 23:14
^h Job 31:33;
Ps 139:7-12;
Jer 23:24

the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹²The man said, "The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

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

These examples show that in the ancient world it was common for people to meditate on ways in which people succeeded and failed in becoming like deity. At

the same time the differences are significant. In Genesis disobedience figures prominently, and the category of godlikeness is distinct. Furthermore, the consequences of the attempt differ. Adam and Eve do achieve a level of godlikeness (like Enkidu), but with significant negative repercussions. At the same time they lose their access to immortality (like Gilgamesh and Adapa) and also suffer in their lost relationship with God, which is not an issue in any of the others. This is then an excellent example of how the comparison between the Bible and the ancient Near East shows a similar landscape but with important variations in the essential nature of the issue.

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me,ⁱ and I ate.”

¹⁴So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed^j are you above all livestock and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust^k all the days of your life.

¹⁵And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring^l and hers;^m

he will crush^b your head,ⁿ and you will strike his heel.”

¹⁶To the woman he said,

“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.^o”

¹⁷To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’

“Cursed^p is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.^q

¹⁸It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.^r

3:13 ⁱ2Co 11:3; 1Ti 2:14
3:14 ^jDt 28:15-20 ^kIsa 65:25; Mic 7:17
3:15 ^lJn 8:44; Ac 13:10; 1Jn 3:8 ^mIsa 7:14; Mt 1:23; Rev 12:17; ⁿRo 16:20; Heb 2:14
3:16 ^o1Co 11:3; Eph 5:22
3:17 ^pGe 5:29; Ro 8:20-22
^qJob 5:7; 14:1; Ecc 2:23
3:18 ^rPs 104:14

3:19 ^s2Th 3:10
^tGe 2:7; Ps 90:3; 104:29; Ecc 12:7
3:22
^uRev 22:14
3:23 ^vGe 2:8
^wGe 4:2
3:24 ^xEx 25:18-22 ^yPs 104:4
^zGe 2:9
4:2 ^aLk 11:51

¹⁹By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food^s until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”^t

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

²¹The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²²And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life^u and eat, and live forever.” ²³So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden^v to work the ground^w from which he had been taken. ²⁴After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side^e of the Garden of Eden cherubim^x and a flaming sword^y flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.^z

Cain and Abel

4 Adam^c made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.^f She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth^g a man.” ²Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.^a

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering

^a 15 Or seed ^b 15 Or strike ^c 20,1 Or The man ^d 20 Eve probably means living. ^e 24 Or placed in front ^f 1 Cain sounds like the Hebrew for brought forth or acquired. ^g 1 Or have acquired

3:14 *God said to the serpent, “... Cursed are you.”* The Egyptian Pyramid Texts were designed to aid the pharaohs of the Old Kingdom on their journey to the afterlife. Among the over 700 utterances are several dozen spells and curses on snakes that may impede the king’s progress. These utterances contain phrases that are reminiscent of the curse on the serpent in ch. 3. *crawl on your belly*. This statement is paralleled by frequent spells in the Egyptian Pyramid Texts that call on snakes to lie down, fall down, get down, or crawl away. Another spell says that he should “go with your face on the path.” These suggest that when God tells the serpent that he will crawl on his belly, there is no suggestion that the serpent had legs that he now loses. Instead, he is going to be docile rather than in an attack position. The serpent on its belly is nonthreatening, while the one reared up is protecting or attacking. *eat dust*. Not a comment about the actual diet of snakes but likely a reference to their habitat. Again the Pyramid Texts show some similarity as they attempt to banish the serpent to the dust. The serpent is a creature of the netherworld (that is why the pharaoh encounters it on his journey), and denizens of the netherworld were typically portrayed as eating dust. There is no suggestion that the Israelites are borrowing from the Pyramid Texts, only that these texts help us determine how someone in the ancient Near East might understand such words and phrases.

3:23 *banished*. In the ancient Near East there is no time

when “sin” begins; no point when humanity moves from a positive relationship with deity into a worse position; no sense of people once being in sacred space but then banished. It was common in the ancient world to portray “before” and “after” pictures with regard to human death and the relationship between God and humanity, but Genesis identifies different elements in the portrayal and reflects a different theology.

3:24 *cherubim*. Cherubs are a class of supernatural creature generally functioning as guardians and typically portrayed in beast form rather than human form. They can be four-footed or upright. In cases where it can be determined, they appear to be composite (i.e., having characteristics of various beasts the way griffins or sphinxes did in other literatures).

4:3 *fruits of the soil*. There is intrinsically no problem with Cain bringing produce as a gift to God. The Hebrew word used for his sacrifice (*minhah*) is one that describes the kind of offering outlined in Lev 2, which is normally something other than an animal sacrifice. It was likewise common throughout the rest of the ancient world to offer food offerings from what was grown. Genesis does not record God asking for these sacrifices, though he approved of the practice as a means of expressing thanks. Gratitude would not be expressed when the gift is given grudgingly, as was possibly the case with Cain (see Heb 11:4, which contrasts Abel’s sacrifice offered in faith with Cain’s gift).

to the LORD.^b ⁴And Abel also brought an offering — fat portions^c from some of the firstborn of his flock.^d The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,^e ⁵but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door;^f it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.^g”

⁸Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.”^a While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.^h

⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

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

¹⁰The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.ⁱ ¹¹Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. ¹²When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

¹³Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear. ¹⁴Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence;^j I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”^k

4:3 ^bNu 18:12

4:4 ^cLev 3:16

^dEx 13:2, 12

^eHeb 11:4

4:7 ^fNu 32:23

^gRo 6:16

4:8 ^hMt 23:35;

ⁱJn 3:12

4:10 ⁱGe 9:5;

^gNu 35:33;

Heb 12:24;

Rev 6:9-10

4:14 ^jKi 17:18;

^kPs 51:11; 139:7-

12; Jer 7:15;

52:3 ^kGe 9:6;

^hNu 35:19, 21,

27, 33

4:15 ⁱEze 9:4,

^g6 ^m ver 24;

^hPs 79:12

4:16 ^hGe 2:8

4:17 ^oPs 49:11

4:23 ^pEx 20:13;

^qLev 19:18

4:24 ^qDt 32:35

^rver 15

¹⁵But the LORD said to him, “Not so^b; anyone who kills Cain^l will suffer vengeance seven times over.^m” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. ¹⁶So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod,^c east of Eden.ⁿ

¹⁷Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son^o Enoch. ¹⁸To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

¹⁹Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. ²⁰Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. ²¹His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. ²²Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of^d bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain’s sister was Naamah.

²³Lamech said to his wives,

“Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
wives of Lamech, hear my words.

I have killed^p a man for wounding me,
a young man for injuring me.

²⁴If Cain is avenged^q seven times,^r
then Lamech seventy-seven times.”

^a 8 Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac; Masoretic Text does not have “Let’s go out to the field.” ^b 15 Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac; Hebrew *Very well* ^c 16 *Nod* means *wandering* (see verses 12 and 14). ^d 22 *Or who instructed all who work in*

4:7 *sin is crouching at your door.* Recent commentators have preferred seeing the participle “crouching” (Hebrew *robos*) as a reference to a well-known Mesopotamian demon (*rabisu*) who lingers around doorways. “Sin” is then portrayed as a doorway demon waiting for its victim to cross the threshold. From the Old Babylonian period on in Mesopotamia, such demons were considered evil and were thought to ambush their victims.

4:12 *wanderer.* In Mesopotamian thinking the ideal lifestyle is urban. Civilized life in the city is the gift of the gods and highly valued. Agricultural and pastoral activities are part of the urban landscape and are foundational to the success of the city. In this way of thinking, nomadic groups are considered uncivilized and a threat to society. The motif of the wild man living out in the steppe country among the animals is represented by Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic and is an archetype for these despised and feared people.

An interesting contrast here in Genesis is that the categories are set up differently. As in Mesopotamia, Cain’s status as a wanderer marks him as undesirable. But this wandering is in contrast to being a farmer rather than to being a city dweller. In fact, it is within his line that the arts of civilization are developed (vv. 17–22).

4:14 *whoever finds me will kill me.* Blood feuding between clans is not a foreign concept. In the ancient world it was typically the business of the clan to avenge the death of one of its members. This concept is represented in Bibli-

cal law — e.g., cities of refuge and the avenger of blood (Nu 35; Dt 19:1–14) — as well as in the ancient Near East. Cain’s comment assumes that Abel has an extended family who might seek revenge.

4:15 *mark.* The Hebrew word does not indicate a tattoo or mutilation, but rather a mark of divine protection similar to that placed on the foreheads of innocents in Eze 9:4–6. It may be an external marking to serve as an indicator to others, or it might represent a sign from God to Cain that he will not be harmed.

4:17 *building a city.* According to Mesopotamian tradition, the first city built was Eridu (remarkably similar to the name Irad, see v. 18). Within this tradition, city building was a divine enterprise. It was an enterprise related to, and a part of, creation, since creation involved the establishment of the world as they knew it — not only in terms of the physical cosmos, but also the civilized aspect of the social and economic world. In contrast, Genesis sees city building in purely human terms.

4:20 *live in tents and raise livestock.* Describes the pastoralist, who had to keep herds and flocks moving to a variety of water sources and grazing lands. This refers not to an achievement (e.g., domestication) but to a lifestyle. Just as Mesopotamians believed cities and kingship to have originated with the gods, so did pastoralism, agriculture and other lifestyles. In contrast, Genesis sees them as human developments.

²⁵Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth,^{as} saying, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.”^t ²⁶Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh.

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

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

From Adam to Noah

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

When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God.^v ²He created

^a ²⁵ Seth probably means *granted*. ^b ²⁶ Or to *proclaim*

4:26 *call on the name of the LORD.* Just as there is no implication that only Cain’s line had cities and the arts of civilization, so the text does not imply that only the line of Seth called on the name of the Lord. About a dozen times in the OT people are said to call on the name of the Lord—generally either calling for help in connection with a ritual or invoking God’s presence at a cultic

site. Eventually humans sought to procure the presence of God through establishing cultic places and performing rituals there, but here there is no indication of these trappings. Thus it seems that people began to invoke the Lord’s presence (the presence that was lost at the fall). This verse, then, represents the beginning of religion.

GENESIS 4:26



THE NAME OF GOD

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

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

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

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

them male and female^w and blessed them. And he named them “Mankind”^a when they were created.

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

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

5:2 ^wGe 1:27;
Mt 19:4;
Mk 10:6;
Gal 3:28
5:3 ^xGe 1:26;
1Co 15:49
5:5 ^yGe 3:19

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

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

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

^a 2 Hebrew *adam* ^b 6 *Father* may mean *ancestor*; also in verses 7-26.

GENESIS 5



GENEALOGIES

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

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

Alulim	28,800 years
Alagar	36,000 years
Enmenluanna	43,200 years
Enmengalanna	28,800 years
Dumuzi	36,000 years
Ensipazianna	28,800 years
Enmeduranna	21,000 years
Uburtutu	18,600 years

Eight kings compile 241,200 years between them. The Sumerian King List uses the standard Sumerian sexagesimal system. If the notation is read with decimal values rather than sexagesimal values, the numbers are in the same range as the Biblical numbers, and the totals of the lists are nearly identical. ♦

came the father of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁷Altogether, Mahalalel lived a total of 895 years, and then he died.

¹⁸When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch.^z ¹⁹After he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁰Altogether, Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died.

²¹When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. ²²After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God^a 300 years and had other sons and daughters. ²³Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. ²⁴Enoch walked faithfully with God;^b then he was no more, because God took him away.^c

²⁵When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech. ²⁶After he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁷Altogether, Methuselah lived a total of 969 years, and then he died.

5:18 ^zJude 1:14
5:22 ^aver 24;
Ge 6:9; 17:1;
48:15; Mic 6:8;
Mal 2:6
5:24 ^bver 22
^c2Ki 2:1, 11;
Heb 11:5

5:29 ^dGe 3:17;
Ro 8:20
6:1 ^eGe 1:28
6:3 ^fIsa 57:16
9Ps 78:39

²⁸When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. ²⁹He named him Noah^a and said, “He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed.^d” ³⁰After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. ³¹Altogether, Lamech lived a total of 777 years, and then he died.

³²After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.

Wickedness in the World

6 When human beings began to increase in number on the earth^e and daughters were born to them, ²the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. ³Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with^b humans forever,^f for they are mortal;^g their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

^a 29 Noah sounds like the Hebrew for *comfort*.

^b 3 Or *My spirit will not remain in* ^c 3 Or *corrupt*

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

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

6:2 *sons of God.* Royal titles of the ancient Near East regularly suggested the divine descent of kings, even outside Egypt’s context of deified kings. This idea of divine descent was a rhetorical expression of the divine election and legitimization of the king and is typical in royal inscriptions. Throughout the Biblical period it was part of the royal prerogative to claim divine heritage. Thus the title “son of God” can be identified as a royal motif both in the Bible and outside of it. Gilgamesh is portrayed as two-thirds god and one-third man (Gilgamesh Epic, 1.48) and “flesh of the gods” (Gilgamesh Epic, 9.49). Nevertheless, though it is common for kings to be portrayed as having divine parentage, there is no precedent for ancient kings as a group being referred to as “sons of god.” This keeps open the possibility that this title could refer to royal elites,

though a reference to members of the heavenly council (cf. Job 1:6) certainly cannot be ruled out. *married any of them they chose.* There are no examples from Akkadian or Northwest Semitic mythological texts of divine beings marrying or cohabiting with human women, so it would be difficult to make the claim that this account is a vestige of ancient mythology as some do. There are examples of kings claiming mixed ancestry of gods and humans (see “sons of God” above in this note), but that is a different concept. If the “sons of God” are viewed as kings, the question remains as to what offense they are committing here. Polygamy has always been a weak candidate since the OT does not condemn it. Promiscuity is likewise an unlikely explanation since the Hebrew text describes the situation using the standard idiom for marriage (“taking wives”). An alternate understanding may be found in a practice noted in the Gilgamesh Epic as the prime example of Gilgamesh’s tyranny, namely, his exercising the right of the first night with a new bride: “He will couple with the wife-to-be, he first of all, the bridegroom after” (Gilgamesh Epic, Old Babylonian version, v.159–60). This practice accommodates the marriage terminology, and in Gilgamesh it is clearly both oppressive and offensive behavior. The remaining problem is that this practice is infrequently attested in ancient literature. Nonetheless, in the Gilgamesh Epic it is clear.

6:3 *a hundred and twenty years.* A Sumerian folk tale speaks of 120 years as an ideal human lifespan. Speculation suggests that this number derives not from observation but from abstraction within the Sumerian mathematical system. (It is clearly not a fixed boundary, as a woman who died in 1997 lived for 122 years.) The idea that deity governs lifespan is reflected in Mesopotamia in the Gilgamesh Epic as the hero continues his quest for immortality. In the Egyptian “Book of the Dead” the god Thoth reports to the creator-god Atum: “You shall not witness wrongdoing, you shall not suffer it! Shorten their years, cut short their months, because they have done hidden damage to all that you have made.” This is the same Atum who in the beginning floated in Nun, the

⁴The Nephilim^h were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

⁵The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.⁶ The LORD regretted^j that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. ⁷So the LORD said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” ⁸But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.^k

Noah and the Flood

⁹This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time,^l and he walked faithfully with God.^m ¹⁰Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.ⁿ

¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence.^o ¹²God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.^p ¹³So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.^q ¹⁴So make yourself an ark of cypress^a wood;^r make rooms in it and coat it with pitch^s inside and out. ¹⁵This

6:4 ^hNu 13:33
6:5 ⁱGe 8:21; Ps 141:3
6:6 ^j1Sa 15:11, 35; Isa 63:10
6:8 ^kGe 19:19; Ex 33:12, 13, 17; Lk 1:30; Ac 7:46
6:9 ^lGe 7:1; Eze 14:14, 20; Heb 11:7; 2Pe 2:5
6:10 ^mGe 5:22
6:11 ^oGe 5:32; 8:17
6:12 ^pPs 14:1-3
6:13 ^qver 17; Eze 7:2-3
6:14 ^rHeb 11:7; 1Pe 3:20
^sEx 2:3

6:17 ^tGe 7:4, 21-23; 2Pe 2:5
6:18 ^uGe 9:9-16
6:20 ^wGe 7:15
6:22 ^xGe 7:5, 9, 16
7:1 ^yMt 24:38
^zGe 6:9; Eze 14:14
7:2 ^aver 8; Ge 8:20; Lev 10:10; 11:1-47

is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high.^b ¹⁶Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit^c high all around.^d Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. ¹⁷I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish.^t ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you,^u and you will enter the ark^v—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you. ¹⁹You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰Two^w of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. ²¹You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

²²Noah did everything just as God commanded him.^x

7 The LORD then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family,^y because I have found you righteous^z in this generation. ²Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean^a animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate,

^a 14 The meaning of the Hebrew for this word is uncertain. ^b 15 That is, about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high or about 135 meters long, 23 meters wide and 14 meters high. ^c 16 That is, about 18 inches or about 45 centimeters. ^d 16 The meaning of the Hebrew for this clause is uncertain.

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

6:4 *Nephilim*. They occur only here and in Nu 13:33. The text presents them not as the offspring of the union, but as contemporaries. The fact that they are also around after the flood indicates that the label is not ethnic. Analysis of the meaning of the designation has been unsuccessful in identifying this group. The latter part of the verse indicates that they are heroic figures, perhaps of the sort exemplified by Gilgamesh, who is described as possessing heroism (Gilgamesh Epic, 1.30) and as being tall, magnificent, and terrible (Gilgamesh Epic, 1.37). He has a six-cubit (nine-foot or 2.7-meter) stride (Gilgamesh Epic, 1.57) and is 11 cubits (16.5 feet or 5 meters) tall (Hittite version of Gilgamesh Epic, 1.8).

A more specific interpretation suggests that the Nephilim ought to be identified as the ancient sages (the *apkallu*). The *apkallu* were considered semidivine (one of their number, Adapa, is called the “son of [the god] Ea”). They likewise marry human women, creating mixed classes. After the flood, the sages are considered of human descent and are called the *ummianu*. These individuals, unlike their predecessors, are more infamous

than famous (though only in general terms, e.g., “angered Adad”).

The *apkallu* and the *ummianu*, were indeed heroic figures of old. This makes sense of the terminology here. This view is additionally attractive in that in Genesis this section is in close proximity to the account of the flood, which is also recorded in the context of the *apkallu*. Though some similarities are evident, the term “Nephilim” remains unexplained, as does their connection to the inhabitants of the land in Nu 13:33.

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

When we remember that sacrifices in the rest of the ancient Near East were considered meals for the nourishment of the gods, the decision about acceptable and unacceptable animals would have been based on what was considered edible or delectable. In Egypt, wild animals such as wild cattle, antelope, gazelle, and ibex were

³and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. ⁴Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.”

⁵And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.^b

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

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

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

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

7:5 ^bGe 6:22
7:11 ^cEze 26:19
^dGe 8:2
7:12 ^ever 4
7:15 ^fGe 6:19
7:17 ^gver 4
7:19 ^hPs 104:6

7:21 ⁱGe 6:7, 13
7:22 ^jGe 1:30
7:23 ^kMt 24:39;
Lk 17:27;
1Pe 3:20;
2Pe 2:5
^lHeb 11:7
7:24 ^mGe 8:3
8:1 ⁿGe 9:15;
19:29; Ex 2:24;
1Sa 1:11, 19
^oEx 14:21
8:2 ^pGe 7:11

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

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

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

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

^a 20 That is, about 23 feet or about 6.8 meters

^b 20 Or rose more than fifteen cubits, and the mountains were covered

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

7:11 *springs ... floodgates.* These are terms from the contemporary understanding of cosmic geography (see the article “Cosmic Geography,” p. 836). The Hebrew word translated “deep” (*tehom*) in this verse is the same Hebrew word used in 1:2. It refers to the great cosmic ocean that not only surrounds the land, but is that on

which the land floats (cf. Ps 24:1–2). This is what 1:7 calls “the water under the vault.” The “springs” were considered the entry points of these waters to the earth. The “floodgates,” or the windows of heaven, were the comparable entry points for the waters above the earth that are held back by the sky. These allowed rain to fall. In ch. 1 separating these waters and then inserting the dry land between them remedied the initial watery condition. In the flood, the restraints on these cosmic waters were lifted and the cosmos was returned to its nonfunctional watery state.

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

Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. ¹²He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

¹³By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark

8:16 ⁹Ge 7:13

and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. ¹⁴By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

¹⁵Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶"Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives."⁹ ¹⁷Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—

best on hillsides, but not in high elevations. The olive leaf brought by the dove gives Noah an indication that the

lower elevations have drained and that vegetation is once again sprouting.

GENESIS 6–8



THE FLOOD

Beginning centuries before the book of Genesis took shape, the story of a massive, destructive flood was circulating in written form in Mesopotamia. As the tale was read—or, more often, recounted through long centuries of family and community gatherings—transformations occurred that shaped the details of its telling to the culture of the audience. Like Nathaniel Hawthorne adapting the myths of classical Greece to his nineteenth-century audience in the *Wonder Book*, or Walt Disney reshaping the Arabian Nights in *Aladdin*, ancient audiences interpreted the epic event to reflect their own particular worldview.

Comparing the versions is more important for telling us about the cultures in which they were preserved than for helping us reconstruct a trail of literary evolution. Whether the Bible is related to the ancient Near Eastern material through exchange of literary or oral traditions, the similarities make it difficult to dissociate them. Most telling is the fact that both include the episode of sending out the birds to determine when it was safe to leave the ark.

The earliest flood account is in Sumerian and recounts the story of Ziusudra. The oldest Babylonian account is found in the Atrahasis epic, dating to early in the second millennium BC. The most well-known version from Mesopotamia is imbedded in the famous Gilgamesh Epic. There it is presented as the explanation for how Utnapishtim (the flood hero) gained eternal life (which Gilgamesh was seeking). These three flood accounts are stages in a single tradition as the similarities clearly indicate.

In the Biblical flood story God is distressed with the behavior of the people whom he has created (Ge 6:5–7). In the monotheistic setting of Genesis, it is his decision alone to send the flood and to preserve Noah and his family alive. He is portrayed as resigned to this course of action, which is sadly the only appropriate response. The Mesopotamian versions derive from a polytheistic culture and therefore portray the gods deliberating in a council. The decision to send the flood is portrayed as a reaction of angry frustration. As the story progresses the gods are duplicitous, shortsighted, and absorbed in petty squabbles.

Genesis documents the downward slide of humanity from the idyllic garden to the chaotic anarchy that introduces the flood story (2:4–6:7). Violence has become an incorrigible way of life, and the waters are sent as an act of justice. The Atrahasis epic preserves most clearly the reasons for the flood in the Mesopotamian tradition. People had been created to do the work that the gods were tired of doing. But the growing population and the inevitable internal strife that resulted had made even more work for the gods, for people were constantly disturbing them with their troubles, demands

continued on next page

the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground — so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.”^r

¹⁸So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. ¹⁹All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds —

8:17 ^rGe 1:22

8:20 ^sGe 12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9 ^tGe 7:8; Lev 11:1-47 ^uGe 22:2, 13; Ex 10:25

8:21 ^vLev 1:9, 13; 2Co 2:15 ^wGe 3:17

everything that moves on land — came out of the ark, one kind after another.

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the LORD^s and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean^t birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings^u on it. ²¹The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma^v and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground^w because of

8:21 *pleasing aroma*. The contrast between the Biblical and ancient Near Eastern accounts is more distinct on

this point than on any other (see the article “The Flood,” p. 20). In the Gilgamesh Epic the gods have apparently

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

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

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

The flood stories from the ancient Near East and from around the world offer persuasive evidence that a flood of significant magnitude occurred and was remembered. The accounts from the ancient Near East are closest to the Biblical account and help us see how the Israelites would have understood the whole event differently than their neighbors. ♦



The most well-known Mesopotamian version of the flood is imbedded in the famous Gilgamesh Epic.

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humans, even though^a every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.^x And never again will I destroy all living creatures,^y as I have done.

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

God’s Covenant With Noah

9 Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.^a ²The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. ³Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you.^b Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

⁴“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.^c ⁵And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal.^d And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.^e

⁶“Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed;^f for in the image of God^g has God made mankind.

⁷As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”^h

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹“I now establish my covenant

8:21 ^xGe 6:5; Ps 51:5; Jer 17:9
^yGe 9:11, 15; Isa 54:9
8:22 ^zGe 1:14; Jer 33:20, 25
9:1 ^aGe 1:22
9:3 ^bGe 1:29
9:4 ^cLev 3:17; 17:10-14; Dt 12:16, 23-25; 1Sa 14:33
9:5 ^dEx 21:28-32 ^eGe 4:10
9:6 ^fGe 4:14; Ex 21:12, 14; Lev 24:17; Mt 26:52
^gGe 1:26
9:7 ^hGe 1:22

9:9 ⁱGe 6:18
9:11 ^jver 16; Isa 24:5
^kGe 8:21; Isa 54:9
9:12 ^lver 17; Ge 17:11
9:15 ^mEx 2:24; Lev 26:42, 45; Dt 7:9; Eze 16:60
9:16 ⁿver 11; Ge 17:7, 13, 19; 2Sa 7:13; 23:5
9:17 ^over 12; Ge 17:11
9:18 ^pver 25-27; Ge 10:6, 15
9:19 ^qGe 10:32

with youⁱ and with your descendants after you ¹⁰and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹I establish my covenant^j with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.^k”

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

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

The Sons of Noah

¹⁸The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.)^p ¹⁹These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth.^q

²⁰Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded^b to plant a vineyard. ²¹When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay

^a 21 Or humans, for ^b 20 Or soil, was the first

neglected to realize that with all humans destroyed, no one will be left to give them sacrifices. Without sacrifices they are deprived of their sustenance. Consequently, when the sacrifice is offered after the survivors disembark from the boat, “the gods smelled the sweet savour, the gods gathered like flies around the sacrificer” (Gilgamesh Epic, 11.161 – 63). Both the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis refer to the aroma/savor of the sacrifice, but the portrayal offered of deity is far different. In the Gilgamesh Epic this represents the gods’ needs and exposes their shortsightedness. It functions to appease their anger. In Genesis it represents God’s pleasure in the creatures he has made and the resulting commitment not to destroy them.

9:3 *food for you.* In Mesopotamia the motif of the wild man includes that he lives in the wild with the animals and eats grass. This is also part of the description of human existence in general before they become civilized. Here in Genesis the provision for eating meat is not connected with the development of civilization (ch. 4) but with the restatement of the blessing. In general in the ancient world meat was a delicacy, eaten only on special occasions in connection with cultic activities. Meat was more regularly part of the palace fare, and Egyptian reliefs

and paintings portray the butchering process.

9:6 Exacting punishment for murder is not reserved for deity but is placed under the purview of human judicial systems here, whether they are located in courts or in clans. This verse may well mark the beginning of judicial responsibility that is eventually evidenced in the compilations of sample verdicts (such as those found on the Hammurapi Stele) throughout the ancient Near East. These compendia demonstrate that the kings and societies of the ancient world took their judicial responsibilities seriously. Many of these indicate that capital punishment was common in cases of homicide, though often lesser penalties were exacted depending on the social status of both the perpetrator and the victim.

9:8 *covenant.* An agreement between two parties containing stipulations for one or both. In this case, God takes the stipulations on himself, rather than imposing them on Noah. Unlike the later Abrahamic covenant, this covenant does not entail a new phase of revelation, and is made with “every living creature” (v. 10), not just people (v. 9).

9:20 – 27 In the history of interpretation of this passage, a number of alternatives have been suggested for explaining the offense committed by Ham, especially in

MAJOR COVENANTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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

MAJOR TYPES OF ROYAL COVENANTS/TREATIES IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

ROYAL GRANT (UNCONDITIONAL)	PARITY	SUZERAIN-VASSAL (CONDITIONAL)
A king’s grant (of land or some other benefit) to a loyal servant for faithful or exceptional service. The grant was normally perpetual and unconditional, but the servant’s heirs benefited from it only as they continued their father’s loyalty and service. (cf. 1Sa 8:14; 22:7; 27:6; Est 8:1.)	A covenant between equals, binding them to mutual friendship or at least to mutual respect for each other’s spheres and interests. Participants called each other “brother.” (cf. Ge 21:27; 26:31; 31:44–54; 1Ki 5:12; 15:19; 20:32–34; Am 1:9.)	A covenant regulating the relationship between a great king and one of his subject kings. The great king claimed absolute right of sovereignty, demanded total loyalty and service (the vassal must “love” his suzerain) and pledged protection of the subject’s realm and dynasty, conditional on the vassal’s faithfulness and loyalty to him. The vassal pledged absolute loyalty to his suzerain—whatever service his suzerain demanded—and exclusive reliance on the suzerain’s protection. Participants called each other “lord” and “servant” or “father” and “son.” (cf. Jos 9:6,8; Eze 17:13–18; Hos 12:1.)

Commitments made in these covenants were accompanied by self-maledictory oaths (made orally, ceremonially or both). The gods were called on to witness the covenants and implement the curses of the oaths if the covenants were violated.

uncovered inside his tent. ²²Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. ²³But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.

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

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

²⁶He also said,

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

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

The Table of Nations

10 This is the account^t of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

9:25 ^rver 18
^sGe 25:23;
^tJos 9:23
10:1 ^rGe 2:4

10:2 ^uEze 38:6
^vEze 38:2;
Rev 20:8
^wIsa 66:19
10:3 ^xJer 51:27
^yEze 27:14; 38:6
10:4
^zEze 27:12, 25;
Jnh 1:3
10:6 ^aver 15;
Ge 9:18

The Japhethites

10:2-5pp — 1Ch 1:5-7

- ²The sons^b of Japheth:
Gomer,^u Magog,^v Madai, Javan, Tubal,^w Meshek and Tiras.
- ³The sons of Gomer:
Ashkenaz,^x Riphath and Togarmah.^y
- ⁴The sons of Javan:
Elishah, Tarshish,^z the Kittites and the Rodanites.^c ⁵(From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.)

The Hamites

10:6-20pp — 1Ch 1:8-16

- ⁶The sons of Ham:
Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan.^a
- ⁷The sons of Cush:
Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteka.
The sons of Raamah:
Sheba and Dedan.
- ⁸Cush was the father^d of Nimrod, who became a mighty warrior on the earth. ⁹He

^a 27 *Japheth* sounds like the Hebrew for *extend*.
^b 2 *Sons* may mean *descendants* or *successors* or *nations*; also in verses 3, 4, 6, 7, 20-23, 29 and 31. ^c 4 Some manuscripts of the Masoretic Text and Samaritan Pentateuch (see also Septuagint and 1 Chron. 1:7); most manuscripts of the Masoretic Text *Dodanites*
^d 8 *Father* may mean *ancestor* or *predecessor* or *founder*; also in verses 13, 15, 24 and 26.

light of the severe curse (on Canaan!) that results. The options of “voyeurism” and paternal (homosexual) incest have little support from the ancient Near East regardless of the case that might be made for them in the Biblical text. The option of castration was offered in rabbinic literature and has one supporting text from ancient mythology that portrays a son castrating his father (both deities) in an attempt to usurp his position. Another option that can be supported conceptually from the ancient Near East is that Ham committed incest with his mother in an attempt to usurp the authority of the family from his father (cf. Reuben in Ge 35:22 and Absalom in 2Sa 16:21–22), or in an attempt to provide for additional offspring in a depopulated world (cf. Lot's daughters in Ge 19:30–38). The idea of usurping someone's authority by taking his wife is attested in royal contexts in an Akkadian text from Ugarit. None of this information offers clarification of Ham's behavior, but it does alert us to a number of alternatives that we otherwise might not have recognized.

10:2–29 This passage is called the table of nations. The list of the sons of Shem, Ham and Japheth contains 70 names, a number that stood for totality and completion. More important, the concept of 70 nations is offered as the design of God. Nevertheless, the list is certainly not complete in its presentation of the descendants of Noah and his sons. The author penetrated selectively into various lines in order to achieve that final number.

This group of 70 does not reflect the perspective of Noah's descendants in the third or fourth generation;

rather, it is Israel's perspective at the time of the author. Note that there is no discussion of anyone outside the known world of the ancient Near East in the middle of the second millennium BC. The text only seeks to account for the groups the Israelites were aware of and does not hint at a world beyond the ancient Near East. In other words, the author has not attempted to provide a comprehensive list of all people(s) descended from the sons of Noah. Instead, he has addressed how all the known peoples and nations of his day are related to the sons of Noah.

10:8–12 Attempts to identify Nimrod with some historical or literary figure from the ancient world have been many, including an Assyrian king (Tukulti-Ninurta I, end of the thirteenth century BC) or the Assyrian god Ninurta, a warrior and hunter of myriad mythical creatures. An Assyrian poem from the end of the second millennium BC epitomizes an Assyrian king (thought to be Tiglath-Pileser I) as a great hunter, but the piece is an extended metaphor using the language of hunting to describe the conquests of the king. It cannot be ruled out that this is also the case in the description of Nimrod, since hunting is a metaphor for royal conquest from earliest times. For example, the royal mace head of Mesilim, king of Kish in the twenty-sixth century BC, is decorated with six intertwined lions around its circumference. The identification of the hunter as a royal metaphor would offer an explanation of why v. 9 includes “before the LORD”; it would indicate that his conquests had divine support. The royal lion hunt was considered a cultic act. “King of Kish” (notice the similarity

was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD.”¹⁰ The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon,^b Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in^a Shinar.^{bc} ¹¹From that land he went to Assyria,^d where he built Nineveh,^e Rehoboth Ir,^c Calah¹² and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah — which is the great city.

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

¹⁵Canaan⁹ was the father of Sidon^h his firstborn,^d and of the Hittites,ⁱ ¹⁶Jebusites,^j Amorites, Girgashites, ¹⁷Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, ¹⁸Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites.

Later the Canaanite^k clans scattered ¹⁹and the borders of Canaan^l reached from Sidon^m toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiyim, as far as Lasha.

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

The Semites

10:21-31pp — Ge 11:10-27; 1Ch 1:17-27

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

10:10 ^bGe 11:9
^cGe 11:2
10:11 ^dPs 83:8;
 Mic 5:6
^eJnh 1:2; 4:11;
 Na 1:1
10:14
^fGe 21:32, 34;
 26:1, 8
10:15 ⁹ver 6;
 Ge 9:18
^hEze 28:21
ⁱGe 23:3, 20
10:16 ^j1Ch 11:4
10:18 ^kGe 12:6;
 Ex 13:11
10:19
^lGe 11:31; 13:12;
 17:8 ^mver 15
10:21 ⁿver 24;
 Nu 24:24

10:22
^oJer 49:34
 Plk 3:36
10:23 ^qJob 1:1
10:24 ^rver 21
10:32 ^sver 1
^tGe 9:19

²²The sons of Shem:
 Elam,^o Ashur, Arphaxad,^p Lud and Aram.

²³The sons of Aram:
 Uz,^q Hul, Gether and Meshek.^f

²⁴Arphaxad was the father of^s Shelah, and Shelah the father of Eber.^r

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

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

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

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

³²These are the clans of Noah’s sons,^s according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth^t after the flood.

^a 10 Or Uruk and Akkad — all of them in ^b 10 That is, Babylonia ^c 11 Or Nineveh with its city squares ^d 15 Or of the Sidonians, the foremost ^e 21 Or Shem, the older brother of ^f 23 See Septuagint and 1 Chron. 1:17; Hebrew Mash. ^g 24 Hebrew; Septuagint father of Cainan, and Cainan was the father of ^h 25 Peleg means division.

between Kish and Cush) was a title that indicated some level of rule over a hegemony in the first half of the third millennium BC.

The description of Nimrod positions him at the head of an empire. Only three major empires are known prior to the time of Moses: the Old Akkadian Empire (2335–2218 BC), the Third Dynasty of Ur (2112–2004), and the Old Babylonian Empire ruled by Hammurapi (1792–1750). If Nimrod is to be identified as a historical individual of early history, he must be connected to one of these. Scholars have argued for the following:

1. Sargon (Dynasty of Akkad): Some records indicate military activity on the upper Tigris (Gasur = Nuzi and Aššur, and his son built a temple at Nineveh), but little associates Sargon with the cities named in Genesis. Sargon built up Akkad and made it his capital city. Nothing in contemporary records connects him with “Babylon.”

2. Shulgi (Ur III Dynasty): Shulgi praises himself as a hunter in his poems, and in his inscriptions he regularly refers to himself as the mighty man or mighty hero. The core area of his political control was in southern Mesopotamia, but his capital was at Ur, not Babylon. His records make no mention of Babylon, though a late chronicle suggests that he despoiled Esagila, the temple of Marduk in Babylon. If this is true, there is even more distinction between him and Nimrod since the latter rules at Babylon. Shulgi also extended his empire from the south to the north, including some cities of Assyria. Extension to the upper Tigris involved cities that paid taxes (as far north

as Assur) and allied cities, which included Nineveh, but there was little military control of these regions. There is no name for Shulgi that makes sense of Nimrod.

3. Hammurapi (Old Babylonian Dynasty): Here we finally find a ruler of an empire whose center is Babylon. He campaigned north on the Tigris, but did not control the Assyrian region and is not referred to as a “hunter.” The fact that he often identified himself as “king of the Mardu” gives a possible connection to the name Nimrod, since a variety of prefixes or determinatives could combine an N with Mardu, though none of them is attested in his inscriptions.

None of these names offers a close match to the description of Nimrod. Perhaps future finds will reveal an earlier empire and king that will better fit the data.

10:10 *Babylon.* Babylon is first mentioned (in passing) in contemporary records in the twenty-third century BC. References to it remain occasional and suggest no great significance until the First Dynasty of Babylon (first half of the second millennium BC), when the predecessors to Hammurapi make it their capital. From that time on it becomes legendary as the seat of culture and religion in Mesopotamia. Archaeologically, excavations can only recover data as far back as the First Dynasty of Babylon because the water table shifted and destroyed all earlier layers. We therefore know nothing of the history of Babylon’s founding from either extra-Biblical literary or archaeological records.



THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF GENESIS

Mesopotamia: Sumer Through Old Babylonia

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Canaan: Middle Bronze Age

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

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

Egypt: Old and Middle Kingdoms

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

ERAS OF MESOPOTAMIAN HISTORY (ROUND DATES)

Early Dynastic Period	2900–2350 BC
Dynasty of Akkad	2350–2200 BC
Ur III Empire	2100–2000 BC
Old Babylonian Period	2000–1600 BC

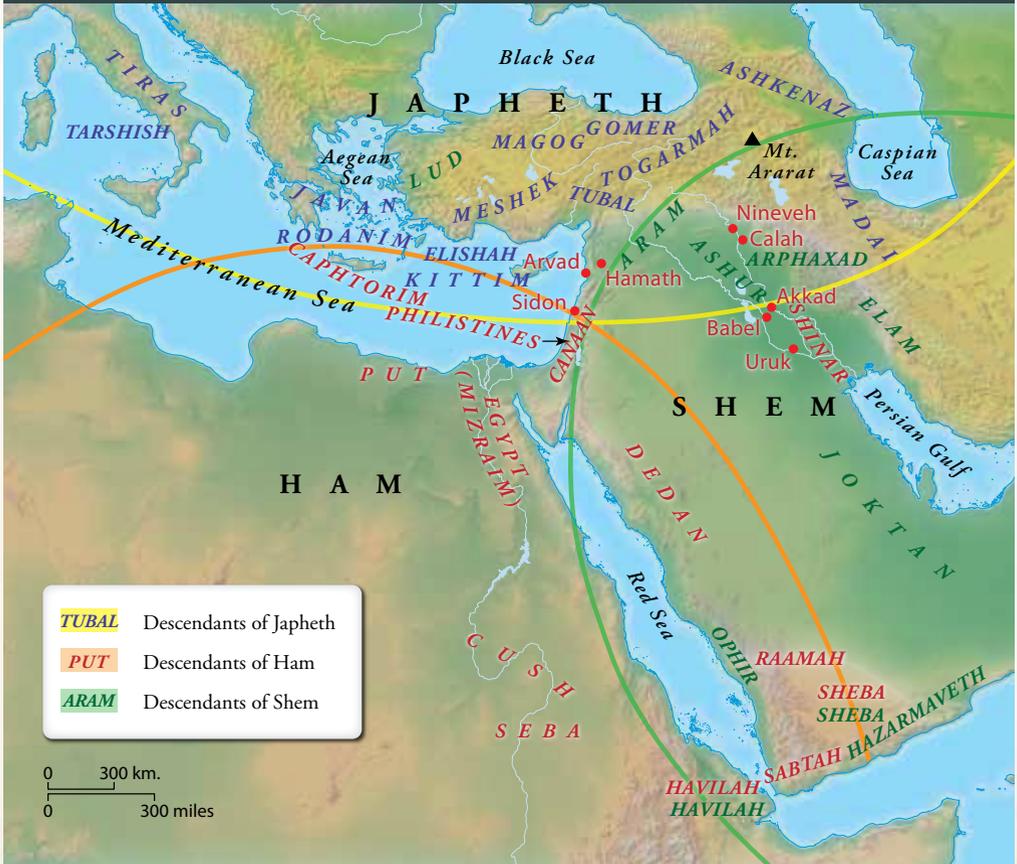
ERAS OF EGYPTIAN HISTORY (ROUND DATES)

Old Kingdom	3100–2200 BC
First Intermediate Period	2200–2050 BC
Middle Kingdom	2050–1720 BC
Second Intermediate Period	1720–1550 BC
Hyksos	1650–1550 BC

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

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

TABLE OF NATIONS



The Tower of Babel

11 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ²As people moved eastward,^a they found a plain in Shinar^b and settled there.

³They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks^v and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar^w for mortar. ⁴Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens,^x so that we may make a name^y for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”^z

⁵But the LORD came down^a to see the

11:2 ^uGe 10:10
11:3 ^vEx 1:14
^wGe 14:10
11:4 ^xDt 1:28;
9:1 ^yGe 6:4
^zDt 4:27
11:5 ^aver 7;
Ge 18:21;
Ex 3:8; 19:11,
18,20

11:7 ^bGe 1:26
^cGe 42:23
11:8 ^dGe 9:19;
Lk 1:51
11:9 ^eGe 10:10

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

⁸So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth,^d and they stopped building the city. ⁹That is why it was called Babel^{ce}—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From

^a 2 Or *from the east*; or *in the east* ^b 2 That is, Babylonia ^c 9 That is, Babylon; *Babel* sounds like the Hebrew for *confused*.

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

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

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

11:4 *a city, with a tower.* One single architectural feature dominated the landscape of early Mesopotamian cities: towers known as ziggurats (see the article “Ziggurats,” p. 30). In the earliest stages of urbanization, the city was not designed for the private sector. People did not live in the city. Instead, it was comprised of the public buildings, such as administrative buildings, and granaries, which were mostly connected with the temple. Consequently, the city was, in effect, a temple complex. *reaches to the heavens.* Throughout Mesopotamian literature, almost every occurrence of the expression describing a building “with its head in the heavens” refers to a temple with a ziggurat (see the article “Ziggurats,” p. 30). It is this language, along with the indication that God “came down” (v. 5), that gives textual confirmation that the tower is a

ziggurat. This would have been transparent to the ancient reader. In keeping with the negative results of the project here, the reader of Genesis will find a few of the omens in the *Shumma Alu* series remarkable: “If a city lifts its head to the midst of heaven, that city will be abandoned” (1.15), and “If a city rises like a mountain peak to the midst of heaven, that city will be turned to a ruin” (1.16). Yet Mesopotamian cities were regularly built on high ground, with the temple on the highest ground. The wording of these omens understood in the context of the omen series is essentially about exceeding natural boundaries to the effect that a city can overreach itself to rival sacred structures and thus bring about its own destruction. *make a name.* The ancient world placed immense value on the sense of continuity from one generation to another. In some cultures a person’s continued comfort in the afterlife was dependent on care from descendants in the land of the living. The details often involved memorial meals and various regular mortuary rites, but more important for this passage, they provided opportunity for the name of the deceased to be spoken. There is continued life and vitality as long as one is remembered. The building of monuments could also contribute to the desirable end result, as could achievements and adventures of various sorts. The important point here is that the desire to make a name in the ancient world is common to all. The more people who remember one’s name, the more secure is one’s existence in the afterlife. While there is nothing inherently evil or sinful in the desire to be remembered (e.g., God promises to “make your name great” for Abraham in 12:2 and David in 2Sa 7:9), this desire may become obsessive or motivate evil or sinful behavior. *scattered.* The fear of scattering is directly related (both syntactically and conceptually) to the previously stated desire to make a name. Remembrance takes place in the vicinity of the burial ground. Descendants who move away (as Abraham does in ch. 12) cut the ties of continuity between the past and the present. Though some have considered this desire not to scatter as disobedience to the blessing in 1:28, it must be recognized that the blessing does not relate to scattering, only to filling—far different issues. God scattered them, not because it was wrong for them to be together, but because their desire to retain continuity was causing them to launch flawed strategies.

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



ZIGGURATS

Though they may resemble pyramids in appearance, ziggurats are nothing like them in function. Ziggurats have no inside. The structure was framed in mud brick, and then the core was packed with fill dirt. The facade was then completed with kiln-fired brick. Ziggurats were dedicated to particular deities. Any given deity may have several ziggurats dedicated to him or her in different cities. Furthermore, a given city may have several ziggurats, though the main one was associated with the patron deity of the city. Archaeologists have discovered nearly 30 ziggurats in the general region, and texts mention several others. The main architectural feature is the stairway or ramp

that leads to the top. There was a small room at the top where a bed was made and a table set for the deity. Ziggurats range in size from 60 feet (18 meters) per side to almost 200 feet (60 meters) per side.

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

The best indication of the function of zig-

Stele of Nebuchadnezzar looking at the design of Babylon's ziggurat, Etemenanki, Babylon, 604 – 562 BC. Many also believe the Tower of Babel was a ziggurat.

The Schøyen Collection, Oslo and London, MS 2063, www.schoyencollection.com



continued on next page

there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

From Shem to Abram

11:10-27pp — Ge 10:21-31; 1Ch 1:17-27

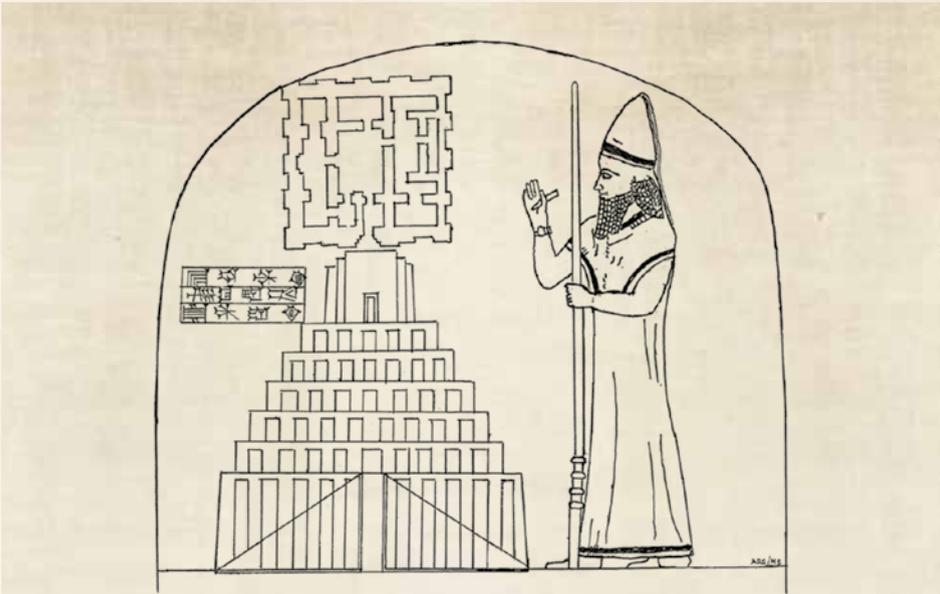
¹⁰This is the account of Shem's family line.

Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father^a of Arphaxad. ¹¹And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹²When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Shelah.^f ¹³And after he became the father of Shelah, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.^b

^a 10 Father may mean ancestor; also in verses 11-25.

^b 12,13 Hebrew; Septuagint (see also Luke 3:35, 36 and note at Gen. 10:24) 35 years, he became the father of Cainan. ¹³And after he became the father of Cainan, Arphaxad lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died. When Cainan had lived 130 years, he became the father of Shelah. And after he became the father of Shelah, Cainan lived 330 years and had other sons and daughters



gurats comes from the names that are given to them. For instance, the name of the ziggurat at Babylon, *Etemenanki*, means “temple of the foundation of heaven and earth.” One at Larsa means “temple that links heaven and earth.” Most significant is the name of the ziggurat at Sippar, “temple of the stairway to pure heaven.” The word translated “stairway” in this last example is used in the mythology as the means by which the messenger of the gods moved between heaven, earth, and the netherworld. As a result of these data, we can conclude that the ziggurat was a structure built to support the stairway. This stairway was a visual representation of that which was believed to be used by the gods to travel from one realm to another. It was solely for the convenience of the gods and was maintained in order to provide the deity with amenities and to make possible his descent into his temple.

At the top of the ziggurat was the gate of the gods, the entrance into their heavenly abode; adjoining the tower was the temple, where hopefully the god would descend to receive the gifts and worship of his people.

In summary, the project is a temple complex featuring a ziggurat, which was designed to make it convenient for the god to come down to his temple, receive their worship, and bless his people. The key for understanding the tower of Babel is to realize that the tower was not built so that people could ascend to heaven, but so that deity could descend to earth. ♦

¹⁴When Shelah had lived 30 years, he became the father of Eber. ¹⁵And after he became the father of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

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

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

²⁰When Reu had lived 32 years, he be-

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

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

²⁴When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah.^h ²⁵And after he became the father of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

^{11:20} ⁹Lk 3:35

^{11:24} ^hLk 3:34

²⁶After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram,ⁱ Nahor^j and Haran.

Abram’s Family

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

Terah became the father of Abram, Na-

11:26 ⁱLk 3:34
^jJos 24:2
11:27 ^kver 31;
Ge 12:4; 14:12;
19:1; 2Pe 2:7
11:28 ^lver 31;
Ge 15:7
11:29
^mGe 17:15
ⁿGe 22:20

hor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot.^k ²⁸While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans,^l in the land of his birth. ²⁹Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai,^m and the name of Nahor’s wife was Milkah;ⁿ she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and

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

By some chronological schemes Abraham’s time in Ur and Harran coincide with the empire phase. Some have deduced that Abraham was an urbane socialite in this grand center of civilization and that Yahweh’s call required a substantial change in lifestyle. Even if it were true that Abraham was born in this highly civilized city, however,

we cannot necessarily conclude that he was a city dweller. Ur had its share of herdsmen and farmers as any city did.

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

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

GENESIS 11



COSMIC HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY

Defining the term “mythology” is treacherous. Many formal definitions have been offered, and beyond those, one can find a wide variety of popular conceptions that impede fruitful discussion. Rather than offer yet another definition, it is more productive to identify the function of mythological literature. The mythology of the ancient world encapsulated contemporary thinking about how the world worked and how it came to work that way. It features the gods prominently because the ancients found the answers to their questions about the world in the divine realm. If we describe mythology functionally in this way, we can conclude that our modern mythology is what we call science. That is our culture’s way of encapsulating how the world works and how it came to work that way. Contrary to the divine orientation of the ancients, our scientific worldview is naturalistic and empiricist.

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

Consequently, studying the mythological literature of the ancient world can help us, whose cultural worldview tends toward empiricism, to make adjustments as we try to understand how a nonempiricist worldview works. The result is that we can be drawn out of the restricted perspectives that come most naturally to us. This is the value of the mythological literature for the study of the Bible. ♦

Iskah. ³⁰Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.^o

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

³²Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

The Call of Abram

12 The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.^r

²“I will make you into a great nation,^s and I will bless you;^t

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.^a

³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;^u

11:30 ^oGe 16:1; 18:11
11:31 ^pGe 15:7; Ne 9:7; Ac 7:4
^qGe 10:19
12:1 ^rAc 7:3*; Heb 11:8
12:2 ^sGe 15:5; 17:2,4; 18:18; 22:17; Dt 26:5
^tGe 24:1, 35
12:3 ^uGe 27:29; Ex 23:22; Nu 24:9

^vGe 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Ac 3:25; Gal 3:8*
12:4 ^wGe 11:31
12:5 ^xGe 14:14; 17:23
12:6 ^yHeb 11:9
^zGe 35:4; Dt 11:30
^aGe 10:18
12:7 ^bGe 17:1; 18:1; Ex 6:3
^cGe 13:15, 17; 15:18; 17:8; Ps 105:9-11
^dGe 13:4
12:8 ^eGe 13:3

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.^{v,b}

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.^w ⁵He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people^x they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶Abram traveled through the land^y as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh^z at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites^a were in the land. ⁷The LORD appeared to Abram^b and said, “To your offspring^c I will give this land.”^c So he built an altar there to the LORD,^d who had appeared to him.

⁸From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel^e and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

^a 2 Or be seen as blessed ^b 3 Or earth / will use your name in blessings (see 48:20) ^c 7 Or seed

were nomadic raiders at some point in their history, but it does not help locate them geographically.

Suspicion arises concerning the identification of Abraham’s Ur as the famous city in the south because the move to Harran does not seem a logical one from there. The distance is at least 700 miles (1,125 kilometers), and Harran is well off the beaten track for someone traveling to Canaan. If a town were 80 miles (125 kilometers) out of the way (especially traveling on foot), it would hardly be considered on the way. This geographic problem leads some to consider alternatives, and the literature of the ancient Near East preserves numerous other town names with some similarity to Ur. However, since the only Chaldeans we know of are from the south, the designation “of the Chaldeans” in relationship to Ur must be considered a later explanation placed in the text to help readers who were no longer familiar with the location of the town.

11:30 *Sarai ... was not able to conceive.* Barrenness was considered a judgment from God in the ancient world. Ancient peoples did not yet understand the physiology associated with fertilization. They viewed the woman as a receptacle for male seed. Rather than supplying an egg to be fertilized, the woman was seen simply as an incubator for the child. Therefore, if man provided the seed at the proper time (they understood that timing was in relation to menstruation) and nothing came of it, the woman was seen to be a faulty incubator. But this defect would not be seen as simply a physical problem, since no illness, symptom or condition was simply physical. Deity was responsible for creation in the womb, and deity was the one who opened the womb.

Sarai’s barrenness would have potentially resulted in a fragile marriage (since failure to deliver children to the family was the most common cause of divorce), in societal shame (since her condition would appear to be the result of having angered a god so that she was therefore unable to fulfill her societal role), and in an uncertainty for the afterlife (since descendants were believed to sustain the deceased in the netherworld). In Abraham and Sarai’s case, it also presented quite an obstacle to the covenant promise of having many descendants (12:2; 15:5).

12:1 – 3 God’s covenant with Abram targets the most essential elements of identity in the value system of the

ancient Near East. Land was connected to one’s survival, livelihood and political identity. Family linked the past, present and future, offering one’s most basic sense of identity (more so than self). Inheritance fixed one’s place in the family and ensured that the generations past would be remembered in the present and future. When Abram gave up his place in his father’s household, he forfeited his security. He was putting his survival, his identity, his future and his security in the hands of the Lord.

12:1 *Go from your country, your people and your father’s household.* One reason God may ask Abram to leave these behind is because it is in these three connections that one related to deity. The gods one worshiped tended to be national or city gods (“country”), the clan god (“people”), or ancestral gods, i.e., ancestors who have taken a place in the divine world (“father’s household”). As Yahweh severed the ties Abram would have had with other deities, he then filled the resulting void as the only God Abram would need.

12:2 *great nation.* This offer is unique in the ancient world. One can certainly find offers by deities to make someone king and to prosper their line — or even a promise that a particular individual would have many offspring. But the prospect that an individual would grow into a great nation is not broached in any other extant literature from the ancient world.

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

12:8 *altar.* Usually thought of as raised platforms used for offering sacrifices; here, however, there is no mention of sacrifices. Furthermore, sacrifices usually take place in



PATRIARCHAL RELIGION

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

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

The Biblical text is clear on the point that Abram comes from a family that is not monotheistic (cf. Jos 24:2,14). We must assume that he was brought up sharing the polytheistic beliefs of the ancient world. In this type of system the gods are connected with the forces of nature and show themselves through natural phenomena. These gods do not reveal their natures or give any idea of what will bring their favor or wrath. They are worshiped by being flattered, cajoled, humored and appeased. Manipulation is the operative term. They are gods with needs made in the image of human beings. One of the main reasons God makes a covenant with Abram is in order to reveal what he is really like—to correct the false view of deity that people have developed. But this is projected to take place in stages, not all at once.

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

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

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

GENESIS 12:1–3



THE COVENANT

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

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

⁹Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.^f

Abram in Egypt

12:10–20^{Ref}— Ge 20:1–18; 26:1–11

¹⁰Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live

12:9^f Ge 13:1, 3

12:13
⁹Ge 20:2; 26:7

there for a while because the famine was severe. ¹¹As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. ¹²When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live. ¹³Say you are my sister,⁹ so that I

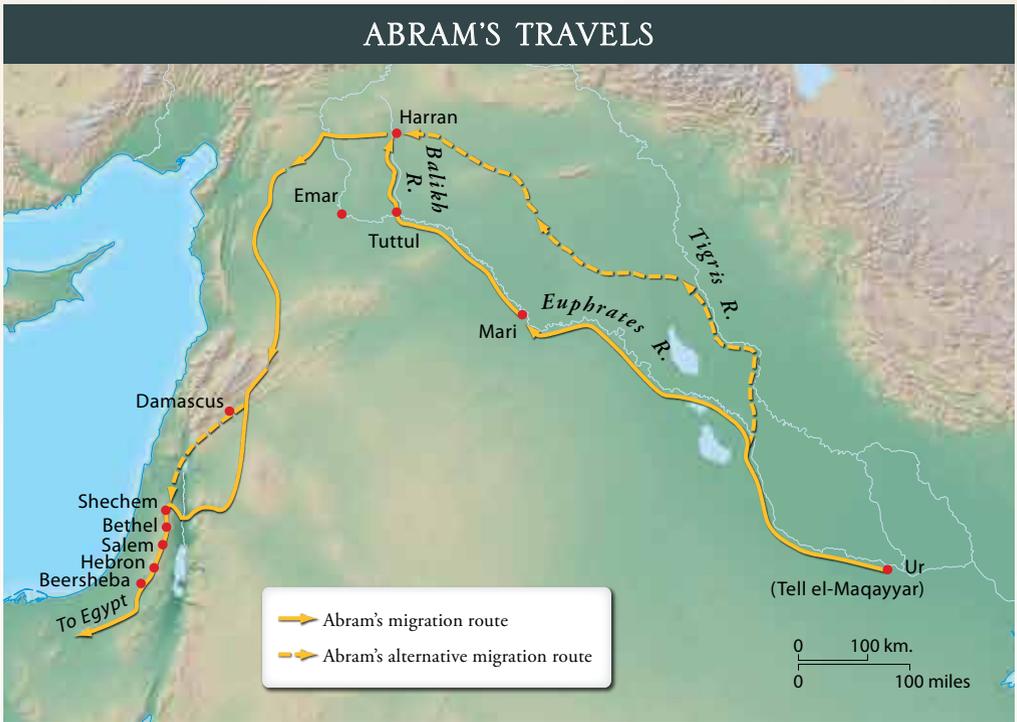
the vicinity of a temple and are serviced by a priesthood. No ancient Near Eastern document refers to altars used for anything other than sacrifices in the presence of deity; sacrifices were pointless if not offered where a deity was believed to be present. In fact, the only sacrifice by Abram described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

12:10 *famine*. In the Negev rainfall is minimal (averaging 4–12 inches [10–30 centimeters] per year), thus making the availability of grazing lands and subsistence agriculture fragile and vulnerable to climatic whims. Water is supplied to the region by wells, and even the rain that does fall does not easily support agriculture. Modern archaeologists and geologists have found evidence of a massive 300-year drought cycle that occurred during the end of the third millennium BC and the beginning of the second millennium BC—one of the time periods to which Abraham is dated. *Egypt*. Recourse there in time of famine in Canaan was not unusual because the food supply in Canaan depended on rainfall, while the food supply in

Egypt depended on the flooding of the Nile. The text offers no identification of the pharaoh at this time. By the earliest chronology for Abraham, the pharaoh of ch. 12 would have been one of the kings of the “First Intermediate Period” that preceded the Middle Kingdom (perhaps Inyotef II). Many are more comfortable locating Abraham and his immediate descendants in the first quarter of the second millennium BC, which coincides with the Middle Kingdom. Little is known of this period in Egyptian history, and it is difficult to date the patriarchs with any precision or confidence.

12:11 *beautiful woman*. Sarai was 65 when she and Abram left Harran; perhaps several years have gone by, so we can estimate her age at 70. The compliment cannot simply be attributed to a doting husband, for the text indicates that the Egyptians share this opinion (vv. 14–15). What is not clear is which features lead to this assessment. In 41:2 the cows of pharaoh’s dream are described by this same Hebrew term (translated “sleek”), where it conveys robust healthiness—fine specimens. We need not think that every culture is as superficial as our modern culture in their assessments of beauty. A woman in the ancient world could be attractive either as showing good potential for childbearing or as a tool for political alliance. Neither of these seems appropriate for Sarai, however, for she is clearly not entering childbearing years, and there is no political alliance that makes it attractive to marry her; however, we should not assume that Sarah has miraculously attained the beauty of youth. Her dignity, bearing or countenance could all create the impression of a striking woman.

12:13 *Say you are my sister*. This is the first of three narratives



will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.”

¹⁴When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. ¹⁵And when Pharaoh’s officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. ¹⁶He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

¹⁷But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household^h because of Abram’s wife Sarai. ¹⁸So Pharaoh summoned Abram. “What have you done to me?”ⁱ he said. “Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹Why did you say, ‘She

12:17
^h1Ch 16:21
12:18 ⁱGe 20:9;
26:10

13:1 ^jGe 12:9
13:3 ^kGe 12:8

is my sister,’ so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!” ²⁰Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

Abram and Lot Separate

13 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev,^j with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. ²Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

³From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel,^k to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier ⁴and where he had first built

in which a patriarch attempts to identify his wife as his sister to avoid problems with the power establishment of the region (see also 20:1 – 18; 26:1 – 11). Interpreters have proposed many ingenious explanations for this behavior. One that was popular for several decades suggested that the wife’s status would be elevated if her husband also adopted her as a sister. Others have argued that if the wife posed as a sister, the patriarch would be viewed as a party to negotiate with rather than as an obstacle to be eliminated. Many of the proposed theories have the underlying motivation to save Abram’s reputation. Unfortunately, at present we remain ignorant of what sociological realities commended this course of action to Abram. The Israelite audience undoubtedly knew what advantage was to be gained from the ruse, so there was no need for the author to explain it. For our part, we accomplish nothing

by devising solutions designed to either vindicate or vilify Abram.

12:17 *diseases.* The terminology here is as general as it can possibly be. With no symptoms being given, it is impossible to speculate on what these diseases may have been. In the ancient world, with no knowledge of epidemiology, parasites, viruses, bacteria or any of the diagnostic tools of modern medicine, people believed disease had its source in the supernatural realm. Treatment focused on the symptoms and combined herbal remedies with magical potions and incantation rituals. Prognoses could offer hope for healing most confidently if an offense against deity could be identified and appeasement effected. Extensive catalogs of symptoms and treatments are available in medical texts from Mesopotamia.

see I will give to you and your offspring^a forever.^y ¹⁶I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. ¹⁷Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land,^z for I am giving it to you.”

¹⁸So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre^a at Hebron,^b where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.^c

Abram Rescues Lot

14 At the time when Amraphel was king of Shinar,^{bd} Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goyim, ²these kings went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboyim,^e and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).^f ³All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea Valley^g). ⁴For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

⁵In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites^h in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emiteiⁱ in Shaveh Kiriathaim ⁶and the Horites^j in the hill country of Seir,^k as far as El Paran^l near the desert. ⁷Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazezon Tamar.^m

⁸Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah,ⁿ the king of Admah, the king of Zeboyim^o and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim ⁹against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of

13:15 ^yGe 12:7; Gal 3:16^a
13:17 ^zver 15; Nu 13:17-25
13:18
^aGe 14:13, 24; 18:1 ^bGe 35:27
^cGe 8:20
14:1 ^dGe 10:10
14:2 ^eGe 10:19
^fGe 13:10
14:3 ^gNu 34:3; 12; Dt 3:17;
 Jos 3:16; 15:2, 5
14:5 ^hGe 15:20; Dt 2:11, 20
ⁱDt 2:10
14:6 ^kDt 2:12, 22 ^kDt 2:1, 5, 22 ^lGe 21:21; Nu 10:12
14:7 ^m2Ch 20:2
14:8 ⁿGe 13:10; 19:17-29
^oDt 29:23

14:10
^pGe 19:17, 30
14:13 ^qver 24; Ge 13:18
14:14 ^rGe 15:3
^sDt 34:1; Jdg 18:29
14:17
^t2Sa 18:18
14:18
^uPs 110:4; Heb 5:6;
^vPs 76:2; Heb 7:2
14:19 ^wHeb 7:6
^xver 22

Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar — four kings against five. ¹⁰Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills.^p ¹¹The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. ¹²They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

¹³A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre^q the Amorite, a brother^c of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. ¹⁴When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household^r and went in pursuit as far as Dan.^s ¹⁵During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

¹⁷After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).^t

¹⁸Then Melchizedek^u king of Salem^v brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹and he blessed Abram,^w saying,

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

^a 15 Or *seed*; also in verse 16 ^b 1 That is, Babylonia; also in verse 9 ^c 13 Or *a relative*; or *an ally*

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

14:13 *Hebrew.* The designation of Abram as a “Hebrew” may reflect a social status more than an ethnic identity. The term is usually used in the Bible to identify Israelites to foreigners (39:14–17; Ex 2:11; 1Sa 4:6; Jnh 1:9). As

a social status it seems to have referred to dispossessed or disenfranchised peoples. This is the usage of a similar-sounding term throughout a wide range of ancient texts (often transliterated *habiru*, more accurately, *Apiru*, referring to various people groups throughout the second millennium BC). At times the label implies an “outsider” status and that the people are unsettled or even lawless renegades. Other times they are refugees or political opponents. In the Amarna texts they sometimes serve as mercenaries. The term cannot be considered as a reference to ethnic Israelites, but it is possible that ethnic Israelites (and here, Abram) are being classified socially as *Apiru*.

14:18 *Melchizedek king of Salem.* If we base our analysis solely on information from this chapter, Melchizedek is a city-state king of Canaanite, Amorite or Hurrian extraction, and apparently one of the chief petty kings of the region. His city is Salem, generally considered to be Jerusalem (cf. Ps 76:2). Archaeological finds, though scant, attest to the fact that Jerusalem is settled at this period. The city is mentioned in extra-Biblical literature as early as the Egyptian execration texts from around 1900 BC.

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

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.^z

²¹The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”

²²But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand^a I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth,^b ²³that I will accept nothing belonging to you,^c not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be

14:20
^yGe 24:27
^zGe 28:22;
Dt 26:12;
Heb 7:4
14:22 ^aEx 6:8;
Da 12:7;
Rev 10:5-6
^bver 19
14:23 ^c2Ki 5:16

15:1 ^dDa 10:1
^eGe 21:17;
26:24; 46:3;
2Ki 6:16;
Ps 27:1;
Isa 41:10, 13-14
^fDt 33:29;
2Sa 22:3, 31;
Ps 3:3

able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ ²⁴I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me — to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”

The LORD’s Covenant With Abram

15 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram^d in a vision:

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

^a 1 Or *sovereign* ^b 1 Or *shield; / your reward will be very great*

Melchizedek makes a brief appearance in Ps 110:4, where the idealized Davidic king is identified as also having priestly credentials “in the order of Melchizedek.” Once we get to the intertestamental period, Melchizedek becomes a much more intriguing figure. The Hasmoneans, seeking to establish a Messianic dimension to their rule in the second century BC, justified their priestly-royal prerogatives by reference to Melchizedek. This practice was continued by the Sadducees. In the Dead Sea Scrolls Melchizedek has become the subject of much speculative interpretation. He is depicted as a heavenly redeemer figure, a leader of the forces of light, who brings release to the captives and reigns during the Messianic age. He is the heavenly high priest to whom archangels make expiation for the sins of ignorance of the righteous.

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

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

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

14:20 *a tenth.* Tithing (giving “a tenth”) is known in the ancient Near East and in the OT in a variety of contexts. Evidence from the ancient Near East occurs as early as about 2000 BC, where the obligatory tithe is in goods given to the temples. In this period there is also reference to a tithe assessed by the palace. Ugaritic texts attest to grain payment tithes to the royal storehouses being made from villages rather than individuals. No texts suggest a tithe of booty taken in battle.

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

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

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



GENESIS 14 AND ANCIENT HISTORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

While there were many periods in the first half of the second millennium BC when the Elamites were closely associated with powers in Mesopotamia, it is more difficult to bring the Hittites into the picture (and, it should be noted, we are not even sure the

Hittites are involved here). We do know that Assyrian merchants had a trading colony in the Hittite region, and one of the key trade items was tin from Elam. But there is no indication of joint military ventures.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Consequently, though many authentic features characterize this narrative, no ready links to the known history are currently possible. ♦

²But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless⁹ and the one who will inherit^a my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant^h in my household will be my heir.”

⁴Then the word of the LORD came to

15:2 ⁹Ac 7:5
15:3 ¹Ge 24:2,
34

15:4 ¹Gal 4:28
15:5 ¹Ps 147:4;
Jer 33:22

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

^a 2 The meaning of the Hebrew for this phrase is uncertain.

decisions seen when in a semicomatose state or trance. The idea of “seeing an oracular decision” makes sense both in the context of this chapter (where Abram asks an oracular question, v. 8) and in the context of the prophets (where messages emerge from the vision). As in the OT,

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

15:3 *no children ... a servant ... will be my heir.* Besides today’s practice in which children are adopted to provide for the child, ancient Near Eastern practice sometimes

GENESIS 15:9–21



RATIFYING THE COVENANT

Controversy remains about what kind of ceremony is carried out in Ge 15:9–21. What/whom do the pieces represent (possibilities: sacrifice for oath, God if he reneges, nations already as good as dead, Israelites in slavery)? Whom do the birds of prey represent (nations seeking to seize available land, e.g., Ge 14, or to plunder Israel)? Whom do the implements represent (God and/or Abram)?

These issues cannot currently be resolved, but a few observations can help identify some of the possible connections with the ancient world. Before we look at the options, a word is in order about what this is not.

1. It is *not a sacrifice*. There is no altar, no offering of the animals to deity and no ritual with the carcasses, the meat or the blood.
2. It is *not divination*. The entrails are not examined and no meal is offered to deity.
3. It is *not an incantation*. No words are spoken to accompany the ritual and no efficacy is sought—Abram is asleep.

The remaining options are based on where animals are ritually slaughtered in the ancient world when it is not for the purposes of sacrifice, divination or incantation.

Option 1: A covenant ceremony or, more specifically, a royal land grant ceremony. In this case the animals typically are understood as substituting for the participants or proclaiming a self-curse if the stipulations are violated. Examples of the slaughter of animals in such ceremonies but not for sacrificial purposes are numerous. In tablets from Alalakh, the throat of a lamb is slit in connection to a deed executed between Abba-El and Yarimlim. In a Mari text, the head of a donkey is cut off when sealing a formal agreement. In an Aramaic treaty of Sefire, a calf is cut in two with the explicit statement that such will be the fate of the one who breaks the treaty. In Neo-Assyrian literature, the head of a spring lamb is cut off in a treaty between Ashurnirari V and Mati’ilu, not for sacrifice but explicitly as an example of punishment. The strength of these examples lies in the contextual connection to covenant. The weakness is that only one animal is killed in these examples, and there is no passing through the pieces and no torch and firepot. Furthermore, there are significant limitations regarding the efficacy of a divine self-curse.

Option 2: Purification. The “torch” (Ge 15:17) is a portable, handheld object for bringing light. The “smoking firepot” (15:17) can refer to a number of different vessels used to heat things (e.g., an oven for food, a kiln for pottery). Here the two items are generally assumed to be associated with God, but need not be symbolic

continued on next page

Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring^a be.”^k

⁶Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.^l

⁷He also said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

15:5 ^kGe 12:2; 22:17; Ex 32:13; Ro 4:18^g; Heb 11:12
15:6 ^lPs 106:31; Ro 4:3^g; 20-24^g; Gal 3:6^g; Jas 2:23^g
15:8 ^mLk 1:18

⁸But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, how can I know^m that I will gain possession of it?”

⁹So the LORD said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years

^a 5 Or *seed*

involved adopting an adult for the purpose of providing for the parents. Through adoption the parents vouchsafed an heir to keep property and possessions intact and procured someone to care for them in old age. In these cases at times a trusted slave was adopted as a son.

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

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

Option 3: Confirming signs related to the promise of what will be done to the nations.

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

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

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

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

old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

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

¹²As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep,^p and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³Then the LORD said to him, “Know for certain that for four hundred years^q your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved^r and mistreated there. ¹⁴But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out^s with great possessions.^t ¹⁵You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age.^u ¹⁶In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites^v has not yet reached its full measure.”

¹⁷When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.^w ¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land,^x from the Wadi^a of Egypt^y to the great river, the Euphrates — ¹⁹the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

Hagar and Ishmael

16 Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children.^z But she had an Egyptian slave^a named Hagar; ²so

15:10 ⁿver 17; Jer 34:18
^oLev 1:17
15:12 ^pGe 2:21
15:13 ^qver 16; Ex 12:40; Ac 7:6, 17
^rEx 1:11
15:14 ^sAc 7:7*
^tEx 12:32-38
15:15 ^uGe 25:8
15:16
^v1Ki 21:26
15:17 ^wver 10
15:18 ^xGe 12:7
^yNu 34:5
16:1 ^zGe 11:30; Gal 4:24-25
^aGe 21:9

16:2 ^bGe 30:3-4, 9-10
16:3 ^cGe 12:5
16:5 ^dGe 31:53
16:7 ^eGe 21:17; 22:11, 15; 31:11
^fGe 20:1
16:10
^gGe 13:16; 17:20

she said to Abram, “The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.”^b

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

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

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

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

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

⁹Then the angel of the LORD told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” ¹⁰The angel added, “I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.”^g

¹¹The angel of the LORD also said to her:

“You are now pregnant
and you will give birth to a son.

^a 18 Or river

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

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

A marriage contract from the town of Nuzi a few centu-

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

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

You shall name him Ishmael,^a for the LORD has heard of your misery.^b

¹²He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward^b all his brothers.¹³

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

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

The Covenant of Circumcision

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty^e; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.^m ²Then I will make my covenant between me and youⁿ and will greatly increase your numbers."

³Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴"As for me, this is my covenant with you:^o You will be the father of many nations.^p ⁵No longer will you be called Abram^f; your name will be Abraham,^{gq} for I have made you a father of many nations.^r ⁶I will make you very fruitful;^s I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.^t ⁷I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God^v and the God of your descendants after you.^v ⁸The whole land of Canaan,^w where you now reside as a foreigner,^x I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you;^y and I will be their God."

16:11 ^hEx 2:24; 3:7,9
16:12 ⁱGe 25:18
16:13
^jGe 32:30
16:15 ^kGal 4:22
17:1 ^lGe 28:3;
^mEx 6:3
ⁿDt 18:13
17:2 ^hGe 15:18
17:4 ^oGe 15:18
^pVer 16;
^qGe 12:2; 35:11;
^r48:19
17:5 ^qver 15;
^sNe 9:7
^tRo 4:17*
17:6 ^uGe 35:11
^vMt 1:6
17:7 ^wEx 29:45,
^x46 ^vRo 9:8;
^yGal 3:16
17:8 ^wPs 105:9,
^x11 ^xGe 23:4;
^y28:4; Ex 6:4
^zYc 12:7

17:10 ^zver 23;
^aGe 21:4;
^bJn 7:22; Ac 7:8;
^cRo 4:11
17:11
^dEx 12:48;
^eDt 10:16
^fRo 4:11
17:12
^gLev 12:3;
^hLk 2:21
17:14
ⁱEx 4:24-26
17:16
^jGe 18:10
^kGe 35:11;
^lGal 4:31
17:17
^mGe 18:12; 21:6
17:19
ⁿGe 18:14; 21:2
^oi Ge 26:3

⁹Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.^z ¹¹You are to undergo circumcision,^a and it will be the sign of the covenant^b between me and you. ¹²For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised,^c including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. ¹³Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people;^d he has broken my covenant."

¹⁵God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her.^e I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations;^f kings of peoples will come from her."

¹⁷Abraham fell facedown; he laughed^g and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" ¹⁸And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!"

¹⁹Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son,^h and you will call him Isaac.^h I will establish my covenant with himⁱ as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ²⁰And as for

^a 11 *Ishmael* means *God hears*. ^b 12 *Or live to the east / of* ^c 13 *Or seen the back of* ^d 14 *Beer Lahai Roi means well of the Living One who sees me*.
^e 1 *Hebrew El-Shaddai* ^f 5 *Abram* means *exalted father*. ^g 5 *Abraham* probably means *father of many*.
^h 19 *Isaac* means *he laughs*.

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

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

17:5 *Abraham*. Personal names in the ancient world provided much more than a moniker. Sometimes they preserved recognition of a distinguishing characteristic or reflected circumstances at the time of the person's birth. Often they made statements about deity (e.g., Isaiah = Yahweh saves). Names generally offered information, at some level, about the person's identity and in a variety

of ways names were believed to be intertwined with a person's destiny (see note on 2:20). Knowing a person's name created a relationship with that person—i.e., the person was further known by knowing the name. Knowing a person's name also provided potential power over that person, most radically when used in spells or hexes. The naming of a person was one of the most dramatic impositions of authority over another individual. Since the name of a person was believed to be intertwined with their destiny, to name a person meant that you controlled their identity and directed their destiny. In this verse, it is not that God is demonstrating his authority over Abram (though the fact that he can change his name is not insignificant), but more important, he is designating Abram's destiny—to be the father of a multitude. The name Abram meant "the father is exalted." Reference to "father" (*ab*) in personal names usually indicated veneration of an ancestor, so this name looked to the past. His new name Abraham designates him as the significant ancestor as it looks to future generations yet to be born.



CIRCUMCISION

Circumcision is well-known in the ancient Near East from as early as the fourth millennium BC, though the details of its practice and its significance vary from culture to culture. Circumcision was practiced in the ancient Near East by many peoples. The Egyptians practiced circumcision as early as the third millennium BC. West Semitic peoples, Israelites, Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites performed circumcision. Eastern Semitic peoples did not (e.g., Assyrians, Babylonians, Akkadians)—nor did the Philistines, an Aegean or Greek people. Anthropological studies have suggested that the rite always has to do with at least one of four basic themes: fertility, virility, maturity and genealogy. Study of Egyptian mummies demonstrates that the surgical technique in Egypt differed from that used by the Israelites; while the Hebrews amputated the prepuce of the penis, the Egyptians merely incised the foreskin and so exposed the glans penis. Egyptians were not circumcised as children, but in either prenuptial or puberty rites. The common denominator, however, is that it appears to be a rite of passage, giving new identity to the one circumcised and incorporating him into a particular group.

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

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

continued on next page

Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers.^j He will be the father of twelve rulers,^k and I will make him into a great nation.^l ²¹But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year."^m ²²When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

²³On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. ²⁴Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised,ⁿ ²⁵and his son Ishmael was thirteen; ²⁶Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that very day. ²⁷And every male in Abra-

17:20 ^oGe 16:10
^kGe 25:12-16
^lGe 21:18
17:21 ^mGe 21:2
17:24 ⁿRo 4:11

18:1 ^oGe 13:18;
14:13
18:2 ^pver 16,
22; Ge 32:24;
Jos 5:13;
Jdg 13:6-11;
Heb 13:2

ham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

The Three Visitors

18 The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre^o while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ²Abraham looked up and saw three men^p standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

³He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord,^a do not pass your servant by. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and then

^a 3 Or eyes, Lord

of patrilineal descent resulted in males being considered the representatives of the clan and the ones through whom clan identity was preserved (as, e.g., the wife took on the tribal and clan identity of her husband). (2) Individuals found their identity more in the clan and the community than in a concept of self. Decisions and commitments were made by the family and clan more than by the individual. The rite of passage represented in circumcision marked each male as entering a clan committed to the covenant, a commitment that he would then have the responsibility to maintain. If this logic holds, circumcision would not focus on individual participation in the covenant as much as on continuing communal participation. The community is structured around patrilineal descent, so the sign on the males marks the corporate commitment of the clan from generation to generation. ♦



Relief in the tomb of Ankhmahor at Saqqara depicting a priest performing a ritual circumcision.

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you may all wash your feet^a and rest under this tree. ⁵Let me get you something to eat,^r so you can be refreshed and then go on your way — now that you have come to your servant.”

“Very well,” they answered, “do as you say.”

18:4 ^aGe 19:2; 43:24
18:5 ^rJdg 13:15

⁶So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. “Quick,” he said, “get three seahs^a of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.”

⁷Then he ran to the herd and selected

^a ⁶ That is, probably about 36 pounds or about 16 kilograms

18:5 Abraham’s hospitality includes the offering of protection (shade), the necessary amenities (foot washing), and a generous provision of food and drink. Custom mandated such hospitality from a host when travelers passed through since public accommodation was scarce and the climate threatening. In towns taverns might provide lodging, and there were occasionally strategically located caravansaries, but in many regions one could not expect to find these whenever one needed to eat or sleep. Travelers were welcomed as a ready source of news.

In ancient Near Eastern literature humans occasion-

ally encounter the gods, but rarely the messengers of the gods. In the Ugaritic Legend of Aqhat, Dan’el offers hospitality to the representative of the gods, Kothar-wa-Hasis (himself also a god), when the representative comes traveling through town, by having his wife prepare a meal of cooked lamb.

18:6 *three seahs*. About 36 pounds (16 kilograms); the amount reflects Abraham’s generosity. *finest flour*. The terminology here indicates that this flour is from wheat rather than from barley and therefore of higher quality. In Mesopotamia, 36 pounds (16 kilograms) of barley

a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. ⁵ While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

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

“There, in the tent,” he said.

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

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹Abraham and Sarah were already very old,^u and Sarah was past the age of child-bearing.^v ¹²So Sarah laughed^w to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord^x is old, will I now have this pleasure?”

¹³Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴Is anything too hard for the LORD?^y I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

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

But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

18:8 ^sGe 19:3
18:10 ^rRo 9:9*
18:11
^uGe 17:17
^vRo 4:19
18:12
^wGe 17:17; 21:6
^x1Pe 3:6
18:14
^yJer 32:17;
27; Zec 8:6;
Mt 19:26;
Lk 1:37; Ro 4:21

18:17 ^zAm 3:7
^aGe 19:24
18:18 ^bGal 3:8*
18:19
^cDt 4:9-10;
6:7 ^dJos 24:15;
Eph 6:4
18:21 ^eGe 11:5
18:22 ^fGe 19:1

Abraham Pleads for Sodom

¹⁶When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷Then the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham² what I am about to do?^a ¹⁸Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation,^b and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.^a ¹⁹For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children^c and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD^d by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

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

²²The men turned away and went toward Sodom,^f but Abraham remained standing before the LORD.^b ²³Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you

^a 18 Or will use his name in blessings (see 48:20)

^b 22 Masoretic Text; an ancient Hebrew scribal tradition but the LORD remained standing before Abraham

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

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

18:9 *Where is your wife Sarah?* It could be inferred from the angel's question that it was unusual for Sarah not to be there — either in a serving capacity or joining them in the meal (there is no evidence of women eating separately in the ancient world). It could also be inferred from Abraham's curt response (“there, in the tent”) that this was not just the circumstance of the moment and that she could be sent for. These are not necessary inferences, but there is a possibility that something is indicated here that was transparent to the Israelite reader, yet elusive to us. That is, it is possible that Sarah has had to retreat to the tent and is now confined there — that she has suddenly, much to her shock and consternation, become “indisposed.” Menstruation rendered a woman unclean in the ancient world and would have prohibited her from social contact and from food preparation and serving. The text specifically indicates that she had already gone through menopause (v. 11), but if she were to bear a child, her period would need to restart. The timing would have to be precise here. In v. 6 Abraham asked Sarah to bake some bread, an activity often forbidden to menstruating women in Abraham's time, so at that point her period had not begun. Yet she would not be confined to her tent unless she actually had her period. If this is the issue, she experienced the onset of

her period as dinner is being served. We know even from the Biblical narratives that menstruating women were at times confined to their tents (cf. 31:34–35). This view is also attested in the ancient Near East. Though somewhat speculative, this line of thinking would explain why the announcement that Sarah would bear a child is introduced by a question concerning Sarah's whereabouts, leading the somewhat embarrassed Abraham to offer the euphemistic explanation that she is “in the tent” as a way of explaining that she is indisposed (note our modern euphemism, “it's that time of the month”). One could almost imagine a transitional, “Indeed, and that is just the beginning . . .” It would have constituted a remarkable sign of the resumption of her fertility.

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

sweep away the righteous with the wicked?⁹ ²⁴What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare^a the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?^h ²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”ⁱ

²⁶The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”^j

²⁷Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes,^k ²⁸what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18:23

⁹Nu 16:22
18:24 ^hJer 5:1
18:25 ⁱJob 8:3,
20; Ps 58:11;
94:2; Isa 3:10-
11; Ro 3:6
18:26 ^jJer 5:1
18:27 ^kGe 2:7;
3:19; Job 30:19;
42:6

18:32 ^lJdg 6:39
^mJer 5:1
19:1 ⁿGe 18:22
^oGe 18:1
19:2 ^pGe 18:4;
Lk 7:44
19:3 ^qGe 18:6
19:5
^rJdg 19:22;
Isa 3:9;
Ro 1:24-27
19:6
^sJdg 19:23

³²Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more.^l What if only ten can be found there?”

He answered, “For the sake of ten,^m I will not destroy it.”

³³When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

19 The two angels arrived at Sodomⁿ in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city.^o When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ²“My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet^p and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.”

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

³But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate.^q ⁴Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. ⁵They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”^r

⁶Lot went outside to meet them^s and shut the door behind him ⁷and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing.

^a 24 Or *forgive*; also in verse 26

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

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

19:4 *all the men.* Though the designation “all” can be hyperbolic, the addition of the merism “both young

and old” indicates widespread participation. It is unlikely, though, that every single member of the male population is present, for Lot’s sons-in-law do not seem to be there.

19:5 *have sex with them.* Perhaps one of the most developed alternative interpretations to the Hebrew here is the contention that when the men say they want to “know” the visitors, they are expressing distrust in Lot’s ability to protect the city from spies and they want to “interrogate” the men. Lot identifies this intention as “wicked” (v. 7) because interrogations in the ancient world were typically not gentle. In this view Lot offers his daughters as hostages to be held as warranty that he has the situation well in hand. The most devastating problem to this position is that in Hebrew, when the verb “to know” (*yada*) has a personal direct object (i.e., to know someone), it always has a sexual innuendo.

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



The paved gateway at Dan featured a canopied platform where either the king or the image of the god stood. Lined up beside it were stone benches where the elders would have sat and business of the city would have been conducted (Ge 19:1).

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

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

¹⁰But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. ¹¹Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and

19:8 ^tJdg 19:24
19:9 ^uEx 2:14;
 Ac 7:27

19:11
^vDt 28:28-29;
 2Ki 6:18;
 Ac 13:11
19:12 ^wGe 7:1
19:13
^x1Ch 21:15

old, with blindness^v so that they could not find the door.

¹²The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here — sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you?^w Get them out of here, ¹³because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."^x

¹⁴So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry^a his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about

^a 14 Or were married to

of the men of the city have traditionally seemed clear enough, but recent interpreters have suggested various alternatives (see note on v. 5).

19:8 *I have two daughters . . . do what you like with them.* Lot's response to the demand of the men is startling. Was he really offering his daughters to be gang-raped and probably murdered? An alternative is that his suggestion implied a more subtle, "I would as soon have you violate my family members as violate those whom I have taken in and offered hospitality!" It would be like sarcastically saying to a mortgage company, "Why don't you just take the clothes off my children's backs and the food off their plates?" Such a comment is not suggesting they will really do that. If this is the correct reading, Lot's offer of his daughters was intended to prick the

conscience of the mob. Just as they would (hopefully) not consider treating a citizen's daughters in this way, so the same inhibitions should protect Lot's guests. The mob refused to be placated or dissuaded from its intentions and indicated it is even willing to treat Lot with the same violence.

19:11 *blindness.* The Hebrew word here is used elsewhere only for the Aramean army at Dothan (2Ki 6:18). It is a term related to an Akkadian word for day or night blindness. This rare Akkadian word is used only in medical texts apparently referring to a corneal disease. As a judgment of the gods, blindness can be found in the Ugaritic Legend of 'Aqhat. Dan'el curses three towns near where his son 'Aqhat has been slain with the words, "May Baal strike you blind" (cf. Dt 28:28).

to destroy the city!^y” But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.^z

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

¹⁶When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. ¹⁷As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives!^c Don’t look back,^d and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”

¹⁸But Lot said to them, “No, my lords,^a please! ¹⁹Your^b servant has found favor in your^b eyes, and you^b have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die. ²⁰Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.”

²¹He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. ²²But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.^c)

²³By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. ²⁴Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah^e—from the LORD out of the heavens.^f ²⁵Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.^g ²⁶But Lot’s wife looked back,^h and she became a pillar of salt.ⁱ

19:14
^yNu 16:21
^zEx 9:21;
 Lk 17:28
19:15
^aNu 16:26
^bRev 18:4
19:17 ^cJer 48:6
^dver 26
19:24
^eDt 29:23;
 Isa 1:9; 13:19
^fLk 17:29;
 2Pe 2:6; Jude 7
19:25
^gPs 107:34;
 Eze 16:48
19:26 ^hver 17
ⁱLk 17:32

²⁷Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD.^j ²⁸He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.^k

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

Lot and His Daughters

³⁰Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains,^m for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave. ³¹One day the older daughter said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is no man around here to give us children—as is the custom all over the earth. ³²Let’s get our father to drink wine and then sleep with him and preserve our family line through our father.”

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

³⁴The next day the older daughter said to the younger, “Last night I slept with my father. Let’s get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and sleep with him so we can preserve our family line through our father.” ³⁵So they got their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went in and slept with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

^a 18 Or No, Lord; or No, my lord ^b 19 The Hebrew is singular. ^c 22 Zoar means small.

19:27
^jGe 18:22
19:28 ^kRev 9:2;
 18:9
19:29 ^l2Pe 2:7
19:30 ^mver 19

19:17 *Don't look back ...!* The angel’s prohibition did not concern looking at the destruction. After all, people standing on the walls of Zoar would have been able to watch the carnage take place. We should notice that when the angel gave the instructions not to look back, it was placed between two other commands. If the prohibition was not concerned with seeing the destruction, it seems the three commands form a sequence: (1) Get out of here; (2) don’t turn back; (3) don’t stop before reaching your destination. The verb “look” must therefore have idiomatic value. The implication is that Lot’s wife returned to Sodom. In this interpretation the command of the angel is broken not by glancing over one’s shoulder and seeing what should not be seen, but in directing attention back and returning to the city (see note on v. 26).

19:24 *rained down burning sulfur.* The scene is one of divine retribution, and brimstone appears here and elsewhere as an agent of purification and divine wrath on the wicked (Ps 11:6; Eze 38:22). One can only speculate about the actual manner of this destruction, but perhaps the combustion of natural tars and sulfur deposits and the release of noxious gases during an earthquake form part of the story (Dt 29:23). The mineral salts of the region include sodium, potash, magnesium, calcium chlorides, and bromide. An earthquake in the area could easily have

ignited these chemicals, causing them to rain down on the victims of the destruction.

19:26 *Lot's wife ... became a pillar of salt.* This need not be seen as an arbitrary and instantaneous transformation. The destruction is described in terms of the burning sulfur (brimstone) and fire that God “rained down” on the cities (v. 24; see note). Since the destruction did not begin until Lot and his daughters reached Zoar (vv. 23–24), we should assume that Lot’s wife did not simply glance back, but returned to the city and was swept up in the destruction like everyone else in the cities (cf. Lk 17:28–32). Many “pillars of salt” would have littered the streets.

19:30 *left Zoar and settled in the mountains.* Perhaps Lot saw that Zoar was just as bad as Sodom, or perhaps he was fearful that the angels would change their mind and destroy the city anyway (without forewarning this time).

19:31–34 The five cities of the plain were the only cities in the region. It most likely seemed to Lot’s daughters that they were the last people on earth. Even so, the audience would not have needed prompting to recognize their action as reprehensible. Incest is already viewed in negative terms in the ancient world. The Mosaic Law is not the first to condemn it; there are, e.g., a number of paragraphs treating incest in Hammurapi’s laws. Lot is exonerated in that the daughters realize they have to get him drunk first.

³⁶So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. ³⁷The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab^a; he is the father of the Moabitesⁿ of today. ³⁸The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi^b; he is the father of the Ammonites^{co} of today.

Abraham and Abimelek

20:1-18Ref — Ge 12:10-20; 26:1-11

20 Now Abraham moved on from there^p into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar,^q and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.⁵

³But God came to Abimelek in a dream^t one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."^u

⁴Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation?^v ⁵Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands."

⁶Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept^w you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. ⁷Now return the man's

19:37 ⁿDt 2:9
19:38 ^oDt 2:19
20:1 ^pGe 18:1
^qGe 26:1, 6, 17
20:2 ^rver 12;
Ge 12:13; 26:7
^sGe 12:15
20:3
^tJob 33:15;
Mt 27:19
^uPs 105:14
20:4 ^vGe 18:25
20:6
^w1Sa 25:26, 34

20:7 ^xver 17;
1Sa 7:5;
Job 42:8
20:9 ^yGe 12:18;
26:10; 34:7
20:11
^zGe 42:18;
Ps 36:1
^aGe 12:12; 26:7
20:14
^bGe 12:16
20:15 ^cGe 13:9

wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you^x and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die."

⁸Early the next morning Abimelek summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. ⁹Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done."^y ¹⁰And Abimelek asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?"

¹¹Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God^z in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'^a ¹²Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. ¹³And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."^w'"

¹⁴Then Abimelek brought sleep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham,^b and he returned Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵And Abimelek said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like."^c

^a 37 Moab sounds like the Hebrew for *from father*.

^b 38 Ben-Ammi means *son of my father's people*.

^c 38 Hebrew *Bene-Ammon*

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

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

20:2 *She is my sister.* The wife-as-sister motif appears here again, but there are significant differences from ch. 12. Here there is no famine to suggest God's abandonment,

nor is Gerar outside the land. Most significant, unlike the prior occasion when Sarah was barren, Sarah is now fertile and the promised son is to be born within the year. Sarah is not obviously pregnant, or she would not have been taken and the ruse would not have been attempted. If Sarah spends even one night in Abimelek's embrace, the paternity of the child to be born would be in question. In ch. 12 Abraham was in danger of losing his wife. In ch. 20 he is in danger of losing claim to his heir, since he would not definitively be the father.

20:7 *prophet... pray.* The connection between prayer and prophets is not transparent. In the ancient world, prophets gave messages from deity because they were reputed to have a seat in the heavenly council where decisions of judgment and destiny were made. This privileged seat also gave a prophet the ability to effectuate a curse or remove it (cf. 1Ki 13:4–6, which included prayer as part of the prophet's procedure). Their messages comprised the announcement of the decisions of the heavenly council. The intercessory role of the prophet was therefore found in the opportunity he or she had to bring issues to the council table for discussion and to serve as advocate for the earthly party. Then, as spokesperson for the council and deity, he or she would announce the verdict in the form of a prophetic message. Such information was typically given by prophetic message, usually derived from a divination setting (note Balaam's procedures in Nu 22–24). *will pray... will live.* The Hebrew verbs describing Abraham's anticipated action are modal ("he may pray for you, so that you may live"). No guarantee is offered of either, though if there is no restoration the death sentence is certain. In this context, however, there is no hint of divination.

¹⁶To Sarah he said, “I am giving your brother a thousand shekels^a of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.”

¹⁷Then Abraham prayed to God,^d and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again,¹⁸ for the LORD had kept all the women in Abimelek’s household from conceiving because of Abraham’s wife Sarah.^e

The Birth of Isaac

21 Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah^f as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised.^g ²Sarah became pregnant and bore a son^h to Abraham in his old age,ⁱ at the very time God had promised him. ³Abraham gave the name Isaac^{bj} to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him,^k as God commanded him. ⁵Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

⁶Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter,^l and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” ⁷And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

⁸The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. ⁹But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham^m was mocking,ⁿ ¹⁰and she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”^o

¹¹The matter distressed Abraham great-

20:17
^d Job 42:9
20:18
^e Ge 12:17
21:1 ^f 1Sa 2:21
^g Ge 8:1; 17:16, 21; Gal 4:23
21:2 ^h Ge 17:19
ⁱ Gal 4:22; Heb 11:11
21:3 ^j Ge 17:19
21:4 ^k Ge 17:10, 12; Ac 7:8
21:6 ^l Ge 17:17; Isa 54:1
21:9 ^m Ge 16:15
ⁿ Gal 4:29
21:10
^o Gal 4:30*

21:11
^p Ge 17:18
21:12 ^q Ro 9:7*;
Heb 11:18*
21:13 ^r ver 18
21:14 ^s ver 31, 32
21:17 ^t Ex 3:7
21:18 ^u ver 13
21:19
^v Nu 22:31
21:20
^w Ge 26:3, 24; 28:15; 39:2, 21, 23
21:21 ^x Ge 24:4, 38

ly because it concerned his son.^p ¹²But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring^c will be reckoned.^q ¹³I will make the son of the slave into a nation^r also, because he is your offspring.”

¹⁴Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.^s

¹⁵When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. ¹⁶Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” And as she sat there, she^d began to sob.

¹⁷God heard the boy crying,^t and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”^u

¹⁹Then God opened her eyes^v and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰God was with the boy^w as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. ²¹While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him^x from Egypt.

The Treaty at Beersheba

²²At that time Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham,

^a 16 That is, about 25 pounds or about 12 kilograms
^b 3 Isaac means *he laughs*. ^c 12 Or *seed*
^d 16 Hebrew; Septuagint *the child*

20:16 *I am giving your brother ... you are completely vindicated.* Abimelek’s payment to Abraham and Sarah is like a reverse bride price. A bride price was paid by the groom to the family of the bride as surety that the marriage would take place. Here the payment moves the same direction, but the woman is moving the opposite direction — from the would-be husband back to the family. Rather than a bride price, it is a restitution payment restoring the woman to her family intact. The text is clear, however, that this is more than a social transaction when Abimelek indicates that by this payment she is vindicated. *a thousand shekels of silver.* An exorbitant amount. We encounter the same number in the Ugaritic poem “The Betrothal of Yarikh and Nikkal-ib,” in which 1,000 shekels of silver was part of the bride price paid among the gods, along with 10,000 shekels of gold and precious stones. In weight it equals about 25 pounds (12 kilograms) of silver; in value it was more than a worker could expect to make in a lifetime (common wage earners were paid ten shekels per year). The king’s generous payment is multifunctional. It is his guarantee that Sarah has been untouched, a fee to Abraham for his intercessory role, and an appeasement of

the deity who has virtually cut off all fertility in his family (vv. 17–18).

21:10 *Get rid of that slave woman.* Hagar’s status in the household of Abraham created friction. Her initial status as Sarah’s handmaiden was altered when Sarah chose her as one to give an heir to Abraham — i.e., when she became not just a concubine (whose children would not have the status of a legitimate heir) but a wife. A concubine had no dowry and her children were slaves in the household, not legitimate heirs. She could be sold and did not have to be divorced. But with a handmaiden given as a wife, as Hagar was, all this changed. Consequently a dual claim of authority was established. A woman of Hagar’s status could be expelled, but not by either husband or wife alone, and she could not be sold. Her son had the status of a legitimate heir, and she would generally have to be divorced. By sending her away, both Hagar’s and Ishmael’s claims were being dissolved. This meant that Hagar was being given her freedom as well as being divorced (see note on v. 14).

21:14 *sent her off.* The Hebrew verb used is the verb for divorce (cf. Mal 2:16).

“God is with you in everything you do. ²³Now swear^y to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you now reside as a foreigner the same kindness I have shown to you.”

²⁴Abraham said, “I swear it.”

²⁵Then Abraham complained to Abimelek about a well of water that Abimelek’s servants had seized. ²⁶But Abimelek said, “I don’t know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today.”

²⁷So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelek, and the two men made a treaty. ²⁸Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, ²⁹and Abimelek asked Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?”

³⁰He replied, “Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness^b that I dug this well.”

³¹So that place was called Beersheba,^{ac} because the two men swore an oath there.

³²After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD,^d the Eter-

21:23 ^yver 31;
Jos 2:12
21:25
^zGe 26:15, 18,
20-22
21:27
^aGe 26:28, 31
21:30
^bGe 31:44, 47,
48, 50, 52
21:31
^cGe 26:33
21:33 ^dGe 4:26

^eDt 33:27
22:1 ^fDt 8:2,
16; Heb 11:17;
Jas 1:12-13
22:2 ^gver 12,
16; Jn 3:16;
Heb 11:17;
1Jn 4:9
^h2Ch 3:1
22:6 ⁱJn 19:17

nal God.^e ³⁴And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Abraham Tested

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

“Here I am,” he replied.

²Then God said, “Take your son^g, your only son, whom you love — Isaac — and go to the region of Moriah.^h Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

³Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac,ⁱ and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

^a 31 *Beersheba* can mean *well of seven* and *well of the oath*.

21:25 *well*. The region of Beersheba had limited rainfall, so the water supply was largely provided through wells. Water rights in such ecological situations were established by contracts, as in vv. 27–32. That such discussion could become important for international relations is evidenced by some correspondence between Rim-Sin of Larsa and the king of Eshnunna in the Old Babylonian period, where water rights are under dispute and negotiations take place. Well technology required sufficient knowledge of hydrology to identify the location of aquifers and the ability to dig down to them, but also sufficient knowledge of well-building technology, including the construction of a lining to stabilize the shaft and prevent seepage from the sides. The significant amount of labor necessary for such an undertaking makes it obvious why the rights to this water supply would be worth fighting over.

21:32 *Philistines*. Known from the time of the judges and the early monarchy, they did not come into the region and occupy this territory until around 1200 BC — much later than the time of Abraham and likewise later than the time of Moses. The first known mention of the Philistines outside the Bible is in the records of Ramesses III (1182–1151 BC). They were one of the tribes of the Sea Peoples who eventually settled in five city-states along the southern coast of Canaan. Abimelek is a Semitic name, and as “king of Gerar” he matches nothing that is known of the Philistine profile. While it is not impossible that this story represents contact with an earlier group of Philistines who settle the area prior to the Sea Peoples, this may simply be an anachronistic use of the name Philistines for the area rather than an ethnic identification of the people whom Abraham encounters.

21:33 *the Eternal God*. Hebrew *El Olam*, the enduring God,

which depicts God as responsible for the grand scheme of things. He is the God of the long term.

22:2 *Moriah*. Since the journey takes two to three days (v. 4), the location of Moriah is within a radius of 40 miles (65 kilometers) of Beersheba. This circle reaches from Kadesh Barnea in the south to Jerusalem in the north, and from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean coast. The only other reference to Moriah is in 2Ch 3:1, which identifies it as the site of the temple in Jerusalem, but it makes no mention of Abraham or this incident. Abraham appears to be familiar with the place, and since he takes firewood with him, presumably he knows that wood is not available in the region (v. 3). In contrast, the wooded hills around Jerusalem would have provided ample firewood for the sacrifice. Furthermore, if the site were Jerusalem, we would expect it to be designated “Salem” (as in 14:18; see note there). Consequently we cannot be certain that the Moriah of Ge 22:2 and the Moriah of 2Ch 3:1 refer to the same place. *Sacrifice him*. God’s demand that Abraham offer Isaac is unlike anything in the ancient world. Child sacrifices would have been carried out soon after birth and would have been associated either with fertility rituals or foundation offerings to secure protection for the home. Contemporary literary sources outside of the Bible that refer to child sacrifice or even human sacrifice are virtually nonexistent. The prohibition against child sacrifice in the Pentateuch (e.g., Lev 18:21) demonstrates that it was sometimes practiced, but none of the potential ritual contexts are pertinent to Ge 22. Human sacrifice may have been carried out in extreme circumstances, but there are no dire conditions here. Undoubtedly Abraham would not have considered this command of God commonplace.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb^j for the burnt offering?”

⁸Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

⁹When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar,^k on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

¹²“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God,^l because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.^m”

¹³Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram^a caught by its horns.

22:7 ^jLev 1:10

22:9

^kHeb 11:17-19;

Jas 2:21

22:12

^lIsa 15:22;

Jas 2:21-22

^mver 2; Jn 3:16

22:13 ⁿRo 8:32

22:14 ^over 8

22:16 ^pLk 1:73;

Heb 6:13

22:17

^qHeb 6:14*

^rGe 15:5

^sGe 26:24;

32:12 ^tGe 24:60

22:18 ^uGe 12:2;

3; Ac 3:25*;

Gal 3:8* ^vver 10

He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.ⁿ ¹⁴So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.^o”

¹⁵The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶and said, “I swear by myself,^p declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will surely bless you and make your descendants^q as numerous as the stars in the sky^r and as the sand on the seashore.^s Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies,^t ¹⁸and through your offspring^b all nations on earth will be blessed,^{cu} because you have obeyed me.”^v

^a 13 Many manuscripts of the Masoretic Text, Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint and Syriac; most manuscripts of the Masoretic Text *a ram behind him* ^b 18 Or *seed*
^c 18 Or *and all nations on earth will use the name of your offspring in blessings* (see 48:20)

22:13 *sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.* Though animal substitution is clear enough in the OT (e.g., firstborn substitution, Passover), the idea of an animal being sacrificed as a substitute for a human being is not as common in the ancient world as might be expected. In the cultures in which animal sacrifice was practiced, the people often simply provide a lavish meal for the deity, at times with the participation of the officiates and the worshipers. The theory that the animal

takes the place of the person whose offenses are thereby vicariously expiated is a different matter (and it should be noted that even in Ge 22 no offense is identified as a reason for the sacrifice). When rituals from the ancient world do involve animal substitution, it is typically in the context of magic — i.e., that through ritual the disease, impurity, evil spirit or spell might be transferred to the animal, which was then slaughtered, thus bringing relief to the human.

GENESIS 22:14



“THE LORD WILL PROVIDE”

When Abraham names this place, he affirms that God is superintending the flow of events. This is to be read as complimentary to the name given to God in Ge 21:33 (see note there). Here the designation of the place recognizes Yahweh as God of the short term, caring for the needs of the moment. This is an important point to make in the context of the ancient Near East. In the polytheism of Abraham’s day, national and cosmic deities handled the long-term kinds of issues that concerned the stability of the world and national destiny. Other deities were more involved in the daily life of the people. These patron (city, ancestral) deities were believed to have the bulk of the impact in the life of the individual. We must remember that God has still not presented to Abraham the tenets of monotheism either on the practical level (the sole object of worship) or on the philosophical level (no other God exists). Nevertheless, in the names attributed to God, Abraham is moving in that direction. He has now recognized that this covenant God of his is not just a replacement for one of the standard categories of deity. He is filling all the roles of deity. We can hardly begin to understand how revolutionary this was. ♦

¹⁹Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

Nahor's Sons

²⁰Some time later Abraham was told, "Milkah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor:^w ²¹Uz the first-born, Buz his brother, Kemuel (the father of Aram), ²²Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel."^z ²³Bethuel became the father of Rebekah.^x Milkah bore these eight sons to Abraham's brother Nahor. ²⁴His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also had sons: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maakah.

The Death of Sarah

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

³Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites.^a He said, ⁴"I am a foreigner and stranger^a among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead."

⁵The Hittites replied to Abraham, ⁶"Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince^b among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead."

⁷Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. ⁸He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar^c on my behalf ⁹so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and

22:20
^wGe 11:29
22:23
^xGe 24:15
23:2 ^yJos 14:15
^zver 19;
 Ge 13:18
23:4 ^aGe 17:8;
 1Ch 29:15;
 Ps 105:12;
 Heb 11:9, 13
23:6
^bGe 14:14-16;
 24:35
23:8 ^cGe 25:9

23:10
^dGe 34:20-24;
 Ru 4:4
23:11
^e2Sa 24:23
23:15
^fEze 45:12
23:16
^gJer 32:9;
 Zec 11:12
23:17
^hGe 25:9;
 49:30-32; 50:13;
 Ac 7:16

is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you."

¹⁰Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate^d of his city. ¹¹"No, my lord," he said. "Listen to me; I give^b you the field, and I give^b you the cave that is in it. I give^b it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead."

¹²Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land ¹³and he said to Ephron in their hearing, "Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there."

¹⁴Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵"Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth four hundred shekels^c of silver,^f but what is that between you and me? Bury your dead."

¹⁶Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver,^g according to the weight current among the merchants.

¹⁷So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre^h—both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field—was deeded ¹⁸to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city. ¹⁹Afterward Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰So the field and the cave in

^a 3 Or the descendants of Heth; also in verses 5, 7, 10, 16, 18 and 20 ^b 11 Or sell ^c 15 That is, about 10 pounds or about 4.6 kilograms

23:3 *Hittites.* The terminology in this chapter identifies these people as the "sons of Heth" throughout, except for "the Hitti" in v. 10 (NIV "the Hittite"). In 10:15 the Hittites are descendants of Canaan and listed among largely Semitic peoples. Outside of the Bible, the most well-known Hittites were Indo-European peoples who inhabited central Anatolia in the middle of the second millennium BC. After the collapse of that empire around 1200 BC, remnants of the civilization persevered in northern Syria. The term "Hittites" for the Anatolian peoples derives from their association with the land of Hatti, not only in their own texts but also in Ugaritic, Egyptian and Akkadian texts. The Indo-European "Hittites" (speaking Nesite) gained prominence over the original Hattian inhabitants beginning about 2000 BC. The OT probably makes no reference to the Nesite Hittites of the empire age. The Anatolian people referred to as "Hittites" should more precisely be referred to as "Hattians" or "Nesites" (referring to land and language, respectively); these should not be confused with the Semitic Hethites/Hittites of Genesis.

23:4 *burial site.* The negotiations here are not concerned with the rights to dig a hole and mark a grave. Contemporary burial practices favored rock-cut or cave tombs, which were meant to accommodate the clan through generations. Bodies would be laid out on rock shelves

until nothing remained but the bones, at which point the bones would either be cleared to the back of the tomb or relocated into a container of some sort to make room for another body. The use of family tombs may partially explain the use of the phrase "gathered to his people" (25:8). Deceased ancestors were honored through a variety of practices that did not stop after burial. These practices made it desirable for tombs to be in proximity to somewhat permanent settlements.

23:9 *sell it to me for the full price.* Abraham negotiates for the long term. If he had been willing to accept the land on a grant basis, the land could have been reclaimed in a later generation or in hard times.

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

it were deeded¹ to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site.

Isaac and Rebekah

24 Abraham was now very old, and the LORD had blessed him in every way.^j ²He said to the senior servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had,^k “Put your hand under my thigh.¹ ³I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth,^m that you will not get a wife for my sonⁿ from the daughters of the Canaanites,^o among whom I am living,⁴ but will go to my country and my own relatives^p and get a wife for my son Isaac.”

⁵The servant asked him, “What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?”

⁶“Make sure that you do not take my son back there,” Abraham said. ⁷“The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father’s household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, ‘To your offspring^q I will give this land’^r — he will send his angel before you^s so that you can get a wife for my son from there. ⁸If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there.” ⁹So the servant put his hand under the thigh^t of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰Then the servant left, taking with him ten of his master’s camels loaded with all

23:20

¹Jer 32:10

24:1 ¹ver 35

24:2 ^kGe 39:4-

⁶1 ver 9;

Ge 47:29

24:3 ^mGe 14:19

ⁿGe 28:1; Dt 7:3

^oGe 10:15-19

24:4 ^pGe 12:1;

28:2

24:7 ^qGal 3:16*

^rGe 12:7; 13:15

^sEx 23:20, 23

24:9 ¹ver 2

24:11 ^uEx 2:15

^vver 13;

15a 9:11

24:12

^wver 27, 42,

48; Ge 26:24;

Ex 3:6, 15, 16

24:14

^xJdg 6:17, 37

24:15 ^yver 45

^zGe 22:23

^aGe 22:20

^bGe 11:29

24:16 ^cGe 26:7

24:18 ^dver 14

24:19 ^ever 14

kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim^b and made his way to the town of Nahor. ¹¹He had the camels kneel down near the well^u outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water.^v

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

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

¹⁷The servant hurried to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water from your jar.”

¹⁸“Drink,^d my lord,” she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.

¹⁹After she had given him a drink, she said, “I’ll draw water for your camels too,^e until they have had enough to drink.” ²⁰So

^a 7 Or *seed* ^b 10 That is, Northwest Mesopotamia

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

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

24:14 *May it be that when I say.* In seeking guidance from God, the servant uses a strategy much like that used for seeking oracles in the ancient world. In an oracle a

binary question (i.e., yes/no) was put to deity and then a device of some sort was used as a means by which the deity could give an answer. In the ancient world the device often used was either casting lots or employing a divination priest to perform extispicy (the investigation of the entrails of sacrificed animals for positive or negative signs). In Israel the high priest used the Urim and Thummim as a way of conducting such an oracular procedure. Since Abraham’s servant has no lots to cast and has no immediate access to specialized professionals, he has to improvise. He therefore resorts to using his current surroundings to devise an oracle. When this procedure is used, it is typical that a highly irregular occurrence designates “yes” and the normal turn of events designates “no,” with the expectation that God will thereby communicate his answer. Here the question is whether the girl whom the servant approaches is the chosen mate for Isaac. The designated indicator of a “yes” answer is if the girl offers to do far beyond what human nature or the conventions of hospitality would dictate, specifically, to water all his camels when he asks only for a drink for himself. Such an unusual offer would serve as evidence that deity was overriding all natural instinct and social etiquette. For similar mechanistic oracles, see Jdg 6:36–40; 1Sa 6:7–12.

24:19 *I’ll draw water for your camels too.* If the servant’s camels had gone several days without water, they could potentially drink up to 25 gallons (almost 100 liters) each.

she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. ²¹Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.^f

²²When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring^g weighing a beka^a and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels.^b ²³Then he asked, “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?”

²⁴She answered him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milkah bore to Nahor.”^h ²⁵And she added, “We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night.”

²⁶Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD,ⁱ ²⁷saying, “Praise be to the LORD,^j the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness^k to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey^l to the house of my master’s relatives.”^m

²⁸The young woman ran and told her mother’s household about these things. ²⁹Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban,ⁿ and he hurried out to the man at the spring. ³⁰As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister’s arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. ³¹“Come, you who are blessed by the LORD,”^o he said. “Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.”

³²So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet.^p ³³Then food was set before him, but he said, “I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say.”

“Then tell us,” Laban said.

³⁴So he said, “I am Abraham’s servant. ³⁵The LORD has blessed my master abundantly,^q and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys.^r ³⁶My master’s wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age,^s and he has given him everything he owns.^t ³⁷And my master made me swear an oath, and said, ‘You must not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites,

24:21 ^fver 12
24:22 ^gver 47
24:24 ^hver 15
24:26 ⁱver 48, 52; Ex 4:31
24:27
^jEx 18:10;
^kRu 4:14;
^l1Sa 25:32
^mver 49;
ⁿGe 32:10;
^oPs 98:3 ^pver 21
^qver 12, 48
24:29 ^rver 4;
^sGe 29:5, 12, 13
24:31
^tGe 26:29;
^uRu 3:10;
^vPs 115:15
24:32
^wGe 43:24;
^xJdg 19:21
24:35 ^yver 1
^zGe 13:2
24:36 ^{aa}Ge 21:2,
^{ab}1Ge 25:5

24:37 ^{ac}ver 3
24:38 ^{ad}ver 4
24:39 ^{ae}ver 5
24:40 ^{af}ver 7
24:41 ^{ag}ver 8
24:42 ^{ah}ver 12
24:43 ^{ai}ver 13
^{aj}ver 14
24:45 ^{ak}1Sa 1:13
^{al}ver 15 ^{am}ver 17
24:46
^{an}ver 18-19
24:47 ^{ao}ver 23
^{ap}ver 24
^{aq}Eze 16:11-12
24:48 ^{ar}ver 26
^{as}ver 27
24:49
^{at}Ge 47:29;
^{au}Jos 2:14
24:50
^{av}Ps 118:23
^{aw}Ge 31:7, 24,
^{ax}29, 42

in whose land I live,^u ³⁸but go to my father’s family and to my own clan, and get a wife for my son.^v

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

⁴⁰“He replied, ‘The LORD, before whom I have walked faithfully, will send his angel with you^x and make your journey a success, so that you can get a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father’s family. ⁴¹You will be released from my oath if, when you go to my clan, they refuse to give her to you—then you will be released from my oath.’^y

⁴²“When I came to the spring today, I said, ‘LORD, God of my master Abraham, if you will, please grant success^z to the journey on which I have come. ⁴³See, I am standing beside this spring.^a If a young woman comes out to draw water and I say to her, ‘Please let me drink a little water from your jar,’^b ⁴⁴and if she says to me, ‘Drink, and I’ll draw water for your camels too,’ let her be the one the LORD has chosen for my master’s son.’

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

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

⁴⁷“I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’^g

“She said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel son of Nahor, whom Milkah bore to him.’^h

“Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms,ⁱ ⁴⁸and I bowed down and worshiped the LORD.^j I praised the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master’s brother for his son.^k ⁴⁹Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness^l to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn.”

⁵⁰Laban and Bethuel answered, “This is from the LORD;^m we can say nothing to you one way or the other.ⁿ ⁵¹Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master’s son, as the LORD has directed.”

⁵²When Abraham’s servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground

^a 22 That is, about 1/5 ounce or about 5.7 grams

^b 22 That is, about 4 ounces or about 115 grams

Given the standard size of the vessels used to draw water, this would mean that Rebekah would have to draw eight to ten jars for each camel, thus requiring nearly a hundred trips from the well—several hours of work. Since it was already almost evening when the scene opens (v. 11), it

is sensible to conclude that the camels may have been watered more recently and would have required considerably less water than that. But Rebekah would not have known the current needs of the camels, so the offer remains impressive and extraordinary.

before the LORD.^o ⁵³Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts^p to her brother and to her mother. ⁵⁴Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night there.

When they got up the next morning, he said, “Send me on my way^q to my master.”

24:52 ^over 26
24:53 ^pver 10,
22
24:54 ^qver 56,
59

⁵⁵But her brother and her mother replied, “Let the young woman remain with us ten days or so; then you^a may go.”

⁵⁶But he said to them, “Do not detain me, now that the LORD has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master.”

^a 55 Or she

GENESIS 24:50–54



MARRIAGE CONTRACTS

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

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

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

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

⁵⁷Then they said, “Let’s call the young woman and ask her about it.” ⁵⁸So they called Rebekah and asked her, “Will you go with this man?”

“I will go,” she said.

⁵⁹So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse^r and Abraham’s servant and his men. ⁶⁰And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

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

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her attendants got ready and mounted the camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

⁶²Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi,^u for he was living in the Negev.^v ⁶³He went out to the field one evening to meditate,^{aw} and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. ⁶⁴Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel ⁶⁵and asked the servant, “Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?”

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

⁶⁶Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. ⁶⁷Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah.^x So she became his wife, and he loved her;^y and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.^z

The Death of Abraham

25:1-4pp — 1Ch 1:32-33

25 Abraham had taken another wife, whose name was Keturah. ²She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Mid-

24:59 ^rGe 35:8

24:60

^sGe 17:16

^tGe 22:17

24:62

^uGe 16:14;

25:11 ^vGe 20:1

24:63 ^wPs 1:2;

77:12; 119:15;

27:48, 97, 148;

143:5; 145:5

24:67

^xGe 25:20

^yGe 29:18, 20

^zGe 23:1-2

25:2 ^a1Ch 1:32,

33

25:5 ^bGe 24:36

25:6 ^cGe 22:24

^dGe 21:10, 14

25:8 ^eGe 15:15

^fver 17;

Ge 35:29;

49:29, 33

25:9 ^gGe 35:29

^hGe 50:13

25:10

ⁱGe 23:16

25:11 ^jGe 16:14

25:12 ^kGe 16:1

^lGe 16:15

ian, Ishbak and Shuah.^a ³Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan; the descendants of Dedan were the Ashurites, the Letushites and the Leummmites. ⁴The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanok, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.

⁵Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac.^b ⁶But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines^c and sent them away from his son Isaac^d to the land of the east.

⁷Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age,^e an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people.^f ⁹His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him^g in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite,^h ¹⁰the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites.^{bi} There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. ¹¹After Abraham’s death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.^j

Ishmael’s Sons

25:12-16pp — 1Ch 1:29-31

¹²This is the account of the family line of Abraham’s son Ishmael, whom Sarah’s slave, Hagar^k the Egyptian, bore to Abraham.^l

¹³These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ¹⁴Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. ¹⁶These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve

^a 63 The meaning of the Hebrew for this word is uncertain. ^b 10 Or the descendants of Heth

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

24:67 *tent of his mother.* Sarah’s status was mistress of the household, and her tent would have been empty since her death (23:1–2). By taking Rebekah into his mother’s tent, Isaac demonstrates that she is now the mistress of the household.

25:6 *sons of his concubines.* The children of concubines did not have the status of legitimate heirs. A concubine typically brought no dowry and her children had the status of servants or slaves in the household. They were part of the inheritance rather than recipients of it. *sent them away.* Thus removing them from any presumed position of privilege; yet at the same time he gives them freedom and gifts. Gifts of movable property (rather than land) would be a typical procedure used to consolidate the chief heir’s inheritance. For Abraham to provide this for these sons is unusual generosity.

25:8 *gathered to his people.* This expression finds its roots in ancient views about burial and afterlife. Both the practice of burials in family tombs and the view of continuing social relationships in the afterlife retain the concept of the ancestors as a distinguishable group. One’s place in the family of deceased ancestors was just as central to one’s identity as one’s place in the family in the land of the living. The living family honored the deceased both individually and corporately through a variety of practices that did not stop after burial.

25:13 *sons of Ishmael.* The Ishmaelites — i.e., the peoples descended from Ishmael — are mentioned infrequently

tribal rulers^m according to their settlements and camps. ¹⁷Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people.ⁿ ¹⁸His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt, as you go toward Ashur. And they lived in hostility toward^a all the tribes related to them.^o

Jacob and Esau

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

Abraham became the father of Isaac, ²⁰and Isaac was forty years old^p when he married Rebekah^q daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram^b and sister of Laban^r the Aramean.

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

²³The LORD said to her,

“Two nations^u are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you
will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the
other,
and the older will serve the younger.”^v

25:16
^mGe 17:20
25:17 ⁿver 8
25:18
^oGe 16:12
25:20 ^pver 26;
Ge 26:34
^qGe 24:67
^rGe 24:29
25:21
^s1Ch 5:20;
2Ch 33:13;
Ezr 8:23;
Ps 127:3;
Ro 9:10
25:22 ^t1Sa 9:9;
10:22
25:23 ^uGe 17:4
^vGe 27:29;
40; Mal 1:3;
Ro 9:11-12*

25:25
^wGe 27:11
25:26
^xHos 12:3
^yGe 27:36
25:27 ^zGe 27:3,
5
25:28
^aGe 27:19
^bGe 27:6
25:33
^cGe 27:36;
Heb 12:16

²⁴When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment;^w so they named him Esau.^c ²⁶After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel;^x so he was named Jacob.^{d,y} Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

²⁷The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country,^z while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. ²⁸Isaac, who had a taste for wild game,^a loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.^b

²⁹Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. ³⁰He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.^e)

³¹Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.”

³²“Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?”

³³But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright^c to Jacob.

³⁴Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and

^a 18 Or *lived to the east of* ^b 20 That is, Northwest Mesopotamia ^c 25 Esau may mean *hairy*.
^d 26 Jacob means *he grasps the heel*, a Hebrew idiom for *he deceives*. ^e 30 Edom means *red*.

in Scripture and are absent entirely from the ancient Near Eastern literature. Besides the genealogical listing (here; 1Ch 1:29–31) and the reference to groups associated with the Midianites (Ge 37:25–28; 39:1; Jdg 8:24) and with a wide array of Israel’s enemies (Ps 83:6), individual Ishmaelites are only mentioned in connection with Esau’s wives (Ge 28:9; 36:3) and David’s administration (1Ch 2:17; 27:30). The Ishmaelites are never identified with a group designated in the OT as “Arabs” — a term that refers to various tribes who inhabit the area of the Arabian peninsula. The term “Arab” is not a tribal term. “Arab” takes on its modern sense only after the rise of Islam in the seventh century AD, at which point it is still not a tribal reference, but a combination of geographic, linguistic and religious identity. Modern Muslims are not descended from Ishmael, nor do they share common biological descent from Muhammad. Moreover, even the prophet of Islam himself did not claim descent from Ishmael. We have no record of what became of the Ishmaelites after the time of David and have no basis for seeing their survival in any known group in the later OT period, and certainly not today.

25:22 *inquire of the LORD.* At times this phrase can refer to dependence upon the Lord rather than on other entities for aid (e.g., gods, foreign nations, as in Isa 31:1; Jer 10:21). At other times it refers to the formal act of asking for an oracle from Yahweh through an official prophet (e.g., 1Ki 22:8; 2Ki 22:13,18). The latter must be the preferred option here because the result of her inquiry is an oracle (v. 23). Usually an oracle is delivered by a prophet or priest, and in the ancient world at large is mediated by a diviner. The statement that “she went” suggests travel to

a sanctuary, though if she visited a prophet, they are not always associated with a sanctuary. Whatever the source of the oracle, this statement features the same laconic silence about the details as Laban’s divination (30:27) and the role of the household gods (31:34). All of these derive from Laban’s family and indicate the continuation of standard ancient Near Eastern religious practices that are preserved by that side of the family. Yet Yahweh showed some level of tolerance for the slow progress and here was willing to communicate through whatever specialist Rebekah consulted. During the time of Moses, God likewise communicated through the foreign prophet Balaam.

25:29 *Jacob was cooking some stew.* In a large household such as Isaac’s, one would expect servants to do such work. Most likely this exchange takes place at a shepherd camp, where Jacob has traveled to graze the flocks (cf. 37:2,12–17). We need not picture Jacob out on his own camping or at home doing kitchen detail. Most realistic is a setting in which Jacob is in charge of a group of herders at a grazing site. When Esau stumbles into the camp, there may have been many servants and hired help around, but Jacob is the one who sees the opportunity and takes charge.

25:32 *I am about to die.* Esau is a skilled hunter (v. 27). Is he truly on the brink of starvation, or is he simply using careless hyperbole? The Hebrew word translated “die” can be used either to describe being famished or experiencing life-endangering hunger. Giving Esau the benefit of the doubt, we may accept that he believes that hunger threatens his life. Nevertheless, the original reading audience would react to Esau’s blunt statement with horror, regardless of how extreme his circumstances.



INHERITANCE RIGHTS AND BIRTHRIGHTS

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

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

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

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

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

some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright.

Isaac and Abimelek

26:1-11Ref — Ge 12:10-20; 20:1-18

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

⁷When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,ⁿ” because he was afraid to say, “She is my wife.” He thought, “The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful.”

⁸When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelek king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. ⁹So Abimelek summoned Isaac and said, “She is really your wife! Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’?”

Isaac answered him, “Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her.”

¹⁰Then Abimelek said, “What is this you have done to us?^o One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.”

¹¹So Abimelek gave orders to all the people: “Anyone who harms^p this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

¹²Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, be-

26:1 ^dGe 12:10
^eGe 20:1
26:2 ^fGe 12:7;
17:1; 18:1
^gGe 12:1
26:3 ^hGe 20:1;
28:15 ⁱGe 12:2;
22:16-18
^jGe 12:7; 13:15;
15:18
26:4 ^kGe 15:5;
22:17; Ex 32:13
^lGe 12:3; 22:18;
Gal 3:8
26:5 ^mGe 22:16
26:7 ⁿGe 12:13;
20:2, 12;
Pr 29:25
26:10 ^oGe 20:9
26:11
^pPs 105:15

26:12 ^qver 3;
Job 42:12
26:13 ^rPr 10:22
26:14
^sGe 24:36
^tGe 37:11
26:15
^uGe 21:30
^vGe 21:25
26:16 ^wEx 1:9
26:18
^xGe 21:30
26:20
^yGe 21:25
26:22 ^zGe 17:6;
Ex 1:7
26:24
^aGe 24:12;
Ex 3:6; ^bGe 15:1
^cver 4 ^dGe 17:7
26:25 ^eGe 12:7;
8; 13:4, 18;
Ps 116:17
26:26
^fGe 21:22

cause the LORD blessed him.^q ¹³The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy.^r ¹⁴He had so many flocks and herds and servants^s that the Philistines envied him.^t ¹⁵So all the wells^u that his father’s servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up,^v filling them with earth.

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

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

¹⁹Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. ²⁰But the herders of Gerar quarreled with those of Isaac and said, “The water is ours!”^y So he named the well Esek,^c because they disputed with him. ²¹Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah.^d ²²He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth,^e saying, “Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish^z in the land.”

²³From there he went up to Beersheba. ²⁴That night the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham.^a Do not be afraid,^b for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants^c for the sake of my servant Abraham.”^d

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

²⁶Meanwhile, Abimelek had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces.^f ²⁷Isaac asked them, “Why

^a 4 Or *seed* ^b 4 Or *and all nations on earth will use the name of your offspring in blessings* (see 48:20)
^c 20 Esek means *dispute*. ^d 21 Sitnah means *opposition*. ^e 22 Rehoboth means *room*.

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

26:7–11 Although similar to the incidents in 12:10–20; 20:1–18, the differences between those passages and this one is how the scene unfolds. Isaac’s rationale for the ruse is the same as Abraham’s, but Rebekah is not actually taken by the ruler as Sarah had been on both occasions. Discovery of the ruse does not occur through divine

revelation or because of plagues, but through a chance glimpse of Isaac’s intimate interaction with Rebekah. We can note, therefore, a decreasing danger in the three accounts. Pharaoh actually took Sarah into his palace (12:15), which probably implies that he had relations with her. Abimelek sent for Sarah but did not have relations with her (20:2,4). In the case of Rebekah, Abimelek never even sent for her. Also, as a result of the incident, Pharaoh sends Abraham away (12:20); Abimelek gives gifts and freedom in the land to Abraham (20:14–16); and Abimelek gives protection to Isaac (26:11).

have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?⁹”

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

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

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

Jacob Takes Esau’s Blessing

³⁴When Esau was forty years old,^m he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite.ⁿ ³⁵They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.^o

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see,^p he called for Esau his older son^q and said to him, “My son.”

“Here I am,” he answered.

²Isaac said, “I am now an old man and don’t know the day of my death.^r ³Now then, get your equipment—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country^s to hunt some wild game for me. ⁴Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing^t before I die.”

⁵Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, ⁶Rebekah said to her son Jacob,^u

26:27 ^gver 16
26:28
^hGe 21:22
26:29
ⁱGe 24:31;
^jPs 115:15
26:30 ^jGe 19:3
26:31
^kGe 21:31
26:33 ^jGe 21:14
26:34
^mGe 25:20
ⁿGe 28:9; 36:2
26:35
^oGe 27:46
27:1 ^pGe 48:10;
^q1Sa 3:2
^rGe 25:25
27:2 ^rGe 47:29
27:3 ^sGe 25:27
27:4 ^{ver 10,}
^{25, 31;}
^tGe 49:28;
^uDt 33:1;
^vHeb 11:20
27:6 ^uGe 25:28

27:8 ^vver 13, 43
27:11
^wGe 25:25
27:12 ^xver 22
27:13
^yMt 27:25
^zver 8
27:15 ^aver 27
27:19 ^bver 4
27:20
^cGe 24:12

“Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, ⁷‘Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.’ ⁸Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: ⁹Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. ¹⁰Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies.”

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

¹³His mother said to him, “My son, let the curse fall on me.^y Just do what I say;^z go and get them for me.”

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

¹⁸He went to his father and said, “My father.”

“Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?”

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

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

“The LORD your God gave me success,^c” he replied.

^a 33 Shibah can mean oath or seven. ^b 33 Beersheba can mean well of the oath and well of seven.

27:4 *give you my blessing.* This blessing is one that transfers the leadership of the clan to the next generation. If the inheritance remained undivided for some time (which was common), the privileged son (usually the firstborn) was designated the administrator of the estate. The administrator had significant control of the estate. His roles included presiding at sacrificial meals celebrated by the family, supervising burials and funerary rites, and serving as guardian-redeemer. Jacob (and Rebekah on his behalf) would desire this because it was also in the administrator’s hands to approve the timing for the division of the inheritance. If Esau were the administrator, he could presumably delay the division indefinitely and thus deprive Jacob of the advantage of the double share of the inheritance. The blessing also served as a proclamation of the destiny of the sons. It was not accorded the same status as a prophecy from God (note Isaac’s use of the first person in v. 37: “I have made him”), but it still was an exercise of authority

believed to be binding through the very speaking of the words. This is why Isaac could not take it back even though it became clear that he had been tricked. It was clearly a celebratory occasion since Isaac asks for the preparation of a special meal, but as such it is odd that the whole household was not asked to be present, both as co-celebrants and as witnesses to the legal transaction. It is not hard to imagine, however, that when political issues of favoritism are involved, there is an inclination to be secretive.

27:11 – 13 Rebekah responded to Jacob’s fear of a curse by appropriating any curse that may have resulted onto herself. Can she do that? Blessings are nontransferable, so curses would be the same. In this case, Rebekah was likely referring to the consequence of the curse rather than the curse itself. Since deity was the enforcer of the curse, she was acknowledging that she has forced Jacob to deceive his father and ensured that the deity will target her instead.

²¹Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you,^d my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.”

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

“I am,” he replied.

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

Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank.

²⁶Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come here, my son, and kiss me.”

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

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

²⁸May God give you heaven’s dew^j and earth’s richness^k— an abundance of grain and new wine.^l

²⁹May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you.^m Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.ⁿ

May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.^o”

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

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

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

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

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

27:21 ^dver 12
27:23 ^ever 16
27:25 ^fver 4
27:27
^gHeb 11:20
^h55 4:11
ⁱPs 65:9-13
27:28 ^jDt 33:13
^kver 39
^lGe 45:18;
Nu 18:12;
Dt 33:28
27:29
^mIsa 45:14,
23; 49:7,23
ⁿGe 9:25;
25:23; 37:7
^oGe 12:3;
Nu 24:9;
Zep 2:8
27:31 ^pver 4
27:32 ^qver 18
27:33 ^rver 29;
Ge 28:3, 4;
Ro 11:29
27:34
^sHeb 12:17

27:35 ^tJer 9:4;
12:6
27:36
^uGe 25:26
^vGe 25:33
27:37 ^wver 28
27:38
^xHeb 12:17
27:39 ^yver 28
27:40
^z2Sa 8:14
^aGe 25:23
^b2Ki 8:20-22
27:41 ^cGe 37:4
^dGe 32:11
^eGe 50:4, 10
^fOb 1:10
27:43 ^gver 8
^hGe 24:29
ⁱGe 11:31
27:44
^jGe 31:38, 41
27:45 ^kver 35
27:46
^lGe 26:35
28:1 ^mGe 24:3
28:2 ⁿGe 25:20

³⁵But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully^t and took your blessing.”

³⁶Esau said, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob^a?^u This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: He took my birthright,^v and now he’s taken my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?”

³⁷Isaac answered Esau, “I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine.^w So what can I possibly do for you, my son?”

³⁸Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud.^x

³⁹His father Isaac answered him,

“Your dwelling will be away from the earth’s richness, away from the dew^y of heaven above. ⁴⁰You will live by the sword and you will serve^z your brother.^a But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck.^b”

⁴¹Esau held a grudge^c against Jacob^d because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, “The days of mourning^e for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”^f

⁴²When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, “Your brother Esau is planning to avenge himself by killing you. ⁴³Now then, my son, do what I say:^g Flee at once to my brother Laban^h in Harran.ⁱ ⁴⁴Stay with him for a while^j until your brother’s fury subsides. ⁴⁵When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him,^k I’ll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?”

⁴⁶Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I’m disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living.”^l

28 So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him. Then he commanded him: “Do not marry a Canaanite woman.^m ²Go at once to Paddan Aram,^b to the house of your mother’s father Bethuel.ⁿ Take a wife for yourself there, from among

^a 36 Jacob means *he grasps the heel*, a Hebrew idiom for *he takes advantage of or he deceives*. ^b 2 That is, Northwest Mesopotamia; also in verses 5, 6 and 7

28:2 Go ... Take a wife ... from among the daughters of ... your mother’s brother. Just as Abraham insisted that Isaac marry someone from outside the land (24:2–4), Isaac expresses the same desire for Jacob. In addition to

echoing the past generation, this served as a tacit condemnation of Esau’s marriage (26:34–35). Why was Isaac prohibited from leaving the land, yet Jacob was encouraged to do so? The difference lies in the fact that if Isaac

the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. ³May God Almighty^{ao} bless you and make you fruitful^p and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. ⁴May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham,^q so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner,^r the land God gave to Abraham." ⁵Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram,^s to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah,^t who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

⁶Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman,"^u ⁷and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. ⁸Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women^v were to his father Isaac;^w ⁹so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth^x and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had.^y

Jacob's Dream at Bethel

¹⁰Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran.^z ¹¹When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. ¹²He had a dream^a in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.^b ¹³There above it^b

28:3 ^oGe 17:1
^pGe 17:6
28:4 ^qGe 12:2,
³^rGe 17:8
28:5
^sHos 12:12
^tGe 24:29
28:6 ^uver 1
28:8 ^vGe 24:3
^wGe 26:35
28:9 ^xGe 25:13
^yGe 26:34
28:10
^zGe 11:31
28:12 ^aGe 20:3
^bJn 1:51

28:13 ^cGe 12:7;
35:7, 9; 48:3
^dGe 26:24
^eGe 13:15;
35:12
28:14 ^fGe 26:4
^gGe 13:14
^hGe 12:3; 18:18;
22:18; Gal 3:8
28:15 ⁱGe 26:3;
48:21 ^jNu 6:24;
^kDt 12:5, 7-8
^lNu 23:19
28:17 ^mEx 3:5;
Jos 5:15
28:18
ⁿGe 35:14
^oLev 8:11
28:19
^pJdg 1:23, 26
28:20
^qGe 31:13;
^rJdg 11:30;
^s2Sa 15:8
^tver 15
28:21
^uJdg 11:31
^vDt 26:17
28:22 ^wGe 35:7;
^x14^vGe 14:20;
^yLev 27:30

stood the LORD,^c and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.^d I will give you and your descendants the land^e on which you are lying. ¹⁴Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you^f will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south.^g All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.^h ¹⁵I am with youⁱ and will watch over you^j wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you^k until I have done what I have promised you."^l

¹⁶When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." ¹⁷He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place!^m This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

¹⁸Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillarⁿ and poured oil on top of it.^o ¹⁹He called that place Bethel,^d though the city used to be called Luz.^p

²⁰Then Jacob made a vow,^q saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me^r on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear ²¹so that I return safely^s to my father's household, then the LORD^e will be my God^t ²²and^f this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house,^u and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."^v

^a 3 Hebrew *El-Shaddai* ^b 13 Or *There beside him*
^c 14 Or *will use your name and the name of your offspring in blessings* (see 48:20) ^d 19 *Bethel means house of God.* ^e 20, 21 Or *Since God . . . father's household, the LORD* ^f 21, 22 Or *household, and the LORD will be my God, 22 then*

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

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

as a commemoration of the covenant agreement and Jacob's response in a vow.

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

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

GENESIS 28:10 – 22



STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

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

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

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

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

We should not imagine that the angels Jacob saw were marching in procession down and up the stairway as often pictured in art. Rather he saw messengers (= angels) going off on missions and returning from delivering their messages. ♦

Jacob Arrives in Paddan Aram

29 Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples.^w ²There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. ³When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.

29:1 ^wJdg 6:3, 33

29:4 ^xGe 28:10

⁴Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?"

"We're from Haran,^x" they replied.

⁵He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?"

"Yes, we know him," they answered.

⁶Then Jacob asked them, "Is he well?"

"Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."

⁷"Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture."

⁸"We can't," they replied, "until all the

29:8 *We can't . . . until all the flocks are gathered . . . Then we will water the sheep.* Herding contracts in the ancient world were critical to assure the fair distribution of resources that

were the foundation for survival. Grazing land and water were often in limited supply. Legal agreements existed between herdsmen and the livestock owners whose

flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep.”

⁹While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep,^y for she was a shepherd. ¹⁰When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban’s sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle’s sheep.^z ¹¹Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud.^a ¹²He had told Rachel that he was a relative^b of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father.^c

¹³As soon as Laban^d heard the news about Jacob, his sister’s son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. ¹⁴Then Laban said to him, “You are my own flesh and blood.”^e

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, ¹⁵Laban said to him, “Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.”

¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters; the

29:9 ^yEx 2:16
29:10 ^zEx 2:17
29:11 ^aGe 33:4
29:12
^bGe 13:8; 14:14,
¹⁶c Ge 24:28
29:13
^dGe 24:29
29:14 ^eGe 2:23;
 Jdg 9:2;
 2Sa 19:12-13

29:18
^fHos 12:12
29:20 ^g5S 8:7;
 Hos 12:12
29:21
^hJdg 15:1
29:22
ⁱJdg 14:10;
 Jn 2:1-2
29:25
^jGe 12:18
^kGe 27:36

name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷Leah had weak^a eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. ¹⁸Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, “I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.”^f

¹⁹Laban said, “It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.” ²⁰So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.^g

²¹Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her.”^h

²²So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast.ⁱ ²³But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. ²⁴And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.

²⁵When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me?^j I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?^k”

²⁶Laban replied, “It is not our custom

^a 17 Or *delicate*

animals they cared for since they all shared responsibility for the welfare of the herds and flocks. Legal agreements also presumably existed among livestock owners who shared resources. The latter sort of contract is not well represented in the extant literature, and it is that sort that is probably the basis for this scene at the well, though there may have been more of an informal agreement here. Herdsmen typically operated outside of urban areas, but often in symbiosis with the sedentary population. It is not unusual to find groups that are part-time farmers and part-time herdsman. In this passage the herds are being kept in close proximity to the settlement. These groups are not nomadic in lifestyle, but do their herding in an orbit around the settled areas.

29:14 *You are my own flesh and blood.* This initial statement by Laban shows some similarity to terminology used in adoption literature. It is possible that Laban is proposing taking Jacob into partnership, which suggests that Jacob will have some prospects for inheritance. A month later, however, Laban acts as if no such deal has ever been made—or he legally repudiates the arrangement, which he can do (see v. 15 and note).

29:15 *Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing?* In this proposal the entire relationship is restructured (see note on v. 14) in that Jacob is considered as doing “work-for-hire” as an employee rather than enjoying a share in the property as a family partner.

29:18 *seven years.* The groom and his family traditionally provided a contribution to the bride wealth often referred to as the bride price (see the article “Marriage Contracts,” p. 59). Jacob has brought no wealth with him (the inheritance he will eventually gain as heir to Isaac has not yet been divided), so the agreement is reached that his seven years’ labor will serve in lieu of a bride price. Since bride prices averaged around 30 to 40 shekels of silver in the mid-second millennium BC Nuzi, and since Jacob’s work

would normally pay about a shekel per month, the substitution of seven years of Jacob’s labor for the bride price results in about twice the normal going rate for brides. Perhaps Laban can take advantage of Jacob because Jacob, being penniless and moonstruck, is in a poor bargaining position.

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

29:26 *It is not our custom.* The Code of Hammurapi (section 160) stipulates a penalty for failing to deliver the bride for whom the bride-price has been received. The very existence of the law indicates that this breach sometimes occurred, though there it specifies that the woman had been given to another man. Laban deflects any accusation of breach of contract by claiming custom as support for his action. Little evidence can substantiate Laban’s claim of custom on the basis of ancient Near Eastern documents.

here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. ²⁷Finish this daughter's bridal week;^l then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."

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

Jacob's Children

³¹When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved,^q he enabled her to conceive,^r but Rachel remained childless. ³²Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben,^a for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery.^s Surely my husband will love me now."

³³She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon.^{bt}

³⁴Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me,^u because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi.^{cv}

³⁵She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him Judah.^{d^w} Then she stopped having children.

30 When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children,^x she became jealous of her sister.^y So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

²Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?"^z

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

⁴So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife.^b Jacob slept with her,^c ⁵and she became pregnant and bore him a son. ⁶Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me;^d he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan.^{ee}

29:27 ^lJdg 14:12
29:29 ^mGe 30:3
ⁿGe 16:1
29:30 ^over 16
^pGe 31:41
29:31 ^qDt 21:15-17
^rGe 11:30; 30:1;
^sPs 127:3
29:32 ^tGe 16:11;
^u31:42; Ex 4:31;
^vDt 26:7;
^wPs 25:18
29:33 ^xGe 34:25; 49:5
29:34 ^yGe 30:20;
^z1Sa 1:2-4
^{aa}Ge 49:5-7
29:35 ^{ab}Ge 49:8;
^{ac}Mt 1:2-3
30:1 ^{ad}Ge 29:31;
^{ae}1Sa 1:5-6
^{af}Lev 18:18
30:2 ^{ag}Ge 16:2;
^{ah}20:18; 29:31
30:3 ^{ai}Ge 16:2
30:4 ^{aj}ver 9, 18
^{ak}Ge 16:3-4
30:6 ^{al}Ps 35:24;
^{am}43:1; La 3:59
^{an}Ge 49:16-17

30:8 ^{ao}Hos 12:3-4
^{ap}Ge 49:21
30:9 ^{aq}ver 4
30:11 ^{ar}Ge 49:19
30:13 ^{as}Ps 127:3
^{at}Pr 31:28;
^{au}Lk 1:48
^{av}Ge 49:20
30:14 ^{aw}SS 7:13
30:15 ^{ax}Nu 16:9, 13
30:17 ^{ay}Ge 25:21
30:18 ^{az}Ge 49:14
30:20 ^{ba}Ge 35:23;
^{bb}49:13; Mt 4:13
30:22 ^{bc}Ge 8:1;
^{bd}1Sa 1:19-20
^{be}Ge 29:31

⁷Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won."^f So she named him Naphtali.^{fg}

⁹When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.^h

¹⁰Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹Then Leah said, "What good fortune!"^g So she named him Gad.^{hi}

¹²Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me^j happy."^k So she named him Asher.^{il}

¹⁴During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants,^m which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

¹⁵But she said to her, "Wasn't it enoughⁿ that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?"

"Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes."

¹⁶So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night.

¹⁷God listened to Leah,^o and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband." So she named him Issachar.^{jp}

¹⁹Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun.^{ka}

²¹Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

²²Then God remembered Rachel;^r he listened to her and enabled her to conceive.^s

^a 32 Reuben sounds like the Hebrew for *he has seen my misery*; the name means *see, a son*. ^b 33 Simeon probably means *one who hears*. ^c 34 Levi sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for *attached*. ^d 35 Judah sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for *praise*. ^e 6 Dan here means *he has vindicated*. ^f 8 Naphtali means *my struggle*. ^g 11 Or "A troop is coming!" ^h 11 Gad can mean *good fortune* or *a troop*. ⁱ 13 Asher means *happy*. ^j 18 Issachar sounds like the Hebrew for *reward*. ^k 20 Zebulun probably means *honor*.

30:14 *mandrake plants.* The usual identification of this plant is *Mandragora*, frequently believed in the ancient and classical world to possess magical properties, primarily as an aphrodisiac (see SS 7:13) with the power to make a barren woman conceive. In Egypt it appears to be the aroma that had the erotic powers. Modern study has confirmed that the fruit is a sedative, narcotic and purga-

tive. Unusual characteristics include that the shape of the roots is often reminiscent of the human form and that the plant shines in the dark. Yet there remains some question whether the identification with the fruit in this passage as *Mandragora* is correct since that plant is not known to grow in Mesopotamia.

²³She became pregnant and gave birth to a son^t and said, “God has taken away my disgrace.”^u ²⁴She named him Joseph,^{av} and said, “May the LORD add to me another son.”^w

Jacob’s Flocks Increase

²⁵After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me on my way^x so I can go back to my own homeland. ²⁶Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you,^y and I will be on my way. You know how much work I’ve done for you.”

²⁷But Laban said to him, “If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you.”^z ²⁸He added, “Name your wages,^a and I will pay them.”

²⁹Jacob said to him, “You know how I have worked for you^b and how your livestock has fared under my care.^c ³⁰The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?^d”

³¹“What shall I give you?” he asked.

“Don’t give me anything,” Jacob replied. “But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: ³²Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat.^e They will be my wages. ³³And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or

30:23 ^tver 6
^uIsa 4:1; Lk 1:25
30:24
^vGe 35:24; 37:2;
39:1; 49:22-26
^wGe 35:17
30:25
^xGe 24:54
30:26
^yGe 29:20, 30;
Hos 12:12
30:27
^zGe 26:24;
39:3, 5
30:28
^aGe 29:15
30:29 ^bGe 31:6
^cGe 31:38-40
30:30 ^d1Ti 5:8
30:32
^eGe 31:8, 12

any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen.”

³⁴“Agreed,” said Laban. “Let it be as you have said.” ³⁵That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons.^f ³⁶Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban’s flocks.

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

30:35 ^fGe 31:1

^a 24 Joseph means may he add.

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

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

30:32 *They will be my wages.* Shepherds’ wages in the ancient Near East were usually the by-products of the herd (mostly a percentage of the wool and milk). Sometimes the shepherd would also get to keep a percentage of the new births. The percentage is not often stated in the texts, but one text from Ischali indicates that the shepherd was allowed to keep 20 percent. Rather than using a percentage, Jacob requests that his share be those that are marked in their coloring. The Awassi fat-tailed sheep was most common in the region and was usually white. Goats were typically black. Deviations from these norms were relatively uncommon and would certainly have been less than 20 percent in normal circumstances.

30:38 *placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs.* In vv. 41–42 Jacob shows some knowledge of breeding by favoring the stronger animals. The principle of “like breeds like” is common in pastoral societies worldwide. But his use of the visual aids in the water troughs indicates, unsurprisingly, that he also is bound to the superstitions of the day. No evidences have yet been found in the ancient Near East of the procedure used by Jacob, or of similar ones, based on the premise that what the animal sees will influence the lambs.

came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.⁹

Jacob Flees From Laban

31 Jacob heard that Laban’s sons were saying, “Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father.”² And Jacob noticed that Laban’s attitude toward him was not what it had been.

³Then the LORD said to Jacob, “Go back^h to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.”ⁱ

⁴So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. ⁵He said to them, “I see that your father’s attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me.^j ⁶You know that I’ve worked for your father with all my strength,^k ⁷yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times.^l However, God has not allowed him to harm me.^m ⁸If he said, ‘The speckled ones will be your wages,’ then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, ‘The streaked ones will be your wages,’ⁿ then all the flocks bore streaked young. ⁹So God has taken away your father’s livestock and has given them to me.^o

¹⁰“In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. ¹¹The angel of God^p said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob.’ I answered, ‘Here I am.’ ¹²And he

30:43 ⁹ver 30; Ge 12:16; 13:2; 24:35; 26:13-14
31:3 ^hver 13; Ge 32:9
ⁱGe 21:22; 26:3; 28:15
31:5 ^jGe 21:22; 26:3
31:6 ^kGe 30:29
31:7 ^lver 41; Job 19:3
^mver 52; Ps 37:28; 105:14
31:8 ⁿGe 30:32
31:9 ^over 1, 16; Ge 30:42
31:11 ^pGe 16:7; 48:16

31:12 ^qEx 3:7
31:13
^rGe 28:10-22
^sver 3; Ge 32:9
31:15
^tGe 29:20
31:18
^uGe 35:27
^vGe 10:19
31:19 ^wver 30, 32, 34-35; Ge 35:2; Jdg 17:5; 15a 19:13; Hos 3:4
31:20
^xGe 27:36
^yver 27
31:21
^zGe 37:25

said, ‘Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.’^q ¹³I am the God of Bethel,^r where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.^{s,t}”

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

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

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

Laban Pursues Jacob

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

^a 18 That is, Northwest Mesopotamia

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

31:23 *pursued Jacob for seven days.* The site of Mizpah (where Laban caught up to Jacob) is not known, but from Harran to the northern end of the hill country of Gilead is approximately 350 miles (565 kilometers). To reach there in ten days (a three-day head start plus seven days for Laban’s travel, vv. 22–23), Jacob must travel 35 miles (55 kilometers) a day, an incredible rate; caravans usually managed 23 miles (37 kilometers) at most. Sheep and goats could neither achieve nor maintain that pace (see 33:13), and women and children would likewise slow down the speed of travel. Given the circumstances, Jacob could not expect to make more than ten miles (16 kilometers) per day. This has led even conservative commentators to suspect that we are reading something wrong. Whenever the Biblical text refers to a journey

(Hebrew *derek*) of a particular number of days, the number is one, three or seven, suggesting the possibility that the expression is idiomatic rather than precise. Yet that does not solve all the problems, because if Jacob travels at a rate of only ten miles (16 kilometers) per day, one would expect Laban to catch him long before he arrives at the hill country of Gilead. Laban can perhaps travel 20 miles (32 kilometers) per day, in which case he could have caught Jacob after only three days, about 65 miles (100 kilometers) from Harran, soon after he crossed the Euphrates at Til-Barsib. Certainly the results will be different if one assumes that Jacob is traveling faster or Laban slower, but the numbers we have used (10 and 20 miles [16 kilometers and 32 kilometers], respectively) are the most defensible. If Jacob is traveling 12 or 13 miles (20 or 21 kilometers) per day, and Laban is traveling 17 miles (27 kilometers), Laban would catch Jacob after about seven days (as the text seems to suggest), but they would only be about 110 miles (175 kilometers) from Harran. That would put them somewhere near Ebla, still only one-third of the way to the hill country of Gilead. The only conceivable solution at the moment that explains Laban’s not catching up to Jacob before the hill country of Gilead is to assume that it takes Laban a week or ten days to prepare for the trip before he can set out and that he cannot travel very fast (after all, he is over 150 years old at this point).



HOUSEHOLD GODS

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

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

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



**Protective figurine, Iraq,
900–612 BC.**

Kim Walton. The Oriental Institute Museum,
University of Chicago.

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

²⁵Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. ²⁶Then Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done? You’ve deceived me,^c and you’ve carried off my daughters like captives in war.^d ²⁷Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn’t you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of timbrels^e and harps?^f ²⁸You didn’t even let me

31:24 ^aGe 20:3;

Job 33:15

^bGe 24:50

31:26

^cGe 27:36

^d1Sa 30:2-3

31:27

^eEx 15:20

^fGe 4:21

31:28 ^gver 55

31:29 ^hver 7

ⁱver 53

31:30 ^jver 19;

Jdg 18:24

31:32 ^kGe 44:9

kiss my grandchildren and my daughters goodbye.⁹ You have done a foolish thing. ²⁹I have the power to harm you;^h but last night the God of your fatherⁱ said to me, ‘Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.’ ³⁰Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father’s household. But why did you steal my gods?^j”

³¹Jacob answered Laban, “I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. ³²But if you find anyone who has your gods, that person shall not live.^k In the presence

of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it.” Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

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

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

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

³⁸“I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. ³⁹I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night.^o

⁴⁰This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. ⁴¹It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters^p and six years for your flocks, and you changed my

31:34 ^lver 37; Ge 44:12
31:35 ^mEx 20:12; Lev 19:3, 32
31:37 ⁿver 23
31:39 ^oEx 22:13
31:41 ^pGe 29:30

^qver 7
31:42 ^rver 5; Ex 3:15; 1Ch 12:17
^sver 53; Isa 8:13
^tPs 124:1-2
^uGe 29:32
31:44 ^vGe 21:27; 26:28
^wJos 24:27
31:45 ^xGe 28:18
31:49 ^yJdg 11:29; 1Sa 7:5-6
31:50 ^zJer 29:23; 42:5
31:51 ^aGe 28:18
31:52 ^bGe 21:30
^cver 7; Ge 26:29

wages ten times.^q ⁴²If the God of my father,^r the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac,^s had not been with me,^t you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands,^u and last night he rebuked you.”

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

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

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

⁵¹Laban also said to Jacob, “Here is this heap, and here is this pillar^a I have set up between you and me. ⁵²This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness,^b that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me.^c

^a 47 The Aramaic *Jegar Sahadutha* and the Hebrew *Galeed* both mean *witness heap*. ^b 49 *Mizpah* means *watchtower*.

31:35 *having my period.* In the ancient world menstruation was a mysterious thing. Blood was often connected to impurity, and since impurity was contagious, menstruating women were typically isolated, and there was some reluctance to touch them or even be near them. In some cultures, the monthly bleeding made one vulnerable to demonic attack — she was considered a woman under taboo (see note on 18:9). Any of these aspects of belief would have made Laban reticent to search Rachel’s tent too carefully.

31:48 *This heap is a witness.* In v. 45 Jacob responds to the suggestion of a covenant by setting up a pillar, after which a heap of stones is gathered. The agreement is then marked ceremonially by a communal meal and the formal proclamation of stipulations and an oath. The pillar (see note on 28:18) serves two purposes here: to commemorate the covenant and to mark a territorial boundary (vv. 52–53). Jacob’s obligation concerns the treatment of his wives, Laban’s daughters. He agrees not to take other wives (v. 50), an act that would potentially lower the status of Leah and Rachel in Jacob’s family. This sort of clause is also found in marriage contracts from the town of Nuzi in the mid-second millennium. There it appears that mar-

riage contracts were typically drawn up only when there were unusual circumstances that called for a document to protect the rights of the groom, the legal status of the wife, or the property rights of children.

31:49 *May the LORD keep watch.* It is not unusual today to hear this intoned by a minister as the benediction to the congregation at the end of a service or even to find it inscribed on wedding rings. In using it this way, we show our misunderstanding of the words. Here in Genesis they express suspicion. Laban does not trust Jacob, and Jacob does not trust Laban. They both regret that they will have no means to keep an eye on one another and prevent mischief-making, so they commend one another to the watchful eye of deity. A paraphrase is “I don’t trust you out of my sight, but since I can no longer personally hold you accountable, may God do so.” It is hardly a sentiment that one would want on a wedding ring, and although a minister may feel that way about a congregation, it is not in good taste to express it so unequivocally.

31:50 *take any wives besides my daughters.* Jacob’s taking of other wives would potentially lower the status of Leah and Rachel in Jacob’s family. Hence he promises their father (in v. 53) that he will not do so.

⁵³May the God of Abraham^d and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.”^e

So Jacob took an oath^f in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac.⁹ ⁵⁴He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there.

⁵⁵Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters^h and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.^{ai}

Jacob Prepares to Meet Esau

32^b Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God^j met him. ²When Jacob saw them, he said, “This is the camp of God!”^k So he named that place Mahanaim.^l

³Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau^m in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.ⁿ ⁴He instructed them: “This is what you are to say to my lord Esau: ‘Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have re-

31:53
^dGe 28:13
^eGe 16:5
^fGe 21:23,27
⁹ver 42
31:55 ^hver 28
ⁱGe 18:33;
 30:25
32:1 ^jGe 16:11;
 2Ki 6:16-17;
 Ps 34:7; 91:11;
 Heb 1:14
32:2 ^kGe 28:17
^l2Sa 2:8,29
32:3
^mGe 27:41-42
ⁿGe 25:30;
 36:8,9

32:5 ^oGe 12:16;
 30:43 ^pGe 33:8,
 10,15
32:6 ^qGe 33:1
32:7 ^rver 11
32:9 ^sGe 28:13;
 31:42 ^tGe 31:13
32:10
^uGe 24:27

mained there till now. ⁵¹I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants.^o Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.^p”

⁶When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”^q

⁷In great fear^r and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups,^d and the flocks and herds and camels as well. ⁸He thought, “If Esau comes and attacks one group,^e the group^e that is left may escape.”

⁹Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac,^s LORD, you who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper;’^t ¹⁰I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness^u you

^a 55 In Hebrew texts this verse (31:55) is numbered 32:1. ^b In Hebrew texts 32:1-32 is numbered 32:2-33. ^c 2 Mahanaim means two camps. ^d 7 Or camps ^e 8 Or camp



- 1** The Euphrates-Balikh River basin was Jacob's destination as he fled from Esau, ultimately reaching the home of his maternal uncle (Laban) near Haran.
- 2** Jacob's lengthy sojourn ended in a dispute with Laban and another flight—this time back to Canaan. His route likely took him toward Aleppo, then to Damascus and Edrei before reaching Peniel on the Jabbok River.
- 3** He and his dependents reached the hill country of Gilead before their caravan was overtaken by Laban. The covenant at Mizpah was celebrated on one of the hills later used as a border station between Aramean and Israelite territories.
- 4** Jacob lingered at Succoth, entered Canaan and proceeded to Shechem, where he erected an altar to the Lord.

have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. ¹¹Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me,^v and also the mothers with their children.^w ¹²But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand^x of the sea, which cannot be counted.’^y”

¹³He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift^z for his brother Esau: ¹⁴two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, “Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds.”

¹⁷He instructed the one in the lead: “When my brother Esau meets you and asks, ‘Who do you belong to, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?’ ¹⁸then you are to say, ‘They belong to your servant^a Jacob.

32:11 ^vPs 59:2
^wGe 27:41
32:12
^xGe 22:17
^yGe 28:13-15;
Hos 1:10;
Ro 9:27
32:13
^zGe 43:11, 15,
25, 26; Pr 18:16
32:18 ^aGe 18:3

32:20
^bGe 33:10;
Pr 21:14
32:22 ^cDt 2:37;
3:16; Jos 12:2
32:24 ^dGe 18:2
32:25 ^ever 32

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

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

Jacob Wrestles With God

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

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

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

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

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

The king (answers), “Come back!”

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

The king (says) as follows, “I shall (strive to) prevail over you.”

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

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

Clearly, there is no actual combat here. Common features include only that the human being detains the deity, conveys his intention to prevail, and requests a blessing. The most important common motif to be rec-

ognized here is in the human risk in initiating a confrontation (though it never becomes physical) with a divine representative in order to gain audience and receive a blessing. Jacob and the Hittite king were both pursuing the same sort of goal. The Hittite text has been identified as a rite designed to ensure that the gods give powers to the king.

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

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

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”^f

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

“Jacob,” he answered.

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

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

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

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

³¹The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel,^c and he was limping because of his hip. ³²Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob’s hip was touched near the tendon.

Jacob Meets Esau

33 Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men;^l so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants. ²He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. ³He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground^m seven times as he approached his brother.

⁴But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.ⁿ ⁵Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. “Who are these with you?” he asked.

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

⁶Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down. ⁷Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.

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

32:26
^fHos 12:4
32:28
^gGe 17:5; 35:10;
 1Ki 18:31
32:29
^hJdg 13:17
ⁱJdg 13:18
^jGe 35:9
32:30
^kGe 16:13;
 Ex 24:11;
 Nu 12:8;
 Jdg 6:22; 13:22
33:1 ^{Ge 32:6}
33:3 ^mGe 18:2;
 42:6
33:4
ⁿGe 45:14-15
33:5 ^pGe 48:9;
 Ps 127:3;
 Isa 8:18
33:8
^pGe 32:14-16

^qGe 24:9; 32:5
33:10
^rGe 16:13;
^sGe 32:20
33:11
^t1Sa 25:27
^uGe 30:43
33:14 ^vGe 32:3
33:15
^wGe 34:11;
 47:25; Ru 2:13
33:17
^xJos 13:27;
 Jdg 8:5, 6, 8, 14-16; Ps 60:6
33:18
^yGe 25:20;
 28:2-2; Jos 24:1;
 Jdg 9:1
33:19
^aJos 24:32
^bJn 4:5

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

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

¹⁰“No, please!” said Jacob. “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God,^r now that you have received me favorably.^s ¹¹Please accept the present^t that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me^u and I have all I need.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

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

¹³But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. ¹⁴So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the flocks and herds before me and the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.^v”

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

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

¹⁶So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. ¹⁷Jacob, however, went to Sukkoth,^x where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Sukkoth.^d

¹⁸After Jacob came from Paddan Aram,^{ey} he arrived safely at the city of Shechem^z in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. ¹⁹For a hundred pieces of silver,^f he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem,^a the plot of ground^b where he pitched his tent. ²⁰There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel.^g

^a 28 *Israel* probably means *he struggles with God*.
^b 30 *Peniel* means *face of God*. ^c 31 Hebrew *Penuel*, a variant of *Peniel* ^d 17 *Sukkoth* means *shelters*.
^e 18 That is, Northwest Mesopotamia ^f 19 Hebrew *hundred kesitahs*; a *kesitah* was a unit of money of unknown weight and value. ^g 20 *El Elohe Israel* can mean *El is the God of Israel* or *mighty is the God of Israel*.

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

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

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

33:19 *pieces of silver*. The monetary unit referred to here (*qesitah*) has not been identified. It occurs elsewhere only in Jos 24:32 (a reference back to this passage) and Job 42:11. Neither archaeology nor extra-Biblical literature provides further information. One possibility is that these pieces are not shaped like coins but take some other form. In Egypt at this time rings of silver (known as *shat*) were used for exchange.



JACOB'S STRATEGY

Jacob decided that it was best to inform Esau of his return. He probably assumed that his father had died by now, whereupon Esau had come into the entire inheritance, Jacob's status or whereabouts having been undetermined. In Jacob's initial communication, he made three basic points.

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

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

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

1. The five distinct groups of animals arriving in succession would wear down the military readiness of Esau's band. If they were planning an ambush, they would have to set it up each time a group arrived. When they discovered that Jacob was not in the group, they would all have gathered again and proceeded on their way. After five times it was unlikely that they would be as alert for combat as they might have been at first. By that time Esau and his men would probably have given up the idea of an ambush altogether.
2. As the gifts arrived, Esau became more and more encumbered in his travel. The animals would have forced him to move more slowly and would have made his band much noisier. It would be difficult to take Jacob by surprise given the unavoidable cacophony of the livestock.
3. As Jacob's servants brought gifts, they joined the march of Esau's band. Esau's military tactics would have been less effective if he had to cope with members of Jacob's household mixed in among his own retinue of soldiers. ♦

Dinah and the Shechemites

34 Now Dinah,^c the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. ²When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped

34:1 ^cGe 30:21

her. ³His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife."

⁵When Jacob heard that his daughter

34:2 *took her and raped her.* In societies in which marriages were arranged with economic and sociological goals in mind, the couple did not always have an opportunity to pursue their love interests. One way around

the problem of parents' unwillingness to accept their children's preference for a spouse was to bypass the process and engage in consensual intercourse. Whether this expression of interest was only on the part of the

Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he did nothing about it until they came home.

⁶Then Shechem's father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob.^d ⁷Meanwhile, Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were shocked and furious, because Shechem had done an outrageous thing in^a Israel^e by sleeping with Jacob's daughter—a thing that should not be done.^f

⁸But Hamor said to them, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. ⁹Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰You can settle among us;^g the land is open to you.^h Live in it, trade^b in it,ⁱ and acquire property in it."

¹¹Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. ¹²Make the price for the bride^j and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the young woman as my wife."

¹³Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. ¹⁴They said to them, "We can't do such a thing; we can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised.^k That would be a disgrace to us. ¹⁵We will enter into an agreement with you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males.^l ¹⁶Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. ¹⁷But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go."

¹⁸Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. ¹⁹The young man, who was the most honored of all his father's family, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter.^m ²⁰So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their cityⁿ to speak to the men of their city. ²¹"These men are friendly toward us," they

34:6

^dJdg 14:2-5

34:7 ^eDt 22:21;

Jdg 20:6;

2Sa 13:12

^fJos 7:15

34:10

^gGe 47:6, 27

^hEx 13:9; 20:15

ⁱGe 42:34

34:12

^jEx 22:16;

Dt 22:29;

1Sa 18:25

34:14

^kGe 17:14;

Jdg 14:3

34:15 ^lEx 12:48

34:19 ^mver 3

34:20 ⁿRu 4:1;

2Sa 15:2

34:24

^oGe 23:10

34:25 ^pGe 49:5

^qGe 49:7

34:30 ^rEx 5:21;

1Sa 13:4

^sGe 13:7

^tGe 46:27;

1Ch 16:19;

Ps 105:12

35:1 ^uGe 28:19

^vGe 27:43

35:2

^wGe 18:19;

Jos 24:15

^xGe 31:19

said. "Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. ²²But the men will agree to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. ²³Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us agree to their terms, and they will settle among us."

²⁴All the men who went out of the city gate^o agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised.

²⁵Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords^p and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male.^q ²⁶They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. ²⁷The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where^c their sister had been defiled. ²⁸They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. ²⁹They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.

³⁰Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious^r to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land.^s We are few in number,^t and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed."

³¹But they replied, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?"

Jacob Returns to Bethel

35 Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel^u and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."^v

²So Jacob said to his household^w and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods^x you have with you, and purify

^a 7 Or *against* ^b 10 Or *move about freely*; also in verse 21 ^c 27 Or *because*

would-be husband, in which case it would be termed "rape," or involved a mutual decision of engaging in consensual sex, the result is similar: the parents would generally have to go ahead with allowing the marriage. Both Ex 22:16–17 and Dt 22:28–29 include regulations to address this situation. It was also regulated in ancient Near Eastern law. Whether Dinah had been raped or virtually "eloped," the family was undeniably shamed by the incident. A rape would certainly be tragic and devastating to Dinah and the family. But if Dinah were in any way involved in the decision, the family would be shamed not only by Shechem's act, but also by Dinah's lack of respect for the family.

34:29 *plunder*. Beyond the slaughter of the entire male population, the brothers took all the women and children as well as all the goods in the city as plunder. Presumably the brothers rationalized their conduct by insisting that such is the mandated bride price for the violation of their sister. Nevertheless, the level of brutality is incomprehensible and far exceeds the justifiable retribution for the crime of the city's prince.

35:2 *Get rid of the foreign gods*. In order to fulfill the vow made to Yahweh in 28:20–22, Jacob commanded several activities, each with ritual significance. Jacob's vow had included not only the payment of a tithe, but the promise that Yahweh would be his God. Consequently,

yourselves and change your clothes.^y ³Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress^z and who has been with me wherever I have gone.^a ⁴So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem.^b ⁵Then they set out, and the terror of God^c fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.

⁶Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz^d (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. ⁷There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel,^a because it was there that God revealed himself to him^e when he was fleeing from his brother.

⁸Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse,^f died and was buried under the oak outside Bethel. So it was named Allon Bakuth.^b

⁹After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram,^c God appeared to him again and blessed him.^g ¹⁰God said to him, "Your name is Jacob,^d but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.^e"^h So he named him Israel.

¹¹And God said to him, "I am God Almighty;ⁱ be fruitful and increase in number. A nation^j and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants.^k ¹²The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your de-

35:2 ^y Ex 19:10, 14
35:3 ^z Ge 32:7
^a Ge 28:15, 20-22; 31:3, 42
35:4
^b Jos 24:25-26
35:5 ^c Ex 15:16; 23:27; Jos 2:9
35:6 ^d Ge 28:19; 48:3
35:7 ^e Ge 28:13
35:8 ^f Ge 24:59
35:9 ^g Ge 32:29
35:10 ^h Ge 17:5
35:11 ⁱ Ge 17:1; Ex 6:3; J Ge 28:3; 48:4 ^k Ge 17:6

35:12
^l Ge 13:15; 28:13
^m Ge 12:7; 26:3
35:13
ⁿ Ge 17:22
35:14
^o Ge 28:18
35:15
^p Ge 28:19
35:17
^q Ge 30:24
35:19 ^r Ge 48:7; Ru 1:1, 19; Mic 5:2; Mt 2:16
35:20
^s 1Sa 10:2

scendants after you.^{l,m} ¹³Then God went up from himⁿ at the place where he had talked with him.

¹⁴Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it.^o ¹⁵Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.^{op}

The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

35:23-26pp — 1Ch 2:1-2

¹⁶Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. ¹⁷And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't despair, for you have another son."^q ¹⁸As she breathed her last — for she was dying — she named her son Ben-Oni.^h But his father named him Benjamin.ⁱ

¹⁹So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). ²⁰Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb.⁵

^a 7 El Bethel means God of Bethel. ^b 8 Allon Bakuth means oak of weeping. ^c 9 That is, Northwest Mesopotamia; also in verse 26 ^d 10 Jacob means he grasps the heel, a Hebrew idiom for he deceives. ^e 10 Israel probably means he struggles with God. ^f 11 Hebrew El-Shaddai ^s 15 Bethel means house of God. ^h 18 Ben-Oni means son of my trouble. ⁱ 18 Benjamin means son of my right hand.

he instructed his household to bury all the foreign gods (v. 4), the presence of which was indicative of divided loyalty. Burial was one of the approved methods of discarding images. These were not the household gods Rachel brought with her, for those were not strictly divine images but images of the ancestors (see the article "Household Gods," p. 72). Instead, the buried images were most likely ones plundered from the town of Shechem. This is the first instance in Genesis of disposing of other gods. There has been little discussion thus far in Genesis about the issue of other gods and no clear call to monotheistic belief or practice. But here Jacob makes a statement by his actions. *purify yourselves and change your clothes.* Purification was a normal preparation for ritual activity. Those officiating in rituals often had outfits befitting their position, from the elaborate garments of priests and kings to the linen of assistants. But here the celebrants were directed to change clothes. Some ritual texts, especially those involving the king, portray him putting on clean garments for a ritual. For many celebrants, however, the issue may not be what they are changing into, but what they are changing out of. When work or other activity has sullied one's clothing, it is appropriate to change clothes in order to avoid ritual impurity. For Jacob's entourage, this may have been necessitated simply to eliminate the dirt and grime of travel with all the animals, but it could also refer to the residue of the recent massacre at Shechem.

35:4 *the rings in their ears.* The earrings referred to were closely related to the images. Commentators commonly suggest, though tentatively, that earrings in their shape or symbolism may have been quasi-representations of deity themselves. However, archaeology thus far attests

no earrings in the shape of deity, but it is speculated that crescent-shaped earrings may have been symbolic representations of the moon-god. Many images in the ancient Near East were adorned with earrings, so in this phrase the pronoun "their" could point to the gods, not to Jacob's household; i.e., as they disposed of the images, they should not hold back the earrings from the images for themselves.

35:16,19 *Ephrath.* See note on v. 20.

35:20 *Rachel's tomb.* The text, geography and traditions all complicate its precise location. Jacob was traveling south from Bethel (v. 16) to arrive eventually in Hebron (v. 27). Specifically they were on the way to Ephrath/Bethlehem (cf. 48:7) and had not yet arrived at Migdal Eder (35:19–21). They were therefore following the main north-south road through the central hill country. From Bethel to Bethlehem is just under 20 miles (32 kilometers) (going through Jerusalem). In 1Sa 10:2 Rachel's tomb is identified as being at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin (cf. Jer 31:15, which has been interpreted to suggest it was near Ramah, just east of Gibeon, more in the middle of Benjamite territory). Jerusalem is on Benjamin's southern border with Judah. Zelzah is unknown other than this reference.

Part of the confusion occurs because the term "Ephrath" (vv. 16,19) has multiple references (cf. 1Ch 2:50–51). Besides its association with Bethlehem (see Mic 5:2), it can refer to people from the tribe of Ephraim. The traditional tomb of Rachel today, located outside Bethlehem, does not fit these details. One last wild card is the location of Migdal Eder (v. 21), which unfortunately is unknown, but it may not have helped since it could have been some distance from Rachel's tomb, just not as far as Hebron.

²¹Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. ²²While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine^t Bilhah,^u and Israel heard of it.

Jacob had twelve sons:

²³The sons of Leah:

Reuben the firstborn^v of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah,^w Issachar and Zebulun.^x

²⁴The sons of Rachel:

Joseph^y and Benjamin.^z

²⁵The sons of Rachel's servant Bilhah:

Dan and Naphtali.^a

²⁶The sons of Leah's servant Zilpah:

Gad^b and Asher.^c

These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.

²⁷Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre,^d near Kiriath Arba^e (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. ²⁸Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years.^f ²⁹Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people,^g old and full of years.^h And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.ⁱ

Esau's Descendants

36:10-14pp — 1Ch 1:35-37

36:20-28pp — 1Ch 1:38-42

36 This is the account of the family line of Esau (that is, Edom).^j

²Esau took his wives from the women of Canaan:^k Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite,^l and Oholibamah daughter of Anah^m and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite — ³also Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth.

35:22 ^tGe 49:4; 1Ch 5:1
^uGe 29:29; Lev 18:8
35:23 ^vGe 46:8
^wGe 29:35
^xGe 30:20
35:24
^yGe 30:24
^zver 18
35:25 ^aGe 30:8
35:26
^bGe 30:11
^cGe 30:13
35:27
^dGe 13:18; 18:1
^eJos 14:15
35:28 ^fGe 25:7, 20
35:29
^gGe 25:8; 49:33
^hGe 15:15
ⁱGe 25:9
36:1 ^jGe 25:30
36:2 ^kGe 28:8-9
^lGe 26:34
^mver 25

36:4 ⁿ1Ch 1:35
36:6 ^oGe 12:5
36:7 ^pGe 13:6; 17:8; 28:4
36:8 ^qEd 2:4
^rGe 32:3
36:11 ^sver 15-16; Job 2:11
^tAm 1:12; Hab 3:3
36:12 ^uEx 17:8; 16; Nu 24:20; 15a 15:2
^vver 16

⁴Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, Basemath bore Reuel,ⁿ ⁵and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These were the sons of Esau, who were born to him in Canaan.

⁶Esau took his wives and sons and daughters and all the members of his household, as well as his livestock and all his other animals and all the goods he had acquired in Canaan,^o and moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob. ⁷Their possessions were too great for them to remain together; the land where they were staying could not support them both because of their livestock.^p ⁸So Esau^q (that is, Edom) settled in the hill country of Seir.^r

⁹This is the account of the family line of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir.

¹⁰These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, the son of Esau's wife Adah, and Reuel, the son of Esau's wife Basemath.

¹¹The sons of Eliphaz:^s Teman,^t Omar, Zepho, Gatam and Kenaz.

¹²Esau's son Eliphaz also had a concubine named Timna, who bore him Amalek.^u These were grandsons of Esau's wife Adah.^v

¹³The sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were grandsons of Esau's wife Basemath.

¹⁴The sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon, whom she bore to Esau: Jeush, Jalam and Korah.

Given all of this information, it is most logical to locate Rachel's tomb somewhere along the road from Bethel to Jerusalem, but it is difficult to be more precise.

35:22 *slept with his father's concubine.* Though this is technically an incestuous act, the offense here was treated more as social usurpation than as sexual immorality. Possession of the concubines that belonged to the head of the clan was presumably a sign of leadership in the clan. When the father died, the care and ownership of the concubines (as part of his property) passed to the next head of the clan. To seize ownership of the concubines prior to the father's death would be then seen as an act of subversion and disrespect (comparable to seizing land or herds), but would not be unusual if succession to clan leadership were contested. In this context, Reuben's offense against his father circumvented proper succession procedures and implies that his father was powerless. Beyond clan leadership, Reuben's act was not necessarily to secure his own position in the clan, but by treating Bilhah (Rachel's servant) this way, it assured that Leah would assume the place of principal wife (since Rachel had just died). In this sense it was an offense against Bilhah, but again, not just

in a sexual sense, but by an act intended to undermine her status in the clan.

36:9 *Esau the father of the Edomites.* Esau's descendants lived in Seir (a region between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba) and formed, with other elements, the tiny tribal kingdom of Edom. Edom was sparsely settled and virtually no Late Bronze Age (1400–1200 BC) settlements are present. However, people did inhabit the region during the Late Bronze Age, for Egyptian records from about the thirteenth to the tenth centuries BC (Rameses I–III; Mernep-tah) first mention this territory/people and groups of Shasu (nomads) from Edom/Seir. Shasu parallels Seir in these texts; these nomads are a major part of Edom's population.

Travel and commerce existed between Egypt and Edom very early. Inhabitants of Edom were probably tent dwellers as well as pastoralists in some sense. Later references to them come from Assyrians and Babylonians. Adadnirari III of Assyria (810–783 BC) was the first one to deal with Edom as a vassal state. Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BC) subjugated Edom. Nabonidus nearly destroyed Edom in about 550 BC (Mal 1:1–3), but it grew healthy under Persian rule.

¹⁵These were the chiefs^w among Esau's descendants:

The sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau:

Chiefs Teman,^x Omar, Zepho, Kenaz,¹⁶Korah,^a Gatam and Amalek. These were the chiefs descended from Eliphaz in Edom; they were grandsons of Adah.^y

¹⁷The sons of Esau's son Reuel:^z

Chiefs Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were the chiefs descended from Reuel in Edom; they were grandsons of Esau's wife Basemath.

¹⁸The sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah: Chiefs Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These were the chiefs descended from Esau's wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah.

¹⁹These were the sons of Esau (that is, Edom),^a and these were their chiefs.

²⁰These were the sons of Seir the Horite,^b who were living in the region:

Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah,²¹Dishon, Ezer and Dishan. These sons of Seir in Edom were Horite chiefs.

²²The sons of Lotan:

Hori and Homam.^b Timna was Lotan's sister.

²³The sons of Shobal:

Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho and Onam.

²⁴The sons of Zibeon:

Aiah and Anah. This is the Anah who discovered the hot springs^c in the desert while he was grazing the donkeys of his father Zibeon.

²⁵The children of Anah:

Dishon and Oholibamah daughter of Anah.

²⁶The sons of Dishon^d:

Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran and Keran.

²⁷The sons of Ezer:

Bilhan, Zaavan and Akan.

²⁸The sons of Dishan:

Uz and Aran.

²⁹These were the Horite chiefs:

Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah,³⁰Dishon, Ezer and Dishan. These were the Horite chiefs, according to their divisions, in the land of Seir.

The Rulers of Edom

36:31-43pp — 1Ch 1:43-54

³¹These were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king^c reigned:

36:15
^w Ex 15:15
^x Job 2:11
36:16 ^y ver 12
36:17
^z 1Ch 1:37
36:19
^a Ge 25:30
36:20
^b Ge 14:6;
Dt 2:12, 22;
1Ch 1:38
36:31 ^c Ge 17:6;
1Ch 1:43

36:33
^d Jer 49:13, 22
36:34
^e Eze 25:13
36:35
^f Ge 19:37;
Nu 22:1; Dt 1:5;
Ru 1:1, 6
37:1 ^g Ge 17:8
^h Ge 10:19
37:2 ⁱ Ps 78:71
^j Ge 35:25
^k Ge 35:26
^l 1Sa 2:24
37:3
^m Ge 25:28

³²Bela son of Beor became king of Edom. His city was named Dinhabah.

³³When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah from Bozrah^d succeeded him as king.

³⁴When Jobab died, Husham from the land of the Temanites^e succeeded him as king.

³⁵When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab,^f succeeded him as king. His city was named Avith.

³⁶When Hadad died, Samlah from Masrekah succeeded him as king.

³⁷When Samlah died, Shaul from Rehoboth on the river succeeded him as king.

³⁸When Shaul died, Baal-Hanan son of Akbor succeeded him as king.

³⁹When Baal-Hanan son of Akbor died, Hadad^e succeeded him as king. His city was named Pau, and his wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred, the daughter of Me-Zahab.

⁴⁰These were the chiefs descended from Esau, by name, according to their clans and regions:

Timna, Alvah, Jetheth,⁴¹Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon,⁴²Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar,⁴³Magdiel and Iram. These were the chiefs of Edom, according to their settlements in the land they occupied.

This is the family line of Esau, the father of the Edomites.

Joseph's Dreams

37 Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed,⁹ the land of Canaan.^h

²This is the account of Jacob's family line.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocksⁱ with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah^j and the sons of Zilpah,^k his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report^l about them.

³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons,^m because he had

^a 16 Masoretic Text; Samaritan Pentateuch (also verse 11 and 1 Chron. 1:36) does not have *Korah*.

^b 22 Hebrew *Hemam*, a variant of *Homam* (see 1 Chron. 1:39) ^c 24 Vulgate; Syriac *discovered water*; the meaning of the Hebrew for this word is uncertain.

^d 26 Hebrew *Dishan*, a variant of *Dishon* ^e 39 Many manuscripts of the Masoretic Text, Samaritan Pentateuch and Syriac (see also 1 Chron. 1:50); most manuscripts of the Masoretic Text *Hadar*

37:3 *ornate robe*. An Egyptian tomb painting from the nineteenth century BC depicts a troupe of Semitic merchants coming down to Egypt. Some of the men are wearing colorful knee-length, sleeveless garments. We do not

know whether this was the type of garment Jacob gave Joseph, but it gives an idea of the fashions of the general period. A fresco from Mari (eighteenth century BC) portrays priests dressed in garments made of rectangular

been born to him in his old age;ⁿ and he made an ornate^a robe^o for him. ⁴When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him^p and could not speak a kind word to him.

⁵Joseph had a dream,^q and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. ⁶He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: ⁷We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.”^r

⁸His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?”^s And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

⁹Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

¹⁰When he told his father as well as his brothers,^t his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?”^u ¹¹His brothers were jealous of him,^v but his father kept the matter in mind.^w

37:3 ⁿGe 44:20
^o2Sa 13:18-19
37:4 ^pGe 27:41;
49:22-23; Ac 7:9
37:5 ^qGe 20:3;
28:12
37:7 ^rGe 42:6,
9; 43:26, 28;
44:14; 50:18
37:8 ^sGe 49:26
37:10 ^tver 5
^uver 7;
Ge 27:29
37:11 ^vAc 7:9
^wLk 2:19, 51

37:14
^xGe 13:18;
35:27
37:17 ^y2Ki 6:13
37:18
^z1Sa 19:1;
Mk 14:1;
Ac 23:12

Joseph Sold by His Brothers

¹²Now his brothers had gone to graze their father’s flocks near Shechem, ¹³and Israel said to Joseph, “As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them.”

“Very well,” he replied.

¹⁴So he said to him, “Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.” Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.^x

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, “What are you looking for?”

¹⁶He replied, “I’m looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?”

¹⁷“They have moved on from here,” the man answered. “I heard them say, ‘Let’s go to Dothan.’”^y

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.^z

¹⁹“Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. ²⁰“Come now, let’s kill him

^a 3 The meaning of the Hebrew for this word is uncertain; also in verses 23 and 32.

pieces of cloth of various colors sewn together into a long strip that is then wrapped around the body seven or eight turns from the ankles up to the chest and then draped over one shoulder.

Various types of clothing communicated rank and status in society. In the ancient world the fabrics, ornamentation, colors, length and hem all played a role in indicating the position of the wearer. Undoubtedly Joseph’s coat designated authority as well as favor, but little more can be said because the Hebrew word for “ornate” occurs only here (also in vv. 23,32) and in the passage describing Tamar’s cloak (2Sa 13:18,19). No cognates from comparative Semitic languages offer any confident clarification. The traditional interpretation of a coat of many colors goes back to the Greek and Latin translations of the OT (though now abandoned in many scholarly circles). Most commentators favor something more along the line of a full-length coat or a long-sleeved coat, reflected in Aquila’s Greek translation in the second century AD.

37:5 *Joseph had a dream.* The ancients believed dreams derived from the divine realm and were therefore taken seriously. Dreams of a rise to power, like the ones Joseph had, are known in the ancient Near East, notably one by Sargon, king of Akkad, half a millennium earlier than Joseph. Sargon, cupbearer to King Ur-Zababa, recounts to the king his dream in which the king was drowned in a river of blood unleashed by a gigantic vision of Inanna:

There was a single young woman [the goddess Inanna],
she was high as the heavens, she was broad as the earth,
She was firmly set as the base of a wall.
For me, she drowned you in a great [river] of blood.

Ur-Zababa’s advisors reinterpreted the dream to sug-

gest that it was Sargon who was going to die rather than the king. This demonstrates how even fairly transparent dreams could be reinterpreted to suit the desires of one party or another. Joseph’s dream indicated not the death of his brothers, but simply their subordination to him. There was nothing in the dream that led them to consider that Joseph’s eventual prominence would extend beyond the confines of the family, for only his family members bowed down to him in the dream. It would not have occurred to any of them that Joseph would rise to the position of second-in-command of a dominant world power.

Both in Sargon’s and Joseph’s dreams the dreamer’s life was put in jeopardy as those who would have been supplanted in his rise to authority sought to prevent the fulfillment of that dream by eliminating the one marked for ascendancy. Of course, there is no reason to think of literary dependence here, only to observe the common motifs that reflect widespread human experience.

A curious feature of the second dream (vv. 9–10) is the symbolic presence of Joseph’s mother and all 11 brothers. This is odd in that his mother had previously died giving birth to her second son. The inclusion of Joseph’s parents is of significance here, because it indicates that the message of the dream did not just suggest that Joseph would be first among his brothers (in which case it would be similar to the patriarchal blessings found in 9:26; 27:29), but that Joseph would rise to prominence in the entire ancestral line, superseding his parents in significance. This justifies the inclusion of family members living or dead. Another option is that — since Joseph was still less than ten years old when his mother died, and therefore Rachel’s handmaid, Bilhah, had been a surrogate mother to Joseph and Benjamin — the dream perhaps referred to Bilhah.

and throw him into one of these cisterns^a and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."^b

²¹When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. ²²"Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

²³So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—²⁴and they took him and threw him into the cistern.^d The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh,^e and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.^f

²⁶Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?^g ²⁷Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother,^h our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

²⁸So when the Midianiteⁱ merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels^a of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.^j

²⁹When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes.^k ³⁰He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?"^l

³¹Then they got Joseph's robe,^m slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the

37:20
^aJer 38:6, 9
^bGe 50:20
37:21
^cGe 42:22
37:24 ^dJer 41:7
37:25
^eGe 43:11
^fver 28
37:26 ^gver 20;
 Ge 4:10
37:27
^hGe 42:21
37:28 ⁱGe 25:2;
 Jdg 6:1-3
^jGe 45:4-5;
 Ps 105:17;
 Ac 7:9
37:29 ^kver 34;
 Ge 44:13;
 Job 1:20
37:30 ^lver 22;
 Ge 42:13, 36
37:31 ^mver 3,
 23

37:33 ⁿver 20
^oGe 44:20, 28
37:34 ^pver 29
^q2Sa 3:31
^rGe 50:3, 10, 11
37:35
^sGe 42:38;
 44:22, 29, 31
37:36 ^tGe 39:1
38:2 ^u1Ch 2:3
38:3 ^vver 6;
 Ge 46:12;
 Nu 26:19
38:7 ^wver 10;
 Ge 46:12;
 1Ch 2:3

blood. ³²They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe."

³³He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animalⁿ has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."^o

³⁴Then Jacob tore his clothes,^p put on sackcloth^q and mourned for his son many days.^r ³⁵All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave."^s So his father wept for him.

³⁶Meanwhile, the Midianites^b sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.^t

Judah and Tamar

38 At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah. ²There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua.^u He married her and made love to her; ³she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, who was named Er.^v ⁴She conceived again and gave birth to a son and named him Onan. ⁵She gave birth to still another son and named him Shelah. It was at Kezib that she gave birth to him.

⁶Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. ⁷But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the LORD's sight; so the LORD put him to death.^w

⁸Then Judah said to Onan, "Sleep with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty

^a 28 That is, about 8 ounces or about 230 grams
^b 36 Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac (see also verse 28); Masoretic Text *Medianites*

37:20 *cisterns.* Where wells could not be dug and precipitation was sufficient, cisterns were constructed to catch rain and runoff during the wet season to provide some supply for the dry season. The area of Dothan averages 24–28 inches (60–70 centimeters) of rainfall annually; thus, if 20 percent of the runoff from a half-acre (one-hectare) field could be caught and stored, about 5,000 sheep could be supplied with water for the year. As one can imagine, water collected in cisterns easily became stagnant. It was not unusual for dry cisterns to be miry at the bottom, because the runoff would carry sediment. But if it were maintained for constant use, it would have been cleaned out regularly. The region of Dothan features limestone, which is porous, and thus cisterns were coated on the inside with plaster (a procedure documented in the Early Bronze and Middle Bronze periods [e.g., at Taanach and Megiddo, respectively]) to prevent absorption of the water.

37:25 *caravan of Ishmaelites.* The text refers to both Ishmaelites and Midianites, kinfolk both descended from Abraham (Midianites through Keturah, 25:1–2; Ishmaelites through Hagar, 16:15). The forebears of these two peoples were half brothers to one another (and to Isaac), and uncles to Jacob; thus, these traders are second or

third cousins to Joseph and his brothers. Both clans occupied the Arabian Desert region. *spices, balm and myrrh.* The goods that the caravan was transporting were common commodities for trade. Myrrh was imported from southern Arabia and must have come by caravan up the Incense Road, which traversed the west coast of Arabia to the King's Highway, which led north-south through Transjordan (east of the Jordan Valley) to Damascus. Perhaps the Ishmaelites purchased this myrrh and other spices from the Arabian caravans passing through Gilead on the King's Highway and then added to their shipment some of the balm that was native to that region to make their trip down to Egypt.

37:28 *twenty shekels of silver.* The going rate for a slave in the mid-second millennium BC. Examples from Hammurapi, Mari, and a variety of Old Babylonian documents support this. In contrast, prices in southern Mesopotamia about 2000 BC were 10 shekels and by the time of Nuzi and Ugarit (fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC) the price was more like 30 shekels. By the time we get into the first millennium BC, the going rate was 50 shekels, and by the Persian period, 80 to 100 shekels was common.

38:8 *fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law.* The custom of levirate marriage mandated that if a man died without

to her as a brother-in-law to raise up offspring for your brother.”⁹ But Onan knew that the child would not be his; so whenever he slept with his brother’s wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from providing offspring for his brother.

¹⁰What he did was wicked in the LORD’s sight; so the LORD put him to death also.^Y

¹¹Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, “Live as a widow in your father’s household until my son Shelah grows up.”^Z For he thought, “He may die too, just like his brothers.” So Tamar went to live in her father’s household.

¹²After a long time Judah’s wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah,^a to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him.

¹³When Tamar was told, “Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep,” ¹⁴she took off her widow’s

38:8 ^xDt 25:5-6; Mt 22:24-28
38:10
^yGe 46:12; Dt 25:7-10
38:11 ^zRu 1:13
38:12 ^aver 14; Jos 15:10,57

38:14 ^bver 11
38:16
^cLev 18:15; 20:12
38:17
^dEze 16:33
^ever 20
38:18 ^fver 25

clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah^b had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.

¹⁵When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. ¹⁶Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law,^c he went over to her by the roadside and said, “Come now, let me sleep with you.”

“And what will you give me to sleep with you?” she asked.

¹⁷“I’ll send you a young goat^d from my flock,” he said.

“Will you give me something as a pledge^e until you send it?” she asked.

¹⁸He said, “What pledge should I give you?”

“Your seal^f and its cord, and the staff in your hand,” she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she

a male heir, a relative was to sire a son with the widow on his behalf. See the article “Levirate Marriage,” p. 85.

38:9 *spilled his semen on the ground.* This does not refer to masturbation, as is occasionally suggested. It rather refers to the practice of ejaculating outside the woman’s body (“withdrawal”) as a means to avoid impregnation. Interestingly, while masturbation is not forbidden in the Bible, a negative confession in the Egyptian “Book of the Dead” proclaims, “I have not masturbated.”

38:11 *Live as a widow.* A widow without children was a woman without legal, economic or social status — a woman without a household. Judah here relegates Tamar (through his continuing authority over her) to the protection of her father’s household. This is unusual in that a dowry would have been initially paid by her father precisely for the purpose of supporting her in a situation such as this. It is unlikely that her father would have had any legal obligation to support her.

38:14 *widow’s clothes.* Would be sufficiently distinctive to mark Tamar’s station, but our sources are inadequate for determining what these clothes looked like.

38:15 *prostitute.* Sheep-shearing time was payday, and the income windfall, the celebratory atmosphere, and the isolation of the men from the family compound all were conducive to the activity of prostitutes. Prostitution in the ancient world can be divided into a number of different categories, and there is some dispute concerning the labels and descriptions.

Particularly debatable is what is called “sacred prostitution” (in which the proceeds go the temple) and “cultic prostitution” (which is performed as a rite of fertility). The latter is only attested in relation to the tightly regulated sacred marriage rites and was not engaged in by the public at large. It is not legitimately labeled “prostitution.” With regard to the former, though undoubtedly secular prostitutes might congregate around the temple (especially at festival times), evidence is lacking for the temples profiting from or organizing prostitution (though Dt 23:18 makes it clear that such a practice did exist).

Some groups of women in the Old Babylonian period (1800–1600) e.g., the *naditu* and *qadishtu*, were regulated by codes and identified with male deities; their sexuality was controlled by either celibacy or marriage. These

were often associated with temples. Other groups (e.g., the *harimtu*) were associated with female deities, had no regulating codes, and were uncontrolled sexually. The latter typically operated from the tavern and acted for pay.

Tamar is referred to by two separate terms in this chapter. In v. 15 Judah considered her a *zonah*, the normal Hebrew word for “prostitute” (used also in v. 24). He reached this conclusion not because her face was veiled (that detail is given to explain why he did not recognize her — usually prostitutes were unveiled), but because she had stationed herself by the road as a prostitute would. But when Judah sent his friend to look for her, the friend inquired concerning the *qedeshah* (vv. 21–22, NIV “shrine prostitute”).

This latter term is used only two other times in the OT (Dt 23:18; Hos 4:14). Ugaritic texts list women similarly labeled (*qds*) among the temple personnel, and Akkadian literature attests those who were dedicated for life to serve the temple with a cognate term (*qadishtu*). These shrine functionaries were not by definition prostitutes — they had other, legitimate roles. But in practice, it may not have been uncommon for them to engage in prostitution. By inquiring after the *qedeshah* Judah’s friend concealed the specifics in ambiguity — there may have been a number of reasons a gift would be brought to a shrine functionary.

38:18 *seal ... cord ... staff.* In the ancient world legal identification was not by signature or specially assigned numbers as today. The seal was the most common form of identification. In Mesopotamia inscribed cylinders were used (and often worn around the neck), whereas in the rest of the ancient world scarab or stamp seals were carved in intaglio on disk-shaped bits of stone (the size of a small coin), usually decorated with some sort of simple picture and occasionally with the individual’s name and/or position. These were often pierced so as to be worn somewhere on the body, often around the neck on a cord, probably referred to in this verse. Stamp seals are attested as early as the seventh-millennium BC Neolithic period. Cylinder seals made their appearance in the early fourth millennium BC. The staff that Judah left with Tamar must have also been distinctive and capable of identifying the owner. One possibility is that it was a staff that designated the head of the family (cf. Nu 17:2). Akkadian



LEVIRATE MARRIAGE

A number of possible motives or anticipated results may underlie this custom, and the issue is still disputed. Alternative and not unrelated possibilities include provision of an heir, protection of the family holdings and/or dowry, or caring for the widow. Information from the ancient Near East comes from family documents from Emar as well as Hittite laws and Middle Assyrian laws.

Care for the widow cannot be seen as the sole motive, for then the legislation would simply mandate that the dead husband's family care for her. It is also unlikely that the retention and benefit of the dowry was the sole motivation, for then the new husband (the brother) would have much to gain and would hardly view the task as an unpleasant duty. The primary beneficiary of the practice must therefore be considered to be the dead husband rather than the surviving family. However, it is not simply for the memory of the dead husband that an heir must be born, but so that the deceased might be provided with an heir to his estate. If the land has been forfeited, the relative must redeem it for the widow and then produce an heir to whom to pass it.

It should be pointed out that the law pertains when brothers are living together (cf. Dt 25:5). This refers to a situation in which the inheritance has not yet been divided. In such a case, if one brother dies, each of the others would receive a larger share. Three circumstances call for the invoking of the levirate rule: (1) the father is alive and the brothers are still living in his house; (2) the father is dead but the inheritance has not yet been divided; (3) the land has been alienated and the levir must redeem it.

None of the ancient Near Eastern material reflects identical circumstances, but shows that concern for the central issues was shared across the ancient world.

Levirate marriage was practiced at Ugarit, at least at the royal level of society (c. 1345–1336 BC), with reference to the childless Arhalba and his brother Niqmepa. Hittite laws and possibly laws at Nuzi recognized this marriage practice. In Hittite law a widowed wife could, if necessary, marry her brother-in-law, her father-in-law, or the son of her brother-in-law.

In some Hittite and Assyrian laws the issue is not whether the deceased had sons, but rather the need to support the widow in whom the father had a large investment through the bride price. More recent textual finds from Emar emphasize the desire of legislation like this to keep property within the family. Concern for the preservation of seed and inheritance is found late into the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (273/272 BC).

In the more ancient Middle Assyrian laws the wife of a son who died could be given by the son's father to another of his sons, even if the other son were betrothed to someone else but not yet married. But if the father of that betrothed daughter did not agree to this, the father of the deceased son could still proceed as planned and give the betrothed bride to his son. Or he could withdraw from the entire process. If a betrothed daughter died before the marriage, her father could give his prospective son-in-law another daughter, or the betrothed groom could withdraw.

If a wife's husband died while they were living in her father's house, if she had borne no children, her father-in-law could marry her to the son of his choice, or she could be given in marriage by her father to her father-in-law. This option was not permitted in Israel (cf. Ge 38:26). If her husband and father-in-law both died, she became a widow and was free to do as she pleased. If the wife had borne children, she was free to live in a house for her and her son in her father's household. ♦

became pregnant by him. ¹⁹After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes⁹ again.

²⁰Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. ²¹He asked the men who lived there, "Where is the shrine prostitute^h who was beside the road at Enaim?"

"There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here," they said.

²²So he went back to Judah and said, "I didn't find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, 'There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here.'"

²³Then Judah said, "Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughing-stock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn't find her."

²⁴About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant."

Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!"ⁱ

²⁵As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are."^j

²⁶Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I,^k since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah.^l" And he did not sleep with her again.

²⁷When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.^m

²⁸As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand; so the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, "This one came out first."ⁿ ²⁹But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, "So this is how you have broken out!" And he was named Perez.^o

³⁰Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out. And he was named Zerah.^b

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

39 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard,^p bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.^q

38:19 ⁹ver 14

38:21

^hLev 19:29;

Hos 4:14;

38:24

ⁱLev 21:9;

Dt 22:21, 22

38:25 ^lver 18

38:26

^k1Sa 24:17

^lver 11

38:27

^mGe 25:24

38:29

ⁿGe 46:12;

Nu 26:20, 21;

Ru 4:12, 18;

1Ch 2:4; Mt 1:3

38:30 ^o1Ch 2:4

39:1 ^pGe 37:36

^qGe 37:25;

Ps 105:17

39:2 ^rGe 21:20,

22; Ac 7:9

39:3 ^sGe 21:22;

26:28 ^tPs 1:3

39:4 ^uver 8, 22;

Ge 24:2

39:5 ^vGe 26:24;

30:27

39:6

^w1Sa 16:12

39:7

^x2Sa 13:11;

Pr 7:15-18

39:8

^yPr 6:23-24

39:9 ^zGe 41:33,

40 ^aGe 20:6;

42:18; 2Sa 12:13

39:12 ^bPr 7:13

39:14

^cDt 22:24, 27

²The LORD was with Joseph^r so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³When his master saw that the LORD was with him^s and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did,^t ⁴Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.^u ⁵From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.^v The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,^w ⁷and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"^x

⁸But he refused.^y "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹No one is greater in this house than I am.^z My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"^a ¹⁰And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

¹¹One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹²She caught him by his cloak^b and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

¹³When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, ¹⁴she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed.^c ¹⁵When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁶She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷Then she told

^a 29 Perez means breaking out. ^b 30 Zerah can mean scarlet or brightness.

hattu is used for the scepter of a king, but also for the shepherd's staff and the staff that serves as the insignia of office for important people. It seems that the top of the staff was often engraved.

38:24 *have her burned to death!* It was a fact of life and society that sometimes widows were forced into (either regular or occasional) prostitution in order to live. Yet it was still unacceptable behavior and was punished

severely. The punishment of burning is rare and reserved for the most serious of sexual crimes (cf. Lev 20:14; 21:9 for the only other Biblical occurrences). In ancient Near Eastern legal texts, burning is likewise a rare punishment, but used in similar circumstances: for a *naditu* (see note on v. 15) who opens a tavern or enters a tavern to drink beer, and for incest with one's mother. This was a most serious punishment since it probably precluded proper burial.

him this story:^d “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. ¹⁸But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

¹⁹When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger.^e

²⁰Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison,^f the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.^g ²²So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.^h ²³The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.ⁱ

The Cupbearer and the Baker

40 Some time later, the cupbearer^j and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. ²Pharaoh was angry^k with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard,^l in the same prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph,^m and he attended them.

After they had been in custody for some time, ⁵each of the two men — the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison — had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.ⁿ

39:17 ^dEx 23:1, 7; Ps 101:5
39:19 ^ePr 6:34
39:20 ^fGe 40:3; Ps 105:18
39:21 ^gEx 3:21
39:22 ^hver 4
40:1 ⁱNe 1:11
40:2 ^kPr 16:14, 15
40:3 ^jGe 39:20
40:4 ^mGe 39:4
40:5 ⁿGe 41:11

40:7 ^oNe 2:2
40:8 ^pGe 41:8, 15
^qGe 41:16; Da 2:22, 28, 47
40:12
^rGe 41:12, 15, 25; Da 2:36; 4:19
40:14 ^sLk 23:42
^tJos 2:12; 1Sa 20:14, 42; 1Ki 2:7
40:15
^uGe 37:26-28

⁶When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. ⁷So he asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why do you look so sad today?”^o

⁸“We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.”^p

Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God?^q Tell me your dreams.”

⁹So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, “In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, ¹⁰and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh’s cup and put the cup in his hand.”

¹²“This is what it means,^r” Joseph said to him. “The three branches are three days. ¹³Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴But when all goes well with you, remember me^s and show me kindness;^t mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. ¹⁵I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews,^u and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.”

¹⁶When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, “I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. ¹⁷In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods

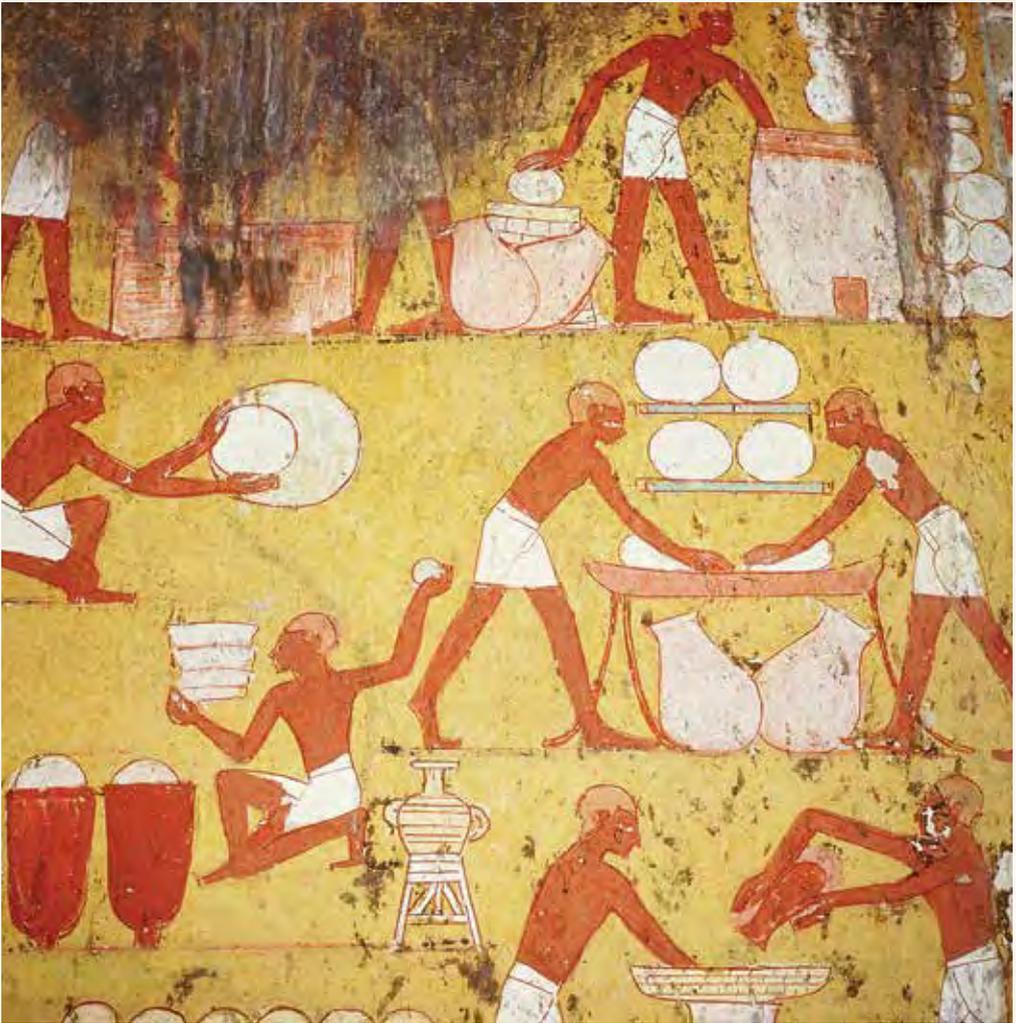
^a 16 Or three wicker baskets

39:20 *where the king’s prisoners were confined.* Jails were not common in the ancient world since imprisonment was not a standard punishment for crimes. If Potiphar truly believed that Joseph, his slave, was guilty of sexually assaulting his wife, execution would have been the swift and normal response. Instead, Joseph was confined where political prisoners were kept to await trial, judgment or execution. Since Potiphar was referred to as the “captain of the guard” (v. 1) and later Joseph met Pharaoh’s other officials in the house of the captain of the guard (40:3), it appears that Joseph was detained under Potiphar’s supervision and was there again given authority. In other words, Joseph was transferred to another part of Potiphar’s house. That does not mean that his imprisonment was a farce, but it suggests that Potiphar’s anger may well have been directed toward his wife and that after an adequate show of indignation, Joseph was gradually moved into a position of authority once again.

40:2 *the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.* Though these titles may in part be ceremonial, these two men had overall responsibility for what was served to the king. The potential for assassination attempts through the king’s food and drink was real and constant, so these officials not only needed to be incorruptible themselves, but also had to be able to hire people above reproach and identify

attempts at infiltration of the staff by enemies of the king. The text is silent concerning their offense, but since both were responsible for meals it seems logical to speculate that the king may have gotten sick from a meal.

40:5 *each dream had a meaning of its own.* Dreams were considered important vehicles of divine communication in the ancient world (see note on 37:5). Trained specialists interpreted the dreams of important people and paying customers using “dream books,” compiled both in Egypt and Mesopotamia. These books were consulted for the meaning of symbols in dreams. The Egyptian books typically indicate that a particular element in the dream is good or bad. Mesopotamian dream books offer ritual remedies. The specialists depended on this literature because the gods did not reveal the interpretation of the dreams. Joseph, however, has no knowledge of the “science” and no access to the literature; he relies on God for the interpretation of the dream. The interpretation he offers nevertheless uses principles well known from the literature. For instance, the idea that the number of items indicates the number of days/years (vv. 12,18) has precedent in the literature. The symbols in these dreams are similar to some of those found in the dream books. A full goblet (v. 11), e.g., is indicative of having a name and offspring. Carrying fruit on one’s head (cf. v. 16) is indicative of sorrow.



Painting in the tomb of Qenamun, West Thebes, depicts bakers mixing, kneading dough and filling bread molds. The chief baker (Ge 40:2) would have overseen these types of activities.

Werner Forman Archive/E. Strouhal/Glow Images

for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.”

¹⁸“This is what it means,” Joseph said. “The three baskets are three days.”¹⁹ Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head^w and impale your body on a pole. And the birds will eat away your flesh.”

²⁰Now the third day was Pharaoh’s birthday,^x and he gave a feast for all his officials.^y

40:18 ^vver 12

40:19 ^wver 13

40:20

^xMt 14:6-10

^yMk 6:21

40:21 ^zver 13

40:22 ^aver 19

^bPs 105:19

40:23

^cJob 19:14;

^dEcc 9:15

He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: ²¹He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand^z— ²²but he impaled the chief baker,^a just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.^b

²³The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.^c

40:20 *Pharaoh’s birthday.* No evidence for celebrations surrounding the birthday of a pharaoh is known until the first millennium BC. The day of birth may refer to the anniversary of his accession or coronation as king (cf. Ps 2:7), for which there is evidence as early as the Sixth Dynasty (second half of the third millennium).

40:22 *impaled the chief baker.* The Hebrew verb used here refers to being hanged. Hanging in the ancient

world was generally not a means of execution, but an additional indignity in the treatment of a corpse. The corpse would be hung in some way (often impaled on a stick) to be devoured by insects, birds, and animals of prey. Here the execution was carried out by beheading (v. 19; cf. 15a 31:9–10) and then the body was hung out to be devoured.

Pharaoh's Dreams

41 When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream:^d He was standing by the Nile, ²when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat,^e and they grazed among the reeds.^f ³After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. ⁴And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

⁵He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. ⁶After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. ⁷The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream.

⁸In the morning his mind was troubled,^g so he sent for all the magicians^h and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

⁹Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. ¹⁰Pharaoh was once angry with

41:1 ^dGe 20:3
41:2 ^ever 26
^fIsa 19:6
41:8 ^gDa 2:1, 3;
⁴5; ¹⁹Ex 7:11,
22; ^{Da} 1:20; 2:2,
27; 4:7

41:10 ⁱGe 40:2
^jGe 39:20
41:11 ^kGe 40:5
41:12 ^lGe 40:12
41:13
^mGe 40:22
41:14
ⁿPs 105:20;
^{Da} 2:25
41:15 ^oDa 5:16
41:16
^pGe 40:8;
^{Da} 2:30;
^{Ac} 3:12; ^{2Co} 3:5

his servants,^l and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard.^j ¹¹Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.^k ¹²Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream.^l ¹³And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled.^m”

¹⁴So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon.ⁿ When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

¹⁵Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.”^o

¹⁶“I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”^p

¹⁷Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, ¹⁸when out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed

41:1 *Pharaoh.* It is impossible (given the insufficient data) to identify the pharaoh of the Joseph story, who throughout is simply called “Pharaoh.” The term “Pharaoh” (= “great house”) originally referred to the palace and is not attested as a designation for the king of Egypt until the fifteenth century BC. Even then, for the next 500 years or so it was not used with the name of the king, but stood alone as here and in Exodus. It is not until the tenth century BC that it is used in combination with a personal name. The general chronology locates Joseph in the period known as the Middle Kingdom (first quarter of second millennium BC) or the Second Intermediate Period (second quarter of the second millennium BC). Those who feel that a precise chronology can be derived from the Biblical record place Joseph in the reign of Amenemhet II or Senusret (Sesostris) II or III. *a dream.* A king’s dream is always of special import, and he customarily employed dream specialists to interpret the dream and offer advice as to how to proceed. It was of particular importance if a dream were repeated, and a number of examples are known from the literature. Just as Pharaoh had a double dream here, Gudea, king of Lagash (around 2000 BC), had a double dream concerning the building of a temple. In a Mari letter, the king is warned twice (given to someone else on consecutive nights) that he should not rebuild a temple in Terqa. In the Gilgamesh Epic at the end of tablet 1, Gilgamesh has a double dream about his upcoming encounter with Enkidu. In tablet 4 he has a sequence of five dreams concerning the upcoming encounter with the guardian, Huwawa. In the Babylonian “Poem of the Righteous Sufferer” (*Ludlul bel Nemeqi*), the sufferer receives three dreams informing him that he has been cleansed from his offense. In these examples multiple dreams give warning (Mari), inform concerning the future (Gilgamesh), and offer absolution (“Righteous Sufferer”). Pharaoh’s dreams contain the first two of these.

41:8 *magicians and wise men.* “Magicians” (*hartummim*) is a technical term that refers to the specialists centered in

the “House of Life,” where the dream interpretation manuals were stored and studied. This term is constructed from an Egyptian title referring to a chief lector priest (*hry-tp hry-hb*). This same term is used in late (Ptolemaic) literature to describe Imhotep, the famous Egyptian architect from the Third Dynasty (middle of the third millennium BC) who was also the high priest of Heliopolis. Another famous Egyptian lector priest was the prophet Neferti, who rehearses the troubled times of the First Intermediate Period at the end of the third millennium BC.

Egyptians, like the Mesopotamians and Hittites, had guilds of magicians whose tasks included both medicinal procedures and oneiromancy (divination based upon dreams). They used exorcism to frighten away gods and demons, and used incantations and curses to transfer evil to or from someone or somewhere. Thousands of texts have been discovered containing protection spells, as well as objects such as amulets, dolls, incantation bowls and figurines (and the recipes to create them), which were used in magical rituals. Mesopotamians distinguished between “black” (harmful) and “white” (helpful) magic, and thus practitioners were divided into “sorcerers” and “magicians”/“wise men,” respectively, but Egyptians did not draw this distinction. Although their primary task was medical, Egyptian magicians sometimes employed a less respectful manner toward the gods, including spells to help a soul escape the underworld as seen in the “Book of the Dead.”

It is unusual in Egypt for Pharaoh to be in need of a dream interpreter. Pharaoh was considered divine, so when the gods communicated with him through dreams, the meaning should have been obvious.

41:14 *shaved.* As Egyptian monuments certify, male Egyptians were characteristically clean-shaven and at times shaved their heads as well (bald or close-cropped), though they would then at times wear wigs made of human hair. The text here is unclear concerning the extent to which Joseph was shaved.

among the reeds. ¹⁹After them, seven other cows came up—scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. ²¹But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before. Then I woke up.

²²“In my dream I saw seven heads of grain, full and good, growing on a single stalk. ²³After them, seven other heads sprouted—withered and thin and scorched by the east wind. ²⁴The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven good heads. I told this to the magicians, but none of them could explain it to me.”^q

²⁵Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.”^r ²⁶The seven good cows^s are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. ²⁷The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.^t

²⁸“It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹Seven years of great abundance^u are coming throughout the land of Egypt, ³⁰but seven years of famine^v will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land.”^w ³¹The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the

41:24 ^qver 8
41:25 ^rDa 2:45
41:26 ^sver 2
41:27
^tGe 12:10;
 2Ki 8:1
41:29 ^uver 47
41:30 ^vver 54;
 Ge 47:13
^wver 56

41:32
^xNu 23:19;
 Isa 46:10-11
41:33 ^yver 39
41:34 ^z1Sa 8:15
^aver 48
41:35 ^bver 48
41:36 ^cver 56
41:37
^dGe 45:16
41:38
^eNu 27:18;
 Job 32:8;
 Da 4:8-9, 18;
 5:11, 14
41:40
^fPs 105:21-22;
 Ac 7:10

famine that follows it will be so severe. ³²The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided^x by God, and God will do it soon.

³³“And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man^y and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. ³⁴Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth^z of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance.^a ³⁵They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food.^b ³⁶This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt,^c so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.”

³⁷The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials.^d ³⁸So Pharaoh asked them, “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?^e”^e

³⁹Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders.^f Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.”

Joseph in Charge of Egypt

⁴¹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I hereby put you in charge of the whole land

^a 38 Or of the gods

41:27 *seven years of famine.* Extended famines were known in Egypt. If the nineteenth century BC is the time period of Joseph, it may be of interest that there is evidence of massive irrigation projects in the Faiyum area designed to reclaim additional land for farming (probably during the reign of Senuwret II). It might also be noted that during the reign of Amenemhet III around 1800 BC, a number of years show record high levels of the Nile during the inundation (reaching as high as 16 feet [5 meters]), but in succeeding years it declined markedly so that ten years later it was only 1.5 feet (0.5 meters). Either of these events could conceivably be related to the system suggested and administered by Joseph, though there is no conclusive evidence to support such a connection.

41:34 *appoint commissioners.* In Egypt as well as in the rest of the ancient Near East, incantations were generally used to avoid the negative consequences portended by dreams. Here, in contrast, Joseph offers a strategy to counteract the effect of the dream. In the nineteenth century BC, Senuwret III is known for reducing the power of the nomarchs (provincial governors) to restore a more centralized government. In the process a new “bureau of the vizier” and a new bureaucracy were established involving new commissioners. Again, there is no evidence to associate this with Joseph, but it demonstrates that periodic modifications in the bureaucracy were not uncommon.

41:40 *in charge of my palace.* Pharaoh’s initial appointment gives Joseph authority in the palace based on the

recognition of the Spirit of God in Joseph (v. 38). The combination of insight (indicated by the dream interpretation) and wisdom (indicated by the proposed strategy) were sufficient to conclude that Joseph enjoyed divine favor—a good reason to keep him close to the throne.

In Egyptian documents, the administrative second-in-command over Egypt is the vizier, known as the “Overseer of the Royal Estates.” Joseph’s new role, however, may not be quite as lofty as that. There are other posts that could make the claim of being second-in-command in the area of their responsibility. This is similar to a company today that has a President and CEO, and a staff of vice presidents: Vice President of Production, Vice President of Marketing, Vice President of Legal, etc. Each of these individuals could legitimately claim to be second-in-command in his or her particular area and to be set in charge of the entire company in the area of his or her jurisdiction. Similarly, numerous Egyptian nobles could serve in offices and bear titles that identified them as second only to Pharaoh. Such titles include “Great Favorite of the Lord of the Two Lands” and “Foremost Among His Courtiers.”

One of the most appropriate known titles that describes Joseph’s duties is “Overseer of the Granaries of Upper and Lower Egypt.” It is not unusual to find accounts of officials who were elevated from lowly status to high positions of authority.

41:41 *in charge of the whole land of Egypt.* Joseph is given authority that is neither municipal nor regional.

of Egypt.”⁹ ⁴²Then Pharaoh took his signet ring^h from his finger and put it on Joseph’s finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.ⁱ ⁴³He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command,^a and people shouted before him, “Make way^{b!}!”^j Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

⁴⁴Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt.”^k ⁴⁵Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On,^c to be his wife.^l And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt.

⁴⁶Joseph was thirty years old^m when he entered the serviceⁿ of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh’s presence and traveled throughout Egypt. ⁴⁷During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. ⁴⁸Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. ⁴⁹Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.

⁵⁰Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On.^o ⁵¹Joseph named his firstborn^p Manasse^d and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” ⁵²The second son he named Ephraim^q and said, “It is because God has made me fruitful^r in the land of my suffering.”

⁵³The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end,⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began,⁵ just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. ⁵⁵When all Egypt began to feel the famine,^t the people cried to Pharaoh for

41:41 ^gGe 42:6; Da 6:3
41:42 ^hEst 3:10
ⁱDa 5:7, 16, 29
41:43 ^jEst 6:9
41:44
^kPs 105:22
41:45 ^lver 50; Ge 46:20, 27
41:46
^mGe 37:2
ⁿ1Sa 16:21; Da 1:19
41:50
^oGe 46:20; 48:5
41:51
^pGe 48:14, 18, 20
41:52 ^qGe 48:1, 5; 50:23
^rGe 17:6; 28:3; 49:22
41:54 ^sver 30; Ps 105:11; Ac 7:11
41:55 ^tDt 32:24

^uver 41
41:56
^vGe 12:10
41:57
^wGe 42:5; 47:15
42:1 ^xAc 7:12
42:2 ^yGe 43:8
42:4 ^zver 38
42:5 ^aGe 41:57
^bGe 12:10; Ac 7:11
42:6 ^cGe 41:41
^dGe 37:10
42:7 ^ever 30
42:8 ^fGe 37:2
42:9 ^gGe 37:2

food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph and do what he tells you.”^u ⁵⁶When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine^v was severe throughout Egypt. ⁵⁷And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph,^w because the famine was severe everywhere.

Joseph’s Brothers Go to Egypt

42 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt,^x he said to his sons, “Why do you just keep looking at each other?”² He continued, “I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.”^y

³Then ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him.^z ⁵So Israel’s sons were among those who went to buy grain,^a for there was famine in the land of Canaan also.^b

⁶Now Joseph was the governor of the land,^c the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.^d ⁷As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them.^e “Where do you come from?” he asked.

“From the land of Canaan,” they replied, “to buy food.”

⁸Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.^f ⁹Then he remembered his dreams^g about them and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

^a 43 Or in the chariot of his second-in-command; or in his second chariot ^b 43 Or Bow down ^c 45 That is, Heliopolis; also in verse 50 ^d 51 Manasseh sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for forget. ^e 52 Ephraim sounds like the Hebrew for twice fruitful.

41:42 – 43 The signet ring allows Joseph to make decisions and authorize them in the name of Pharaoh. The clothing, jewelry and transportation all designate his high station.

41:45 Joseph’s renaming and his marriage into a priestly family give him a new identity as an Egyptian noble. On. This city (reflecting Egyptian *lunu*) is later known as Heliopolis and is one of the most revered of Egypt’s ancient cities (along with Memphis and Thebes). It is located just north of modern Cairo at the base of the Nile delta.

42:9 *You are spies!* Semites/Asiatics were often distrusted by the Egyptians, so this is not an unusual charge. The Egyptians referred to them by various epithets such as “sand dwellers” and “throat slitters” and considered them wild and uncivilized.

But for what purpose would they be spying on Egypt?

It is not likely that the Egyptians feared invasion from Canaan, though they may have been wary of limited raids. Since we use the word “spy” mostly for military intelligence, an alternate translation here might be “scouts.” Economic motives would be more logical than military ones. Fields and storehouses could be plundered. What might ostensibly be a request for grain could serve as a guise for discovering what supplies of grain existed and how they might be ransacked. Reflections on the First Intermediate Period (last century and a half of the third millennium BC) in works such as the Instructions of Merikare and the Prophecy of Neferti reveal the social unrest caused by unruly foreign elements infiltrating Egyptian society. The result was increased attention to fortification of the Nile delta during the Middle Kingdom period (2100–1800 BC).

¹⁰“No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.”

¹²“No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

¹³But they replied, “Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.”^h

¹⁴Joseph said to them, “It is just as I told you: You are spies!¹⁵ And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives,ⁱ you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth.^j If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!” ¹⁷And he put them all in custody^k for three days.

¹⁸On the third day, Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God:^l ¹⁹If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. ²⁰But you must bring your youngest brother to me,^m so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.” This they proceeded to do.

²¹They said to one another, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother.ⁿ We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress^o has come on us.”

²²Reuben replied, “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy?^p But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting^q for his blood.”^r ²³They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

²⁴He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.^s

²⁵Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain,^t to put each man’s silver back in his sack,^u and to give them provisions for their journey.^v After this was done for them, ²⁶they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left.

²⁷At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his sil-

42:13
^hGe 37:30, 33;
 44:20
42:15
ⁱ1Sa 17:55
42:16 ^jver 11
42:17 ^kGe 40:4
42:18
^lLev 20:11;
 Lev 25:43
42:20 ^mver 15,
 34; Ge 43:5;
 44:23
42:21
ⁿGe 37:26-28
^oHos 5:15
42:22
^pGe 37:21-
 22 ^qGe 9:5
^r1Ki 2:32;
 2Ch 24:22;
 Ps 9:12
42:24 ^sver 13;
 Ge 43:14, 23;
 45:14-15
42:25 ^tGe 43:2
^uGe 44:1, 8
^vRo 12:17, 20-21

42:27
^wGe 43:21-22
42:28
^xGe 43:23
42:30 ^yver 7
42:31 ^zver 11
42:33 ^aver 19,
 20
42:34
^bGe 34:10
42:35
^cGe 48:12,
 15, 18
42:36
^dGe 43:14
42:38
^eGe 37:33
^fver 4
^gGe 37:35
^hGe 44:29, 34
43:1 ⁱGe 12:10;
 41:56-57

ver in the mouth of his sack.^w ²⁸“My silver has been returned,” he said to his brothers. “Here it is in my sack.”

Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, “What is this that God has done to us?”^x

²⁹When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, ³⁰“The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us^y and treated us as though we were spying on the land. ³¹But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we are not spies.’^z ³²We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan.”

³³“Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, ‘This is how I will know whether you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go.’^a ³⁴But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade^a in the land.”^b

³⁵As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man’s sack was his pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened.^c ³⁶Their father Jacob said to them, “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin.^d Everything is against me!”

³⁷Then Reuben said to his father, “You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back.”

³⁸But Jacob said, “My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead^e and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him^f on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave^g in sorrow.”^h

The Second Journey to Egypt

43 Now the famine was still severe in the land.ⁱ ²So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go back and buy us a little more food.”

³But Judah said to him, “The man warned us solemnly, ‘You will not see my face again unless your brother is with

^a 34 Or move about freely

42:25 *each man’s silver.* In supplying each of the brothers with both the grain and their silver, Joseph confirmed the accusation that they were scouts, intent on stealing grain (see previous note). Frequently we might see trade

in grain or herds (rather than silver), but Jacob’s family had no grain, and the herds were difficult to transport. It is no surprise, then, that they brought silver with which to trade.

you.^j ⁴If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. ⁵But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, ‘You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.’^k”

⁶Israel asked, “Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?”

⁷They replied, “The man questioned us closely about ourselves and our family. ‘Is your father still living?’^l he asked us. ‘Do you have another brother?’^m We simply answered his questions. How were we to know he would say, ‘Bring your brother down here?’”

⁸Then Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die.ⁿ ⁹I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life.^o ¹⁰As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice.”

¹¹Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift^p—a little balm^q and a little honey, some spices^r and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds. ¹²Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks.^s Perhaps it was a mistake. ¹³Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. ¹⁴And may God Almighty^{at} grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you.^u As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”^v

¹⁵So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried^w down to Egypt and presented themselves^x to Joseph. ¹⁶When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house,^y “Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare a meal;^z they are to eat with me at noon.”

¹⁷The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph’s house. ¹⁸Now the men were frightened^a when they were taken to his house. They thought, “We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys.”

¹⁹So they went up to Joseph’s steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. ²⁰“We beg your pardon, our lord,” they said, “we came down here the first

43:3 ^jGe 42:15; 44:23
43:5 ^kGe 42:15; 2Sa 3:13
43:7 ^lver 27
^mGe 42:13
43:8 ⁿGe 42:2; Ps 33:18-19
43:9 ^oGe 42:37; 44:32;
Phm 1:18-19
43:11
^pGe 32:20; Pr 18:16
^qGe 37:25; Jer 8:22
^r1Ki 10:2
43:12
^sGe 42:25
43:14 ^tGe 17:1; 28:3; 35:11
^uGe 42:24
^vEst 4:16
43:15
^wGe 45:9,13
^xGe 47:2, 7
43:16 ^yGe 44:1, 4, 12 ^zver 31; Lk 15:23
43:18
^aGe 42:35

time to buy food.^b ²¹But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver—the exact weight—in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us.^c ²²We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don’t know who put our silver in our sacks.”

²³“It’s all right,” he said. “Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks:^d I received your silver.” Then he brought Sim-eon out to them.^e

²⁴The steward took the men into Joseph’s house,^f gave them water to wash their feet^g and provided fodder for their donkeys. ²⁵They prepared their gifts for Joseph’s arrival at noon, because they had heard that they were to eat there.

²⁶When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts^h they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground.ⁱ ²⁷He asked them how they were, and then he said, “How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?”^j

²⁸They replied, “Your servant our father is still alive and well.” And they bowed down, prostrating themselves before him.^k

²⁹As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother’s son, he asked, “Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?”^l And he said, “God be gracious to you,^m my son.”

³⁰Deeply movedⁿ at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept^o there.

³¹After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself,^p said, “Serve the food.”

³²They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews,^q for that is detestable to Egyptians.^r ³³The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. ³⁴When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s.^s So they feasted and drank freely with him.

A Silver Cup in a Sack

44 Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack.^t ²Then put my

43:20 ^bGe 42:3
43:21 ^cver 15; Ge 42:27,35
43:23
^dGe 42:28
^eGe 42:24
43:24 ^fver 16
^gGe 18:4; 24:32
43:26 ^hMt 2:11
ⁱGe 37:7, 10
43:27 ^jver 7
43:28 ^kGe 37:7
43:29
^lGe 42:13
^mNu 6:25; Ps 67:1
43:30
ⁿJn 11:33,38
^oGe 42:24; 45:2, 14, 15; 46:29
43:31 ^pGe 45:1
43:32 ^qGal 2:12
^rGe 46:34; Ex 8:26
43:34 ^sGe 37:3; 45:22
44:1 ^tGe 42:25

^a 14 Hebrew *El-Shaddai*

cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, along with the silver for his grain." And he did as Joseph said.

³As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. ⁴They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, "Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid good with evil?'^u ⁵Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination?^v This is a wicked thing you have done."^w

⁶When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. ⁷But they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! ⁸We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks.^w So why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house? ⁹If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die;^x and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves."

¹⁰"Very well, then," he said, "let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame."

¹¹Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. ¹²Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.^y ¹³At this, they tore their clothes.^z Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

¹⁴Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him.^a ¹⁵Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?^b"

¹⁶"What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves^c—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.^d"

¹⁷But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."

¹⁸Then Judah went up to him and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, let me

44:4 ^uPs 35:12

44:5 ^vGe 30:27; Dt 18:10-14

44:8 ^wGe 42:25; 43:21

44:9 ^xGe 31:32

44:12 ^yver 2

44:13 ^zGe 37:29;

Nu 14:6;

2Sa 1:11

44:14 ^aGe 37:7;

10

44:15 ^bver 5;

Ge 30:27

44:16 ^cver 9;

Ge 43:18^dver 2

44:18

^eGe 18:30;

Ex 32:22

44:19 ^fGe 43:7

44:20 ^gGe 37:3

^hGe 37:33

ⁱGe 42:13

44:21

^jGe 42:15

44:22

^kGe 37:35

44:23 ^lGe 43:5

44:25

^mGe 43:2

44:27

ⁿGe 46:19

44:28

^oGe 37:33

44:29

^pGe 42:38

44:30

^q1Sa 18:1

44:32 ^rGe 43:9

44:33

^sGe 43:18

^tJn 15:13

44:34 ^uEst 8:6

45:1 ^vGe 43:31

speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry^e with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. ¹⁹My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?'^f ²⁰And we answered, 'We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age.^g His brother is dead,^h and he is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him.'ⁱ

²¹"Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.'^j ²²And we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.'^k ²³But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.'^l ²⁴When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.

²⁵"Then our father said, 'Go back and buy a little more food.'^m ²⁶But we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'

²⁷"Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons.ⁿ ²⁸One of them went away from me, and I said, 'He has surely been torn to pieces.'^o And I have not seen him since. ²⁹If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.'^p

³⁰"So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life,^q ³¹sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. ³²Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!'^r

³³"Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave^s in place of the boy,^t and let the boy return with his brothers. ³⁴How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father."^u

Joseph Makes Himself Known

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself^v before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no

44:5 *cup... for divination.* The idea that a cup was used for divination suggests that divination took place by observing liquids poured into the cup (either the shapes of oil on water or the ripples of the water, to name a few techniques known from Mesopotamia). Little is known

of these techniques in Egyptian practice. Divination was a means of acquiring information. It is of interest that Joseph acquired information by means of the cup, not by pouring liquid into it, but by using it to test his brothers, thus using observation at a different level.

one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ²And he wept^w so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.^x

³Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?"^y But his brothers were not able to answer him,^z because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!^a ⁵And now, do not be distressed^b and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here,^c because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.^d ⁶For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant^e on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.^{af}

⁸"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father^g to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.^h ⁹Now hurry back to my father and say to him, "This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay.ⁱ ¹⁰You shall live in the region of Goshen^j and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. ¹¹I will provide for you there,^k because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.^l

¹²"You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. ¹³Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.^l"

¹⁴Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. ¹⁵And he kissed^m all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.ⁿ

¹⁶When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come,^o Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. ¹⁷Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, ¹⁸and bring

45:2 ^wGe 29:11
^xver 16;
Ge 46:29
45:3 ^yAc 7:13
^zver 15
45:4 ^aGe 37:28
45:5 ^bGe 42:21
^cGe 42:22
^dver 7-8;
Ge 50:20;
Ps 105:17
45:7 ^e2Ki 19:4,
30, 31;
Isa 10:20, 21;
Mic 4:7; Zep 2:7
^fEx 15:2;
Est 4:14;
Isa 25:9
45:8
^gJdg 17:10
^hGe 41:41
45:9 ⁱGe 43:10
45:10
^jGe 46:28, 34;
47:1
45:11
^kGe 47:12
45:13 ^lAc 7:14
45:15
^mLk 15:20
ⁿver 3
45:16 ^oAc 7:13

45:18
^pGe 27:28;
46:34; 47:6, 11,
27; Nu 18:12, 29
^qPs 37:19
45:19 ^rGe 46:5
45:21
^sGe 42:25
45:22 ^tGe 37:3;
43:34
45:24
^uGe 42:21-22
45:26
^vGe 44:28
45:27 ^wver 19
46:1 ^xGe 21:14;
28:10
^yGe 26:24;
28:13; 31:42
46:2 ^zGe 15:1;
Job 33:14-15
^aGe 22:1; 31:11
46:3 ^bGe 28:13
^cGe 12:2;
Dt 26:5 ^dEx 1:7
46:4 ^eGe 28:15;
48:21; Ex 3:8
^fGe 50:1, 24

your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt^p and you can enjoy the fat of the land.^q

¹⁹"You are also directed to tell them, 'Do this: Take some carts^r from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. ²⁰Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.'^s

²¹So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he also gave them provisions for their journey.^s ²²To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels^t of silver and five sets of clothes.^t ²³And this is what he sent to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey. ²⁴Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Don't quarrel on the way!"^u

²⁵So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. ²⁶They told him, "Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt." Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them.^v ²⁷But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts^w Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸And Israel said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."^w

Jacob Goes to Egypt

46 So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba,^x he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.^y

²And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night^z and said, "Jacob! Jacob!"

"Here I am,"^a he replied.

³"I am God, the God of your father,"^b he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation^c there.^d ⁴I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again.^e And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes.^f"

⁵Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel's

^a 7 Or *save you as a great band of survivors* ^b 22 That is, about 7 1/2 pounds or about 3.5 kilograms

45:8 *father to Pharaoh.* The Egyptian title *it-ntr* ("father of the god") refers to a variety of officials and priests. Since Pharaoh was considered divine, it is likely that "father to Pharaoh" carries a similar connotation of advisor.

45:10 *region of Goshen.* In Egyptian texts the heaviest concentrations of Semites occur in the eastern delta region closest to Canaan. This corresponds to the Biblical texts in which the region of Goshen is equated to

the "district of Rameses" (47:11), which is certainly in the delta region. In the early chapters of Exodus, this is the location of the Israelite labors in towns such as Pithom and Rameses. The region is bounded by the branches of the Nile delta on the west and the series of lakes from the Mediterranean down to the Red Sea on the east. Crossing east to west through the center of it is the Wadi Tumilat.

sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts⁹ that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. ⁶So Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt,^h taking with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan. ⁷Jacob brought with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters — all his offspring.ⁱ

⁸These are the names of the sons of Israel^j (Jacob and his descendants) who went to Egypt:

- Reuben the firstborn of Jacob.
- ⁹The sons of Reuben:^k
Hanok, Pallu, Hezron and Karmi.
- ¹⁰The sons of Simeon:^l
Jemuel,^m Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman.
- ¹¹The sons of Levi:ⁿ
Gershon, Kohath and Merari.
- ¹²The sons of Judah:^o
Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez and Zerah (but Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan).
The sons of Perez:^p
Hezron and Hamul.
- ¹³The sons of Issachar:^q
Tola, Puah,^{ar} Jashub^b and Shimron.
- ¹⁴The sons of Zebulun:^s
Sered, Elon and Jahleel.
- ¹⁵These were the sons Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram,^c besides his daughter Dinah. These sons and daughters of his were thirty-three in all.
- ¹⁶The sons of Gad:^t
Zephon,^{du} Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi and Areli.
- ¹⁷The sons of Asher:^v
Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi and Beriah. Their sister was Serah.
The sons of Beriah:
Heber and Malkiel.
- ¹⁸These were the children born to Jacob by Zilpah,^w whom Laban had given to his daughter Leah^x — sixteen in all.
- ¹⁹The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel:
Joseph and Benjamin.^y ²⁰In Egypt, Manasseh^z and Ephraim^a were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On.^e

46:5 ^gGe 45:19
46:6 ^hDt 26:5;
 Jos 24:4;
 Ps 105:23;
 Isa 52:4; Ac 7:15
46:7 ⁱGe 45:10
46:8 ^jEx 1:1;
 Nu 26:4
46:9 ^k1Ch 5:3
46:10
^lGe 29:33;
 Nu 26:14
^mEx 6:15
46:11
ⁿGe 29:34;
 Nu 3:17
46:12
^oGe 29:35
^p1Ch 2:5;
 Mt 1:3
46:13
^qGe 30:18
^r1Ch 7:1
46:14
^sGe 30:20
46:16
^tGe 30:11
^uNu 26:15
46:17
^vGe 30:13;
 1Ch 7:30-31
46:18
^wGe 30:10
^xGe 29:24
46:19
^yGe 44:27
46:20
^zGe 41:51
^aGe 41:52

46:21
^bNu 26:38-41;
 1Ch 7:6-12; 8:1
46:25 ^cGe 30:8
^dGe 29:29
46:26 ^ever 5-7;
 Ex 1:5; Dt 10:22
46:27 ^fAc 7:14
46:28
^gGe 45:10
46:29
^hGe 45:14-15;
 Lk 15:20
46:31 ⁱGe 47:1
46:33 ^jGe 47:3

- ²¹The sons of Benjamin:^b
Bela, Beker, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim and Ard.
- ²²These were the sons of Rachel who were born to Jacob — fourteen in all.
- ²³The son of Dan:
Hushim.
- ²⁴The sons of Naphtali:
Jahziel, Guni, Jezer and Shillem.
- ²⁵These were the sons born to Jacob by Bilhah,^c whom Laban had given to his daughter Rachel^d — seven in all.
- ²⁶All those who went to Egypt with Jacob — those who were his direct descendants, not counting his sons' wives — numbered sixty-six persons.^e ²⁷With the two sons^f who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy^g in all.^f
- ²⁸Now Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to Goshen.^g When they arrived in the region of Goshen, ²⁹Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father^h and wept for a long time.^h
- ³⁰Israel said to Joseph, "Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive."
- ³¹Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and speak to Pharaoh and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were living in the land of Canaan, have come to me.'ⁱ ³²The men are shepherds; they tend livestock, and they have brought along their flocks and herds and everything they own.'^j ³³When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, 'What is your occupation?'^j ³⁴you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then

^a 13 Samaritan Pentateuch and Syriac (see also 1 Chron. 7:1); Masoretic Text *Puah* ^b 13 Samaritan Pentateuch and some Septuagint manuscripts (see also Num. 26:24 and 1 Chron. 7:1); Masoretic Text *lob* ^c 15 That is, Northwest Mesopotamia ^d 16 Samaritan Pentateuch and Septuagint (see also Num. 26:15); Masoretic Text *Ziphion* ^e 20 That is, Heliopolis ^f 27 Hebrew; Septuagint the *nine children* ^g 27 Hebrew (see also Exodus 1:5 and note); Septuagint (see also Acts 7:14) *seventy-five* ^h 29 Hebrew *around him*

46:34 *all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.* By identifying themselves as shepherds, Jacob's clan offers assurance that they are not coming to take Egyptian farmland or get involved in politics. Flocks and herds were kept by Egyptians during all periods and were used for meat, milk, and wool or hides, as well as for some sacrifices (more cattle than sheep and goats). They are depicted in reliefs, models and tomb paintings, remains are found in excavation, and deities were associated with

the ram and the cow (but not sheep or goats) — all demonstrating the pervasive penetration of these animals into Egyptian culture. In contrast, sheep and goats do not figure prominently in fables, metaphors or personal names, which indicates that they were considered rather common. It is difficult to ascertain whether shepherds were detested because of their associations with foreigners, with a low status in society, or with sheep and goats as



Egyptian painting at Beni Hasan of man with goats. Many depictions of flocks and herds have been discovered, demonstrating the pervasive penetration of these animals into Egyptian culture. It is difficult to ascertain whether shepherds were detested (Ge 46:34) because of their associations with foreigners, with a low status in society, or with sheep and goats as inferior animals that threatened farm land.

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you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen,^k for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.^l

47 Joseph went and told Pharaoh, “My father and brothers, with their flocks and herds and everything they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in Goshen.”^m ²He chose five of his brothers and presented them before Pharaoh.

³Pharaoh asked the brothers, “What is your occupation?”ⁿ

“Your servants are shepherds,” they replied to Pharaoh, “just as our fathers were.” ⁴They also said to him, “We have come to live here for a while,^o because the famine is severe in Canaan^p and your servants’ flocks have no pasture. So now, please let your servants settle in Goshen.”^q

⁵Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you, ⁶and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land.^r Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability,^s put them in charge of my own livestock.”

⁷Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed^a Pharaoh,^t ⁸Pharaoh asked him, “How old are you?”

⁹And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The years

46:34

^kGe 45:10

^lGe 43:32;

Ex 8:26

47:1 ^mGe 46:31

47:3 ⁿGe 46:33

47:4 ^oGe 15:13;

Dt 26:5

^pGe 43:1

^qGe 46:34

47:6 ^rGe 45:18

^sEx 18:21, 25

47:7 ^tver 10;

2Sa 14:22

47:9 ^uGe 25:7

^vHeb 11:9, 13

^wGe 35:28

47:10 ^xver 7

47:11 ^yEx 1:11;

12:37

47:12

^zGe 45:11

47:13

^aGe 41:30;

Ac 7:11

47:14

^bGe 41:56

47:15 ^cver 19;

Ex 16:3

of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty.^u My years have been few and difficult,^v and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers.^w ¹⁰Then Jacob blessed^b Pharaoh^x and went out from his presence.

¹¹So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses,^y as Pharaoh directed. ¹²Joseph also provided his father and his brothers and all his father’s household with food, according to the number of their children.^z

Joseph and the Famine

¹³There was no food, however, in the whole region because the famine was severe; both Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine.^a ¹⁴Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan in payment for the grain they were buying, and he brought it to Pharaoh’s palace.^b ¹⁵When the money of the people of Egypt and Canaan was gone, all Egypt came to Joseph and said, “Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes?^c Our money is all gone.”

¹⁶“Then bring your livestock,” said Joseph. “I will sell you food in exchange for your livestock, since your money is gone.”

^a 7 Or *greeted* ^b 10 Or *said farewell to*

inferior animals that threatened farm land. Extant Egyptian records offer no insight on this.

47:11 *district of Rameses.* At this period Rameses was not a common name and no city was yet so named. The pharaohs with the names Rameses do not come along until the thirteenth century BC. It is logical to conclude that this geographic name is supplied at a later period. The city of Rameses, Pi-Ramessé, is eventually going to be located at Qantir/Avaris (Tell ed-Dab’a, which has been

extensively excavated and provides much evidence of a Semitic population that lived there). The site was founded in the Twelfth Dynasty (1963–1786 BC), the most likely setting for Joseph. Despite the growing Syro-Palestinian population of this town over the next several centuries, no remains permit the identification of descendants of Abraham. The material culture is Canaanite and the religious practices show a syncretism of Canaanite and Egyptian elements.

¹⁷So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for their horses,^d their sheep and goats, their cattle and donkeys. And he brought them through that year with food in exchange for all their livestock.

¹⁸When that year was over, they came to him the following year and said, “We cannot hide from our lord the fact that since our money is gone and our livestock belongs to you, there is nothing left for our lord except our bodies and our land. ¹⁹Why should we perish before your eyes—we and our land as well? Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we with our land will be in bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate.”

²⁰So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh. The Egyptians, one and all, sold their fields, because the famine was too severe for them. The land became Pharaoh’s, ²¹and Joseph reduced the people to servitude,^a from one end of Egypt to the other. ²²However, he did not buy the land of the priests, because they received a regular allotment from Pharaoh and had food enough from the allotment^e Pharaoh gave them. That is why they did not sell their land.

²³Joseph said to the people, “Now that I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh, here is seed for you so you can plant the ground. ²⁴But when the crop comes in, give a fifth^f of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you may keep as seed for the fields and as food for yourselves and your households and your children.”

²⁵“You have saved our lives,” they said.

47:17 ^dEx 14:9
47:22
^eDt 14:28–29;
Ezr 7:24
47:24
^fGe 41:34

47:25 ^gGe 32:5
47:26 ^hver 22
47:27 ⁱGe 17:6;
46:3; Ex 1:7
47:28
^jPs 105:23
47:29 ^kDt 31:14
^lGe 24:2
^mGe 24:49
47:30
ⁿGe 49:29–
32; 50:5, 13;
Ac 7:15–16
47:31
^oGe 21:23
^pGe 24:3
^qHeb 11:21 *fm*;
1Ki 1:47
48:1 ^rGe 41:52
48:3 ^sGe 28:19

“May we find favor in the eyes of our lord;^g we will be in bondage to Pharaoh.”

²⁶So Joseph established it as a law concerning land in Egypt—still in force today—that a fifth of the produce belongs to Pharaoh. It was only the land of the priests that did not become Pharaoh’s.^h

²⁷Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.ⁱ

²⁸Jacob lived in Egypt^j seventeen years, and the years of his life were a hundred and forty-seven. ²⁹When the time drew near for Israel to die,^k he called for his son Joseph and said to him, “If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh^l and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness.^m Do not bury me in Egypt, ³⁰but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.”ⁿ

“I will do as you say,” he said.

³¹“Swear to me,”^o he said. Then Joseph swore to him,^p and Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.^q

Manasseh and Ephraim

48 Some time later Joseph was told, “Your father is ill.” So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim^r along with him. ²When Jacob was told, “Your son Joseph has come to you,” Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed.

³Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty^c appeared to me at Luz^s in the land of Ca-

^a 21 Samaritan Pentateuch and Septuagint (see also Vulgate); Masoretic Text and *he moved the people into the cities* ^b 31 Or *Israel bowed down at the head of his bed* ^c 3 Hebrew *EL-Shaddai*

47:19 *Buy us and our land.* Joseph’s policy suggests a shift from privately owned property to centralized ownership of property worked by tenant farmers. The Middle Kingdom and Early New Kingdom (2100–1500 BC) evidence large tracts of crown property administered by government officials. In this way centralization is in evidence as is the state-run redistributive economy. In the New Kingdom, much land gradually came under control of the temples. In that period, there was no longer any private property, but only personal rights to the use of property granted in trust for a land-owning institution such as the crown or temple.

Though it may appear as if Joseph’s policies were economically repressive, hard times require hard solutions. The text documents the sequence of how the people were impoverished by the famine (not by the government). First they spent all their money buying food, then they traded away their livestock, and finally they gave up their land and worked as tenant farmers. Their rent for the land was 20 percent of the produce—a lower than normal percentage in the ancient world. This was a progressive tax in that it was proportioned according to income. Theoretically, then, a prosperous farmer could have rebuilt his wealth when the famine ended, though it

is not clear whether he would have been allowed to buy back the land. This turned Egypt into a state in which all the wealth was centralized in the government. Despite the personal hardship and servitude that resulted, the people were grateful for their lives.

47:22 *priests ... received a regular allotment from Pharaoh.* Priests did not need to grow their own food, and therefore shortages did not drive them to sell their land. Instead, temples, like the kings, were owners of land and benefited from renting out the land to be farmed by laborers. Temple ownership of land is well documented in Egypt of all periods, but became extensive by the mid-second millennium BC.

47:29 *Do not bury me in Egypt.* Jacob’s sentiment reflects the extent to which he is tied to the land of Canaan, as it looks to both past and future. Since the ancestral burial ground is in Canaan, he will “rest with [his] fathers” (v. 30) by being buried with them, thus actualizing his solidarity with them. One’s burial place also serves as the focus for any ongoing care and remembrance after death. The request to be buried in Canaan thus serves as an indication that he sees the future of his descendants as connected to the covenant land—a statement of faith in God’s promise to bring his family back there.

naan, and there he blessed me^t and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers.^u I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.’

⁵“Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt^v before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine,^w just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. ⁶Any children born to you after them will be yours; in the territory they inherit they will be reckoned under the names of their brothers. ⁷As I was returning from Paddan,^a to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath” (that is, Bethlehem).^x

⁸When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, “Who are these?”

⁹“They are the sons God has given me here,”^y Joseph said to his father.

Then Israel said, “Bring them to me so I may bless^z them.”

¹⁰Now Israel’s eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see.^a So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them^b and embraced them.

¹¹Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too.”^c

¹²Then Joseph removed them from Israel’s knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. ¹³And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel’s left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel’s right hand,^d and brought them close to him. ¹⁴But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim’s head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh’s head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.^e

¹⁵Then he blessed^f Joseph and said,

“May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully,
the God who has been my shepherd^g
all my life to this day,

48:3 ¹Ge 28:13; 35:9-12
48:4 ^uGe 17:6
48:5
^vGe 41:50-52; 46:20 ^w1Ch 5:1; Jos 14:4
48:7 ^xGe 35:19
48:9 ^yGe 33:5
^zGe 27:4
48:10 ^aGe 27:1
^bGe 27:27
48:11
^cGe 50:23; Ps 128:6
48:13 ^dPs 110:1
48:14
^eGe 41:51
48:15 ^fGe 17:1
^gGe 49:24

48:16
^hHeb 11:21
ⁱGe 28:13
48:17 ^jJer 14
48:19
^kGe 17:20
^lGe 25:23
48:20
^mNu 2:18
ⁿNu 2:20; Ru 4:11
48:21
^oGe 26:3; 46:4
^pGe 28:13; 50:24
48:22
^qJos 24:32; Jn 4:5 ^rGe 37:8
49:1 ^sNu 24:14; Jer 23:20
49:2 ^tPs 34:11
49:3 ^uGe 29:32
^vDt 21:17;
Ps 78:51

¹⁶the Angel who has delivered me from all harm — may he bless these boys.^h May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,ⁱ and may they increase greatly on the earth.”

¹⁷When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim’s head^j he was displeased; so he took hold of his father’s hand to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. ¹⁸Joseph said to him, “No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.”

¹⁹But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great.^k Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he,^l and his descendants will become a group of nations.” ²⁰He blessed them that day and said,

“In your^b name will Israel pronounce this blessing:
‘May God make you like Ephraim^m and Manasseh.’ⁿ”

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

²¹Then Israel said to Joseph, “I am about to die, but God will be with you^{co} and take you^c back to the land of your^c fathers.^p ²²And to you I give one more ridge of land^{da} than to your brothers,^r the ridge I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow.”

Jacob Blesses His Sons

49:1-28Ref — Dt 33:1-29

49 Then Jacob called for his sons and said: “Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.^s

²“Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel.^t

³“Reuben, you are my firstborn,^u my might, the first sign of my strength,^v

^a 7 That is, Northwest Mesopotamia
^b 20 The Hebrew is singular. ^c 21 The Hebrew is plural. ^d 22 The Hebrew for ridge of land is identical with the place name Shechem.

48:22 ridge of land ... I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow. The Hebrew word *shekam* (NIV “ridge of land”; NIV text note, Septuagint, the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT) refers to the conquest of Shechem by Simeon and Levi (34:25 – 29). Jacob did not approve of this act and was not proud of it, but it was irreversible and undeniable. The land was therefore his to give, since it was taken in his name and by his clan. This justifies Jacob’s use of the first person (“I took”).

49:1 what will happen to you in days to come. As was

typical of patriarchal pronouncements, Jacob made statements concerning the future destiny of his sons. These were not prophecy, for they were not given in the name of deity. They forecasted the future. Like a weather forecaster or an economic forecaster, Jacob identified his expectations derived from observed indicators that were considered reliable and thus could be interpreted with a high level of probability. Words had power in the ancient world, and the very speaking of them, especially by someone in authority, was taken seriously.

excelling in honor, excelling in power.

⁴Turbulent as the waters,^w you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it.^x

⁵"Simeon and Levi are brothers — their swords^a are weapons of violence.^y

⁶Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly,^z for they have killed men in their anger^a and hamstringed oxen as they pleased.

⁷Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!

I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.^b

⁸"Judah,^b your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you.^c

⁹You are a lion's^d cub, Judah;^e you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness — who dares to rouse him?

¹⁰The scepter will not depart from Judah,^f

49:4 ^wIsa 57:20
^xGe 35:22;
Dt 27:20
49:5
^yGe 34:25;
Pr 4:17
49:6 ^zPr 1:15;
Eph 5:11
^aGe 34:26
49:7 ^bJos 19:1,
9; 21:1-42
49:8 ^cDt 33:7;
1Ch 5:2
49:9 ^dNu 24:9;
Eze 19:5;
Mic 5:8
^eRev 5:5
49:10
^fNu 24:17,19;
Ps 60:7

^gPs 2:9;
Isa 42:1,4
49:13
^hGe 30:20;
Dt 33:18-19;
Jos 19:10-11
49:14
ⁱGe 30:18

nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,^c until he to whom it belongs^d shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.^g

¹¹He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.

¹²His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.^e

¹³"Zebulun^h will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon.

¹⁴"Issachariⁱ is a rawboned^f donkey lying down among the sheep pens.^g

¹⁵When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor.

^a 5 The meaning of the Hebrew for this word is uncertain. ^b 8 *Judah* sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for *praise*. ^c 10 *Or from his descendants* ^d 10 *Or to whom tribute belongs*; the meaning of the Hebrew for this phrase is uncertain. ^e 12 *Or will be dull from wine, / his teeth white from milk* ^f 14 *Or strong* ^g 14 *Or the campfires; or the saddlebags*

49:7 *I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.* The tribes of Simeon and Levi were to be dispersed (not the individuals, of course), deprived of clearly identified land as a consequence of their violence in Shechem (ch. 34). This represents virtual disinheritance. Simeon is eventually assigned villages scattered in Judah's territory (Jos 19:1-9) and Levi, though having no claim to land, serves its priestly function from the bases known as the Levitical cities, which were distributed among the tribal territories (Nu 35).

49:8 *your father's sons will bow down to you.* This is the legal transfer of clan leadership to Judah. Though Joseph received the double portion of the inheritance (since Ephraim and Manasseh both inherited shares among Jacob's sons; see ch. 48), Judah would be the administrator of the undivided inheritance.

49:9 *Like a lion.* Lion imagery is common in the ancient Near East. There are lion/lioness cults in Egypt, particularly associated with On, where Joseph's in-laws were from. More important, the lion is used in Egypt as the symbol of the king. In Mesopotamia the lion is most often associated with the goddess Ishtar. The god Nergal carries a lion scepter, and numerous other gods are described using lion metaphors. The lion as a royal metaphor as well as an animal for the royal hunt is more familiar in Mesopotamia from the later Neo-Assyrian period, though it is not absent from the earlier periods. In these contexts, the image that the metaphor presents is one of fierceness, cruelty and power. This imagery has its focus on the male lion, which is prevalent in the art of the Levant. In contrast, rather than representing an immediate threat, the imagery associated with Judah invokes quiet power at rest, but a power that's not to be trifled with as both the cub and lioness are included.

49:11 *wash his garments in wine.* This imagery is suggestive of Judah's descendants having the blue/purple/red clothing often associated with royalty, though that coloring is usually achieved through the processing of murex snails (an expensive process because of the large number of snails needed to produce the dye).

The earliest written records concerning dyeing are from Nuzi in the mid-second millennium BC. The earliest evidence of the use of the snail for purple dye comes from seventeenth-century BC Crete. That suggests that at the time of the patriarchs, that technology for dyeing was unknown, yet dyeing itself was known because Egyptian tomb paintings show clothing with color patterns.

Prior to the discovery of murex-snail purple, might wine have been used for dyeing? Would red/purple have been associated with royalty? Royal women in the tomb of Ur from the end of the third millennium BC wore red-colored clothing, but no evidence suggests that wine was used for dyeing, though its staining effect would have been well recognized since wine was filtered through linen cloth.

49:13 *haven for ships.* Seafaring took place primarily from the north, where there were natural harbors. The difficulty with this verse is that Zebulun, to our knowledge, never had territory adjacent to the sea. The tribal allotment given him was in western lower Galilee, entirely landlocked, and 65 miles (100 kilometers) from Sidon. This would actually be a more appropriate description of the territory allotted to Asher, which stretched along the coast from Akko to Tyre. These apparent discrepancies suggest that this blessing does not reflect a later description of the territories as they existed after the conquest. There is no known period when Zebulun controlled the coastal regions.

- 16 “Dan^{aj} will provide justice for his people
as one of the tribes of Israel.
17 Dan^k will be a snake by the roadside,
a viper along the path,
that bites the horse’s heels
so that its rider tumbles backward.
18 “I look for your deliverance, LORD.^l
19 “Gad^{bm} will be attacked by a band of
raiders,
but he will attack them at their heels.
20 “Asher’sⁿ food will be rich;
he will provide delicacies fit for a king.
21 “Naphtali^o is a doe set free
that bears beautiful fawns.^c
22 “Joseph^p is a fruitful vine,
a fruitful vine near a spring,
whose branches climb over a wall.^d
23 With bitterness archers attacked him;
they shot at him with hostility.^q
24 But his bow remained steady,
his strong arms^r stayed^e limber,
because of the hand of the Mighty One
of Jacob,^s
because of the Shepherd, the Rock of
Israel,^t
25 because of your father’s God,^u who
helps you,
because of the Almighty,^f who
blesses you
with blessings of the skies above,
blessings of the deep springs below,^v
blessings of the breast and womb.
26 Your father’s blessings are greater
than the blessings of the ancient
mountains,
than^s the bounty of the age-old hills.
Let all these rest on the head of
Joseph,
on the brow of the prince among^h
his brothers.^w

- 27 “Benjamin^x is a ravenous wolf;
in the morning he devours the prey,
in the evening he divides the
plunder.”
28 All these are the twelve tribes of Is-
rael, and this is what their father said to
them when he blessed them, giving each
the blessing appropriate to him.

The Death of Jacob

29 Then he gave them these instruc-
tions:^y “I am about to be gathered to my
people.^z Bury me with my fathers^a in the
cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

49:16 ^jGe 30:6;
Dt 33:22;
Jdg 18:26-27
49:17
^kJdg 18:27
49:18
^lPs 119:166, 174
49:19
^mGe 30:11;
Dt 33:20;
1Ch 5:18
49:20
ⁿGe 30:13;
Dt 33:24
49:21
^oGe 30:8;
Dt 33:23
49:22
^pGe 30:24;
Dt 33:13-17
49:23
^qGe 37:24
49:24 ^rPs 18:34
^sPs 132:5, 5;
Isa 1:24; 41:10
^tIsa 28:16
49:25
^uGe 28:13
^vGe 27:28
49:26
^wDt 33:15-16
49:27
^xGe 35:18;
Jdg 20:12-13
49:29
^yGe 50:16
^zGe 25:8
^aGe 15:15;
47:30; 50:13

49:30 ^bGe 23:9
^cGe 23:20
49:31 ^dGe 25:9
^eGe 23:19
^fGe 35:29
49:33 ^gver 29;
Ge 25:8; Ac 7:15
50:1 ^hGe 46:4
50:2 ⁱver 26;
2Ch 16:14
50:3 ^jGe 37:34;
Nu 20:29;
Dt 34:8
50:5 ^kGe 47:31
^l2Ch 16:14;
Isa 22:16
^mGe 47:31
50:10
ⁿ2Sa 1:17;
Ac 8:2
^o1Sa 31:13;
Job 2:13

30 the cave in the field of Machpelah,^b near
Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought
along with the field^c as a burial place from
Ephron the Hittite. ³¹There Abraham^d and
his wife Sarah^e were buried, there Isaac
and his wife Rebekah^f were buried, and
there I buried Leah. ³²The field and the
cave in it were bought from the Hittites.¹”

³³When Jacob had finished giving in-
structions to his sons, he drew his feet up
into the bed, breathed his last and was
gathered to his people.⁹

50 Joseph threw himself on his fa-
ther and wept over him and kissed
him.^h ²Then Joseph directed the physi-
cians in his service to embalm his father
Israel. So the physicians embalmed him,ⁱ
³taking a full forty days, for that was the
time required for embalming. And the
Egyptians mourned for him seventy days.^j
⁴When the days of mourning had
passed, Joseph said to Pharaoh’s court,
“If I have found favor in your eyes, speak
to Pharaoh for me. Tell him, ⁵“My father
made me swear an oath^k and said, “I am
about to die; bury me in the tomb I dug
for myself^l in the land of Canaan.”^m Now
let me go up and bury my father; then I
will return.”

⁶Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your
father, as he made you swear to do.”

⁷So Joseph went up to bury his fa-
ther. All Pharaoh’s officials accompanied
him—the dignitaries of his court and all
the dignitaries of Egypt—⁸besides all the
members of Joseph’s household and his
brothers and those belonging to his fa-
ther’s household. Only their children and
their flocks and herds were left in Goshen.
⁹Chariots and horsemen^j also went up
with him. It was a very large company.

¹⁰When they reached the threshing floor
of Atad, near the Jordan, they lamented
loudly and bitterly;ⁿ and there Joseph
observed a seven-day period^o of mourn-
ing for his father. ¹¹When the Canaanites
who lived there saw the mourning at the
threshing floor of Atad, they said, “The
Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony
of mourning.” That is why that place near
the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim.^k

^a 16 Dan here means *he provides justice*. ^b 19 Gad sounds like the Hebrew for *attack* and also for *band of raiders*. ^c 21 Or *free*; / he utters beautiful words
^d 22 Or *Joseph is a wild colt*, / a wild colt near a spring, / a wild donkey on a terraced hill ^e 23,24 Or *archers will attack . . . will shoot . . . will remain . . . will stay*
^f 25 Hebrew *Shaddai* ^g 26 Or *of my progenitors*, / as great as ^h 26 Or *of the one separated from*
ⁱ 32 Or *the descendants of Heth* ^j 9 Or *charioteers*
^k 11 Abel Mizraim means *mourning of the Egyptians*.

50:2 directed the physicians . . . to embalm his father. Jacob’s embalming took 40 days (see the article “Embalming,” p. 102), and he was mourned for 70 days (v. 3).

50:11 Abel Mizraim. Its location is unknown, and it is difficult to understand why a procession from Egypt to Hebron should bring them anywhere near the Jordan.

¹²So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them: ¹³They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field^p as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. ¹⁴After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father.

50:13
^pGe 23:20;
 Ac 7:16

50:15
^qGe 37:28;
 42:21-22

Joseph Reassures His Brothers

¹⁵When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"^q ¹⁶So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷"This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they commit-

GENESIS 50:2



EMBALMING

Embalming served to preserve the body of the deceased, but in Egypt the reason for doing so involved significant theology. They preserved the body so that it could be reinhabited by the spirit (*ka*) in the afterlife. Nothing in the text suggests that Joseph or his family had adopted the complex afterlife theology of ancient Egypt with its emphasis on rituals, spells and other sorts of magic.

The physicians referred to (Ge 50:2) are probably mortuary priests, who were the experts in the techniques of embalming as they prepared the body not only physically for the grave, but also spiritually for the after-life. Evidence of embalming goes back to about 2600 BC. The principal agent used in the embalming process is natron, which served to dry out the body after the important viscera (internal organs) were removed. This dehydration process took about 40 days. The viscera were packed in natron individually and eventually replaced in the body.

Meanwhile the body was washed out with spiced wine, and after the process was over, it was anointed with oils and gum resins. As the body was wrapped in linen, protective amulets were included at various places. As a final step a liquid resin was poured over the whole body.

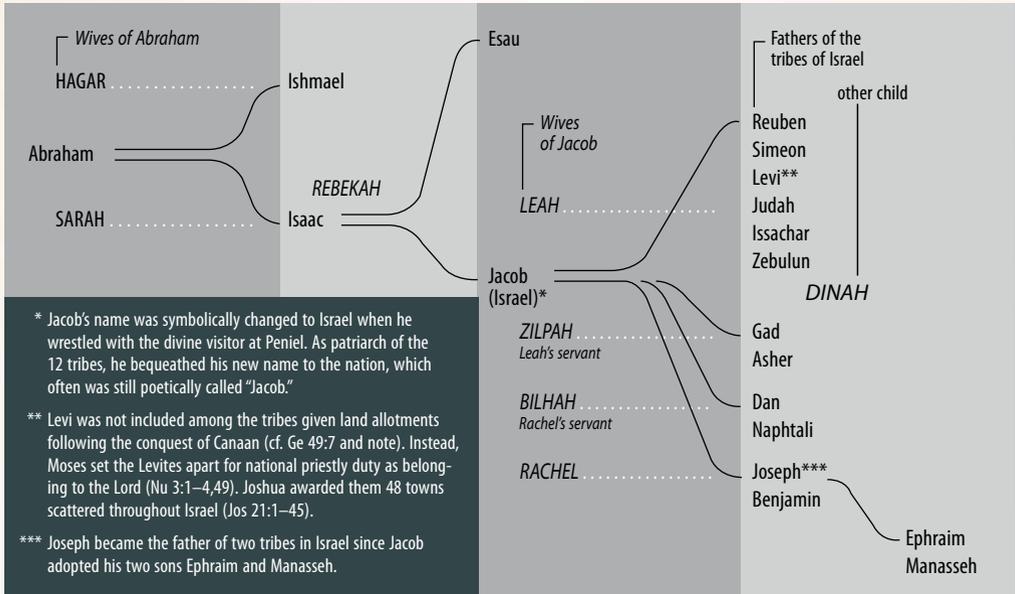
Although it was common practice in Egypt (for any who could afford it), embalming of Israelites is found only in this chapter. The fact that the bodies of Jacob and Joseph are embalmed (Ge 50:2,26) may suggest the desire of the Israelites to soothe the feelings of the Egyptians, but it also serves the purpose of preserving their bodies for later burial in Canaan. ♦



**Funerary stele of the "servant of Osiris."
 Ankh-Hapy depicts Anubis preparing a
 mummy for burial, Memphis, 525 - 500 BC.**

Kim Walton. The Vatican Museum.

THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL



ted in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. ^r "We are your slaves," ^s they said.

¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ^t ²⁰You intended to harm me, ^u but God intended ^v it for good ^w to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ^x ²¹So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children. ^y" And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

The Death of Joseph

²²Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and

50:18 ^rGe 37:7
^sGe 43:18
50:19
^tRo 12:19;
 Heb 10:30
50:20
^uGe 37:20
^vMic 4:11-12
^wRo 8:28
^xGe 45:5
50:21
^yGe 45:11;
 47:12
50:22 ^zGe 25:7;
 Jos 24:29
50:23
^aJob 42:16
^bNu 32:39, 40
50:24
^cGe 48:21
^dEx 3:16-17
^eGe 15:14
^fGe 12:7; 26:3;
 28:13; 35:12
50:25
^gGe 47:29-30;

ten years^z ²³and saw the third generation^a of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir^b son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees.^a

²⁴Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. ^c But God will surely come to your aid^d and take you up out of this land to the land^e he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."^f ²⁵And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place."^g

²⁶So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him,^h he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

^a ²³ That is, were counted as his

Ex 13:19; Jos 24:32; Heb 11:22 **50:26** ^h ver 2

50:22 *a hundred and ten years.* This was considered the ideal life span for an Egyptian, despite the fact that exami-

nation of mummies has demonstrated that the average life expectancy in Egypt was between 40 and 50.

NEW TESTAMENT CHRONOLOGY

Christ's Early Life

(Mt 1-2; Lk 1-2)

6/5 BC
Christ born

Christ's Ministry

(Mt 2-28; Mk; Lk 3-24; Jn)

30 Christ crucified
The ascension

29 Christ at Festival of Tabernacles
Christ at Festival of Dedication

28/29 John the Baptist dies

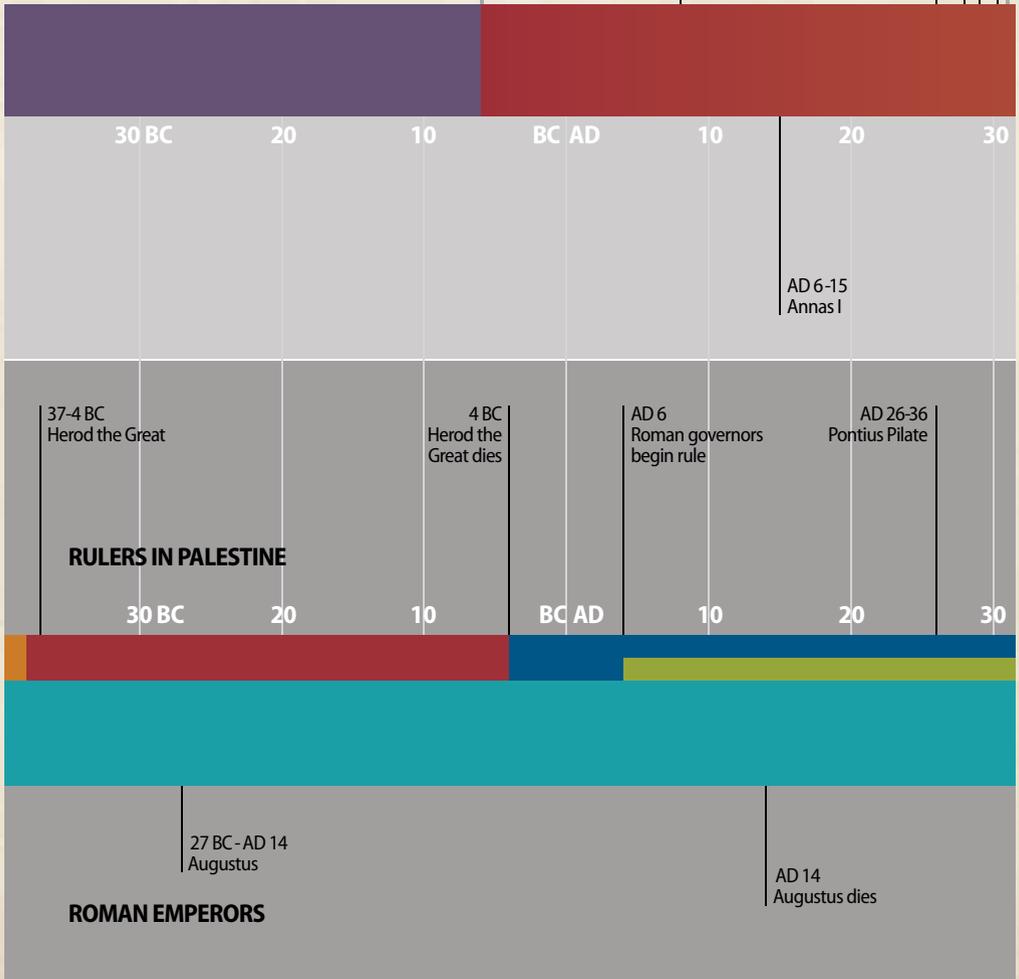
AD 7/8
Christ in temple
at age 12

27/28
John the Baptist imprisoned

26
Christ baptized

26
Christ begins
ministry

26
John the Baptist
begins ministry



The Early Church

(Acts–Revelation)

30 Pentecost

46-48 Paul's first missionary journey

35 Paul converted to Christianity

44 James martyred

Peter imprisoned

49-50 Jerusalem Council

50-52 Paul's second missionary journey

51/52 1,2 Thessalonians written

53-57 Paul's third missionary journey

57 Romans written

59-61/62 Paul imprisoned in Rome

64-67 2 Timothy written

64-68 Paul dies

95 Revelation written

90-95 John exiled on Patmos

40

50

60

70

80

90

AD 100

Lines to timeline denote end of journey or reign

47-59 Ananias

4 BC - AD 39 Herod Antipas

44 Herod Agrippa I dies

70 Jerusalem destroyed

44 -100 Herod Agrippa II

37-44 Herod Agrippa I

40

50

60

70

80

90

AD 100

37-41 Caligula

41-54 Claudius

69 Galba, Otho, Vitellius

79-81 Titus

AD 14-37 Tiberius

54-68 Nero

69-79 Vespasian

81-96 Domitian

96-98 Nerva

.....

NEW TESTAMENT



The Gospels & Acts..... 1597

The Letters & Revelation 1943

NEW TESTAMENT

THE GOSPELS & ACTS

.....
ACCOUNTS OF JESUS AND
THE EARLY CHURCH



HEARING THE GOSPELS AS FIRST-CENTURY HEARERS HEARD THEM

Bible readers who come to the four accounts of Jesus' life typically have multiple questions about these different works. This essay seeks to address a few of the more pertinent questions that may be raised by readers based on the culturally relevant goals of this study Bible: How would the Gospels' first audience have understood these writings, historically and theologically? How reliable are their sources? Are there any other gospels besides the four in the Bible? How were the Gospels first published? In this essay, we'll examine the principles behind each of these foundational questions in turn.

The Gospels as Ancient Biographies About Jesus

As a category of literature, the Gospels are unique in the sense that they tell us the story of Someone unique. In many respects, however, they follow a form that ancient hearers and readers would have recognized. In the ancient world, a book about a recent historical person was called a *bios*, or in English, a "biography."

Modern readers should keep in mind that ancient biographies differed from typical modern biographies. First, they were shorter than most modern biographies. They varied in length, but could easily be as short as Mark's Gospel or expand to roughly double that length: as long as Matthew or Luke. Second, ancient biographies did not always start with the person's childhood (as in Matthew and Luke), but sometimes opened with a person's public activity or career (as in Mark and, after the prologue, John).

Moreover, whereas modern biographies are usually arranged chronologically, ancient biographers often arranged their material topically. Thus we should not be surprised when, for example, Matthew has some material in a different sequence than do Mark or Luke. That was expected in ancient biography, and the church fathers recognized this point. (Already in the early second century, Papias observed that Mark did not write everything in chronological order.)

Writers often paraphrased material in their own words. Thus, finding slightly different wording in different Gospels (e.g., Matthew's usual "kingdom of heaven" versus Mark's "kingdom of God") should not surprise us. Presumably to increase understanding, Luke even adapts the style of roof mentioned in Mk 2:4 to fit the style of roofs in the northern Mediterranean world where his primary audience lived (Lk 5:19).

Nevertheless, then as today, biographies were a form of *historical* writing. Biographers liked to teach moral lessons through the accounts that they wrote, but like other historians, they did so in a special way that differed from fictional sorts of writing. They could offer lessons, but they were expected to make their points by using genuine information, not by composing fiction. When writing about characters of centuries past, sometimes historians and biographers admitted that some of the information available to them might be merely legendary. When writing about characters of the past two generations, however — within living memory of eyewitnesses — they generally had very substantial information. Comparing such "recent" biographies by different writers concerning the same characters quickly reveals that ancient biographers depended on information, not free imagination, when they wrote their works.

The Point of the Gospels

The Gospels communicate historical information, but this does not mean — as some modern readers have supposed — that the Gospels do not also teach theology. The modern contrast between history and theology misunderstands how history was written in the ancient world.

Ancient historians wrote with a sense of moral responsibility: they communicated the events of the past so that readers in the present could learn positive examples to follow and negative

examples to avoid. Both historians and novelists sought to communicate their stories in an engaging way, but only the former sought to do so using genuine information, and only the former normally presented models to imitate. In this period, historians and biographers, rather than novelists, used the facts of history to communicate moral, political or theological ideas or emphases. This is true of the Gospels as well. If we read them only as a matter of historical interest and not to hear what we can learn for our lives today, we miss part of the purpose of the Gospels. At the same time, the Gospels do not merely teach us moral lessons. Most of all they teach us about who Jesus is—a theological message. This characteristic is also consistent with biographies, which were first and foremost about the individuals whose stories they recount.

Above all else, the Gospels are stories about Jesus. Jesus was both hero and Lord to his early followers, and his disciples would have been expected to tell and retell the stories about him as long as they lived. Most of what is significant about most founders of movements—whether Socrates, Muhammad, or Joseph Smith—is preserved by the movements themselves, by those initially most interested in the founders. For Christians, the Gospels are of prime importance, because they help us to know better the one we also honor as our Lord.

The Gospels' Reliable Sources

Ancient tradition reports that two of the Gospels' authors were eyewitnesses of the events: Matthew and the beloved disciple of John 19:35 and 21:24. Early tradition also reports that Mark's Gospel relies heavily on Peter's eyewitness accounts.

Luke more directly tells us about potential sources for gospels in his day. Luke does not claim to be an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry itself, but his work does imply that he traveled with Paul (see note on Ac 16:10) and spent up to two years near him in Judea (Ac 21:17; 24:27; 27:1). This would have given Luke ample time to check into sources such as those he mentions. By the time Luke wrote, "many" had written about Jesus (Lk 1:1), suggesting that written gospel accounts about Jesus were already circulating within the first generation.

Luke also cites oral tradition stemming from eyewitnesses (Lk 1:2). Some readers today, especially in technology-driven cultures, doubt that disciples would have remembered detailed information for decades. Nevertheless, even in Western cultures, many families once passed on family stories orally for generations. Memory skills were no less developed in Mediterranean antiquity. Thus, for example, elementary education throughout the Mediterranean world depended heavily on memorization. Rhetorical students—those preparing for public careers—learned to deliver from memory speeches that could even be two hours in length. Traveling storytellers, often illiterate with regard to written texts, could recite entire books by heart. Thus the disciples' and others' memories could easily have preserved the most striking sayings of and stories about Jesus for the few decades before these accounts began to be preserved in writing.

In the ancient world, the practice of oral memory was most developed among disciples, advanced students of teachers or adherents of schools. Greek philosophic schools passed on the teachers' beliefs from one generation to the next. Students often rehearsed the previous day's lectures so they could repeat back the main points. In Greek schools more generally, students often took notes on their teachers' lectures and sometimes published them for the teachers. Teachers often expected their students to publish their teachings, and teachings of the founder of a school of thought often became foundational for that school's beliefs.

The range of surviving Jewish sources is more limited, but the evidence here points in the same direction as all other surviving evidence from the period. If anything, Jewish disciples were even more meticulous about preserving and passing on the sayings of their teachers than were disciples of Gentile teachers. Moreover, throughout the Roman Empire, not all disciples agreed with everything their teachers taught, but even when they disagreed they would have respectfully represented their teacher accurately. Like other disciples, Jesus' disciples would have told and retold the stories about Jesus, solidifying such accounts both in their memory and in the corporate memory of the early church.

Some scholars who grow up in societies with less-developed memory skills challenge this background, arguing that Jesus' disciples were unlike all the other disciples we read about in the same period; these scholars protest that the disciples were uneducated and illiterate. Against this premise several observations may be offered. First, texts about the disciples being "unlearned" merely mean that they lacked the training available to the elite, not that they lacked all training. Fishermen made a better living, and probably had somewhat better education, than the majority of people in Galilee (most people were peasants). Second, in many cultures memory skills are inversely proportional to literacy—that is, sometimes people who are illiterate have even stronger memories because they cannot simply refer to other sources if they forget them. Finally, ancient sources are clear that memory skills were *not* limited to the highly educated. Traveling bards who recited all of Homer's poetry by heart were generally not educated, yet few scholars in the modern West could compare with them in their capacity to memorize. This observation also holds true today; in some places even those who are illiterate can, for example, recite large sections of the Qur'an or other writings from memory.

The Gospel writers had a variety of memories, oral sources and written works on which they could draw. Normally memories and oral traditions remain most accurate in the first generation or two, within living memory of eyewitnesses who can communicate and confirm events. In antiquity, as today, writers of histories and biographies would consult eyewitnesses first and foremost. Throughout the first generation, when information about Jesus was becoming widespread, Jesus' original disciples plus his brother James remained in positions of leadership in the church (Gal 1:18–19; 2:9; cf. 1Co 15:5–7). By the time Luke wrote, he could see his purpose as merely confirming information that was already widely known (Lk 1:3–4).

Some scholars protest that some lines of evidence for the accuracy of oral tradition come from only limited circles. Yet almost *any* claim about evidence we can identify from antiquity is limited; only a sample of sources have survived. The evidence we do have for accurate tradition, however, is undoubtedly a representative sample. It is widespread among varied settings and virtually all points in the same direction. No responsible scholar would dismiss virtually all the contemporary evidence we do have and then argue the opposite conclusion based on silence.

Jesus' Teachings

Various ancient Jewish sages had their own distinctive teaching traits, but other forms of teaching were common among them. They commonly taught in parables very similar to those of Jesus (see the article "Parables," p. XXXX); they used riddles to provoke thought; they used proverbs that often made a particular point without covering all possible exceptions or circumstances (cf. Pr 26:4–5); and they often used graphic hyperbole (rhetorical overstatement) to reinforce their points. Although Jesus often used the teaching techniques that were common in his day, other traits are distinctive to him, such as the phrase "*truly* I say to you." Most distinctive, of course, are passages where Jesus hints at his deity (e.g., Mt 18:20; Jn 8:58).

Because Jesus addressed especially crowds of poor Galilean farmers as he traveled from place to place, his teachings are not systematic; instead, they are often meant to provoke thought and make a point, sometimes in a graphic way that holds an audience's attention. For a modern reader to directly convert Jesus' words into rules or statements of systematic theology therefore sometimes misses their point. For example, Jesus requires caring for parents in their old age (Mk 7:9–13), but summons people to abandon their family responsibilities if need be to follow him (Mt 8:21–22 parallel to Lk 9:59–62; Mt 10:37 parallel to Lk 14:26). Is Jesus pro-family, or is he a home-wrecker? In fact, Jesus should come before everything else, but "hating" one's family (Lk 14:26) is *hyperbole*, merely a graphic way of making his point.

Hyperbole is common in Jesus' teaching. We recognize it in the most obvious cases: for example, ripping out one's eye as a solution to lust (Mt 5:28–29), swallowing a camel whole (Mt 23:24), or squeezing a camel through a needle's eye (Mk 10:25). Some suggest that it would be consistent to view some other sayings in the same way—for example, giving up one's only cloak (Mt 5:40

parallel to Lk 6:29) or treating all remarriage as adultery (Mk 10:11 – 12, the literal point being found in 10:9). Such observations and cautions are very important, but we should also be careful not to miss the *purpose* of hyperbole: to graphically underline the point being made. Thus, for example, we should not downplay Jesus' commands to give all to those in need (Mk 10:21; Lk 12:33; 14:33). Even if we do not all relinquish literally all our possessions to follow Jesus (cf. Mt 27:57; Lk 10:38; Ac 2:44 – 45; 12:12 – 13), we surrender our *ownership* of them. If Jesus is genuinely Lord of our lives, then he is Lord also of our possessions, and we must use them as wisely and as generously as he would desire. Likewise, even if we believe that treating all remarriage as adultery may go too far (Mt 5:32, 19:19), we must work hard to preserve and nurture marriages, viewing as sacred what God has joined together.

Understanding how Jesus spoke can help us understand how best to obey and apply his teachings today.

Miracle Stories

In the West, skepticism about the Gospels started especially because some Western philosophers had pronounced miracles impossible. For such scholars, the Gospels were not trustworthy because they included miracle accounts; one nineteenth-century scholar, David Strauss, thus regarded the Gospels as late and their miracle accounts as legends and myths. Strauss did so because of his philosophic assumptions, not because of evidence: in fact, one of his own friends was healed when a German Lutheran pastor prayed for him.

Historically, the argument against the Gospels' miracle reports followed this logic: miracles are not believable because respectable eyewitnesses (those known to the upper-class, elite people who made this argument) do not report them happening. Therefore if some *otherwise* reputable eyewitnesses do claim miracles happening, they are not to be believed. This is, of course, a circular argument, but it influenced many scholars who were or became skeptics in reference to the Bible. They assumed that miracle reports cannot come from eyewitnesses, because miracles cannot happen. Therefore, in their view, any reports of significant miracles do not reflect early testimony, but rather a process of legendary growth over generations (or at least decades).

Today, however, one can easily demonstrate that these assumptions about eyewitnesses are false, even in the West. Worldwide, literally hundreds of millions of people, from a wide range of denominations and church traditions, claim to have witnessed or experienced divine healing. Sources in China attribute to healing experiences millions of new Christian conversions over the course of two decades. In a survey conducted several decades ago in one large city in India, more than 10 percent of *non*-Christians claimed to have been cured when Christians prayed for them in Jesus' name.

The sorts of miracles reported by eyewitnesses today include the same range as in the Gospels. A skeptic may find other explanations for many of the cures, but it is simply impossible empirically to deny that eyewitnesses otherwise known to be reliable do claim the sorts of cures reported in the Gospels. In other words, the miracle accounts in the Gospels can reflect information from eyewitnesses, exactly as can any of the other accounts in the Gospels.

How would ancient hearers have learned from the miracle stories in the Gospels? Presumably they would have learned from them the way that ancients believed they learned from accounts of cures in Greek temples, or the way that Christians in many cultures hear the Gospels' miracle stories today: they would have experienced these accounts as invitations to faith in the power and love of Jesus, whom we as Christians believe has risen and remains alive and active today.

Lost "Gospels"?

Many people today speculate about the influence of "lost Gospels." Although this is mostly sensationalism, some early accounts of Jesus' life were undoubtedly lost. Luke mentions that "many" wrote accounts about Jesus before Luke did, but the majority of scholars believe that only one of these that he has in mind (Mark) survived intact. A majority of scholars also believe that Matthew

and Luke drew on another shared source that often follows the same sequence present in these two Gospels; this document has not survived and is reconstructed merely based on where Matthew and Luke overlap. Some scholars believe that this lost document merely was an early collection by Matthew, focusing especially on sayings, used by Mark, Luke, and our current version of Matthew's Gospel (which incorporates also most of Mark's narrative). Other scholars reconstruct differently the sequence in which our Gospels were written, but the point remains: most of Luke's "many" sources did not survive.

Some later works have also been sometimes called gospels. Unlike the four Gospels preserved in the Bible, however, these other works date to a later timeframe for writing, no longer within living memory of the eyewitnesses. The earliest of them, often referred to as the "Gospel of Thomas," is usually dated more than 100 years after Jesus's death and resurrection and some 70 years after Mark's Gospel. (Some scholars date it even later, to 100 years after Mark.) Of all the later gospels, Thomas is the earliest and the likeliest to contain some sayings about Jesus, but scholars have not agreed on any way to discover which sayings, if any, are authentic (besides the ones already recorded in our first-century Gospels).

Thomas is usually classified as belonging to the group called "gnostic gospels," although later ones are generally far more gnostic than Thomas. These works are not really "gospels" at all, for they are not narratives about Jesus. (Comparing them with the canonical Gospels, then, is like comparing apples and oranges; they are completely different categories.) The "gnostic gospels" are usually collections of sayings that their authors claim were passed on "secretly." As most ancient Christians recognized, those who had to claim information passed on "secretly" were admitting that they had no real evidence that any of the information went back to anyone who knew Jesus. Moreover, the amorphous group of beliefs we define as Gnosticism, and thus clearly gnostic elements, do not clearly predate the second century; these works are all much later — many of them many *centuries* later. Mostly they were accepted as authoritative only in their own, small gnostic groups. In the wider church's canon lists over the next few centuries, none of them appear, with only a single exception (one reference to Thomas), whereas the canonical Gospels always appear.

Other late "gospels" are called "apocryphal gospels." These works come from the heyday of novels, in the late second and early third centuries (with many written later still). They are entertaining and sometimes edifying novels. They are not, however, true accounts about Jesus. Whereas the first-century Gospels assume ancient Galilean customs, Jewish figures of speech, and the like, these later gospels betray their own time period. Apocryphal gospels and acts contain stories of talking dogs, walking crosses, obedient bed bugs and the like; in one of them Jesus strikes dead a boy who offends him and strikes blind the boy's parents for complaining. Some ancient Christians read them, but the churches never viewed them as Scripture.

Only Matthew, Mark, Luke and John survive from the first century. Unlike the other works, they include abundant Judean and Galilean traits. By the late second century, mainstream churches from one end of the Roman Empire to the other accepted these four, and only these four, Gospels as genuine apostolic memories of Jesus. If one wishes to learn more about Jesus than what one reads in the surviving first-century Gospels, later fictions are not the best place to start. One would do better to read works that genuinely shed light on Jesus' milieu, even if they do not talk about Jesus himself. These would include, for example, collections of Jewish ideas circulating in Jesus' day, such as the book of Sirach, probably 1 Enoch, or undisputed Biblical works that are actually cited in the Gospels such as Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah and Daniel.

How the Gospels First Circulated

The ancient world was vastly different from our modern world of printing presses, copy machines and electronic publishing. Most books were copied by hand, one at a time, although very popular books could be dictated to multiple scribes at once. Books were normally written on scrolls in the first century, though in the second century Christians appear to be among the first adopters (or possibly innovators) of the sort of bound volumes we use for hard-copy books today. Christians

found useful this bound version, called a codex, because it allowed for more material to be included in one volume without making it too cumbersome.

Writing material was expensive; for example, a copy of the Gospel of Mark may have required the equivalent early twenty-first-century buying power of \$1000–\$2000 U.S. Most people thus could not own their own copies of books. In fact, most would not have needed these copies anyway, since most people were either illiterate or only semiliterate. Although inscriptions were posted in cities with the assumption that many people could understand at least some writing, illiteracy was high. It was highest among women (due to the practices of ancient education) and in rural areas, but even many urban-dwelling men could not read, especially a work as long and detailed as a Gospel.

Most people thus *heard* the Gospels rather than *read* them for themselves. (That is why this study Bible's notes usually speak of the Gospels' first *audience* or hearers rather than their first readers.) They might hear an entire Gospel read during a church meeting, which was typically an intimate gathering in the home of one of the believers. Because many were accustomed to listening intently to stories or speeches, they would be able to follow the stories carefully. Hearing the accounts over and over, they would quickly learn much of the material by heart. Additionally, most people could not unroll multiple scrolls trying to find related passages; rather, they often quoted from memory from many different Biblical books.

Some books in antiquity were sold in book markets, but books achieved their greatest circulation when given public readings or especially when read at banquets. Persons of means who liked a book they heard could have a scribe write out a new copy for them. Because early Christians met around the Lord's Supper, they also had a banquet setting for the reading of the Gospels. The most familiar form of public reading for them, however, would have been the use of Scripture in the synagogues. Already in the second century, Christians read apostolic works as Scripture alongside the Old Testament.

Authorship of the Gospels

By the standards used to evaluate ancient works' authorship, the traditions of the Gospels' authorship are very early. This is not surprising, given the amount of work represented by each of the Gospels. Works such as the Gospels normally would require careful writing and revision, then oral presentation and further revision based on feedback.

Works as large as these were major literary undertakings, requiring so much papyrus that in terms of early twenty-first-century buying power the larger Gospels may have been worth thousands of U.S. dollars, as suggested earlier. They were not as large as elite, multivolume historical works, but were nevertheless larger works than the vast majority of people could hope to afford.

Normally in antiquity readers knew who produced such major works, whether by information on the outside of the scroll or by knowledge circulated only by word of mouth. In a work this size, authorship would be one of the last details forgotten.

Moreover, had the church in fact forgotten the authorship of the Gospels, the traditions about their authorship would likely look very different. Second-century churches in different parts of the Roman Empire would likely have come up with different speculations about authorship, probably often preferring the names of apostles favored by their own locales. Instead, the early churches throughout the Empire settled on the same authors for the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Moreover, if the church were inventing names for authors, non-apostles such as Mark and Luke make little sense.

These observations suggest that the traditions about the different Gospels' authorship are very early, as Martin Hengel argued. These traditions may offer more compelling evidence for some Gospels (such as Luke) than for others (such as Matthew), but on the whole they are stronger than many critics recognize. For Christians, of course, what matters most is not the tradition of human authorship, but our confidence that God speaks to us through these texts, and that they preserve the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ. ♦



THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Matthew's Position Among the Gospels

As a Gospel, Matthew is an ancient biography, and the information treated in the introduction to the Gospels in general also applies to Matthew. But just as other ancient biographies differed from one another even when they described the same person, so do the four Gospels. Of the four Gospels, Matthew is the most carefully arranged by topic and therefore lends itself most easily to a hierarchical outline. Along with John, Matthew is also an emphatically Jewish Gospel; Matthew moves in a thought world resembling that of the emerging rabbinic movement (the circle of Jewish sages and law-teachers) more than do the other Synoptic Gospels. (Our sources for rabbinic Judaism are later than the NT, but later rabbis avoided early Christian writings, so the frequent parallels — sometimes even in sayings and expressions, for which see, e.g., Mt 7:2; 18:20; 19:3, 24; 21:21; 22:2; 23:25 — presumably stem from concepts, customs and figures of speech already circulating among sages in the first century.)

Authorship

As noted above, the traditions of the Gospels' authorship are very early. Works as large as Matthew's Gospel were major literary undertakings. As suggested for the Gospels generally, in a work this size, authorship would be one of the last matters forgotten. That observation would surely be particularly relevant for Matthew's Gospel, which seems to have enjoyed popularity right from the start. Matthew was the early second-century church's favorite and most-cited Gospel.

Some raise questions about the ancient tradition in the case of Matthew. One reason for these questions is that the earliest tradition about Matthew's Gospel (from a very early second-century church father named Papias) is that he wrote in Hebrew and that other Gospels, probably including Mark, drew on this work. Most scholars agree that our current Gospel of Matthew was not written in Hebrew, nor does it appear to be mostly translated from Hebrew. Most scholars, moreover, believe that our current Gospel of Matthew makes use of Mark's Gospel, casting doubt on Papias's apparent suggestion that Matthew wrote first (although it is possible to interpret Papias differently).

QUICK GLANCE

AUTHOR:

Matthew, also called Levi

AUDIENCE:

Greek-speaking Jewish Christians

DATE:

Between AD 50 and 90, perhaps in the 70s

THEME:

Matthew presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah sent by God to fulfill OT prophecy.

If Papias was wrong about some details, why should we trust him on others? This is a legitimate concern. Nevertheless, some other factors may mitigate the concern. First, some scholars believe that even if Papias does not properly describe our current Gospel of Matthew, he preserves some genuine information; possibly Matthew wrote a collection of Jesus' sayings (fitting the meaning of Papias's word here) in Hebrew or Aramaic, on which others (including Matthew's later Gospel in Greek) drew. Second, people are usually more apt to be correct about the simple fact of a document's authorship than about the circumstances of its writing. So even if Papias was partly or largely wrong, if he knew anything at all about these works written just a generation before him, he likely knew about their authorship.

Another objection that some raise against the traditional belief that Matthew wrote this Gospel is that Matthew, who was one of Jesus' disciples (9:9; 10:3; Mk 3:18), would not need to depend on Mark's Gospel, since Matthew was an eyewitness of most of Jesus' public ministry. Ancient approaches to eyewitness sources differed somewhat from modern approaches, however. Thus when the historian Xenophon writes an account of events in which he participated, he nevertheless depends heavily on an earlier-published work by another author, because the other work was already in wide circulation. By the same token, Matthew could have been an eyewitness and nevertheless used Mark because its wide circulation (or its association with Peter) made it a standard work. None of this proves that Matthew wrote this Gospel. It does, however, call into question the conviction with which some scholars dismiss that early tradition.

Provenance and Date

There is no consensus and no certain means of resolving Matthew's precise setting or date. Some general considerations may be relevant. Because Matthew, more than any other NT document, addresses Jewish concepts closely paralleled in the emerging rabbinic movement, the common scholarly view that he wrote from the Roman province of Syria (which included Judea and Galilee) makes good sense. Some scholars also find similarities between Matthew and other documents from early Syrian Christianity.

Because Matthew wrote in Greek, which dominated in Syria's urban centers, rather than Aramaic, which dominated in rural areas, Matthew's core audience might have been located in an urban setting. Many scholars thus suggest that Matthew writes especially for Antioch in Syria. Antioch had a large Jewish community, one of the few Jewish communities not devastated by the Judean war; it also was an early Christian center of mission to Gentiles (Ac 11:20; 13:1–3; Gal 2:11–12).

Ultimately, what we can be sure of is that Matthew wrote especially to Jewish believers in Jesus in the eastern Mediterranean world. Whatever specific "core" audience he may have envisioned, as the author of a major literary work Matthew probably hoped that his Gospel would circulate as widely as possible.

Matthew's date is also a matter of much debate. If Matthew was the first Gospel writer, he probably wrote before Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70. A larger number of scholars, however, believe that Matthew made use of Mark's Gospel, and many thus date Matthew after 70. On this view, it is not surprising that Matthew must urge his Jewish Christian audience to bring the message of the kingdom to Gentiles—many Jewish followers of Jesus at that time would have felt little love for the people who destroyed their holy city and enslaved many of their people. Nevertheless, even before 70, tensions were building toward that climax, so a similar background could be relevant on either dating.

A majority of scholars think that Matthew writes after 70 also because of allusions to the

destruction of the temple and the holy city. In possible contrast to Mark's more ambiguous relationship between Jesus' warning of the temple's destruction and the promise of his return, Matthew seems to distinguish the two events (compare 24:2–3 with Mk 13:2–4). (Some also point to Mt 22:7.) Such features could well suggest a post-70 date. Nevertheless, it seems clear from the earliest sources (including some shared by and thus earlier than Matthew and Luke) that Jesus himself did predict impending judgment on the temple (23:38; Mk 13:2,14; Lk 13:35; cf. Mk 11:15–17).

In the end, the specific question of date may be a moot point. (Indeed, some scholars think that Matthew and/or his assistants expanded the Gospel in subsequent editions at different times.) Because the Gospels are primarily concerned with events that have already occurred in the past, the time they describe is more crucial than the time in which they wrote, although the latter is helpful for considering why the different writers emphasized some particular themes.

Background

Only rarely can scholars studying ancient documents pinpoint precise dates for those documents. One does not need to know exact dates or locations to reconstruct the general setting of such works, however.

As will be clear from the following study notes on Matthew's Gospel, Matthew addresses an audience comfortable with traditional Jewish forms of speech. For example, one need only compare Mark's pervasive "kingdom of God" with Matthew's usual "kingdom of heaven" to see that Matthew prefers traditional (and emphatically) Jewish formulations.

Because Jewish thinking took many forms in different parts of the ancient world, it is valuable to be more precise in this case. Whereas Jewish people who liked apocalyptic literature would particularly appreciate Revelation, Jews in the Diaspora would appreciate Hebrews, and groups such as the Essenes might appreciate John's Gospel, Matthew often moves in a more "rabbinic" world. That is, the views and arguments of teachers and interpreters of the law, who came to be called rabbis, are very relevant to Matthew's Gospel. Most of the sources from which we know rabbinic thought are later, but they offer numerous parallels to Matthew's ways of handling Scripture and intimate understanding of Pharisaic debates with Jesus (e.g., see notes on 19:3; 23:25–26). Because Jesus was himself a sage and engaged in discussion, and often debate, with Pharisaic teachers, Matthew continues to engage a world within which Jesus himself moved. ♦

The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah

1:1-17pp — Lk 3:23-38

1:3-6pp — Ru 4:18-22

1:7-11pp — 1Ch 3:10-17

1 This is the genealogy^a of Jesus the Messiah^b the son of David,^a the son of Abraham:^b

- ²Abraham was the father of Isaac,^c
 Isaac the father of Jacob,^d
 Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,^e
³Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,^f
 Perez the father of Hezron,
 Hezron the father of Ram,
⁴Ram the father of Amminadab,
 Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
 Nahshon the father of Salmon,
⁵Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
 Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
 Obed the father of Jesse,
⁶and Jesse the father of King David.^g

David was the father of Solomon,
 whose mother had been Uriah's wife,^h

1:1 ^a2Sa 7:12-16; Isa 9:6, 7; 11:1; Jer 23:5, 6; Mt 9:27; Lk 1:32, 69; Ro 1:3; Rev 22:16
^bGe 22:18; Gal 3:16
1:2 ^cGe 21:3, 12 ^dGe 25:26
^eGe 29:35
1:3
^fGe 38:27-30
1:6 ^g1Sa 16:1; 17:12
^h2Sa 12:24

1:10 ⁱ2Ki 20:21
1:11 ^j2Ki 24:14-16; Jer 27:20; Da 1:1, 2
1:12 ^k1Ch 3:17
^l1Ch 3:19; Ezr 3:2

- ⁷Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
 Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
 Abijah the father of Asa,
⁸Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
 Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
 Jehoram the father of Uzziah,
⁹Uzziah the father of Jotham,
 Jotham the father of Ahaz,
 Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
¹⁰Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,ⁱ
 Manasseh the father of Amon,
 Amon the father of Josiah,
¹¹and Josiah the father of Jeconiah^c
 and his brothers at the time of
 the exile to Babylon.^j
- ¹²After the exile to Babylon:
 Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,^k
 Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,^l
¹³Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
 Abihud the father of Eliakim,
 Eliakim the father of Azor,
¹⁴Azor the father of Zadok,
 Zadok the father of Akim,
 Akim the father of Elihud,

^a 1 Or is an account of the origin ^b 1 Or Jesus Christ. Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek) both mean Anointed One; also in verse 18. ^c 11 That is, Jehoiachin; also in verse 12

1:1 *genealogy of Jesus.* “The book of the genealogy” here uses the exact Greek phrase found in the Greek translation of Ge 5:1, including the Greek word from which we get our name for the book “Genesis.” Similar phrases appear with other genealogies in Genesis. The phrase in Matthew functions differently, however. In Genesis, the phrase is followed by a list of the person’s descendants, who depend on their ancestor for their meaning. Matthew, by contrast, lists not Jesus’ descendants but his *ancestors*. Jesus is so pivotal for Israel’s history that even his ancestors depend on him for their purpose and meaning.

When Jewish people spoke of the “son of David” they usually thought of David’s descendant *par excellence*, the Messiah (i.e., the Davidic king; cf. 22:42). Jesus is thus the fulfillment of God’s promise to raise up a king from David’s line. Although Ishmaelites and others also claimed descent from Abraham, Jewish people customarily applied the title “children of Abraham” to Jewish people in particular. Matthew presents Jesus as both Israel’s rightful ruler and as one identified fully with his people. Many scholars find this identification with Jesus’ people’s heritage also in 2:15, 18; 4:1–11 (see applicable notes there).

1:2 *Abraham . . . Isaac . . . Jacob.* For the births of Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob’s sons, see Ge 21–30; 35:18.

1:3 *Tamar.* Ancient genealogies often omitted women. Jewish hearers would have expected that if Matthew included any women, he would have chosen some of the famous matriarchs: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and (outside Judah’s line here) Rachel. Instead he includes four women with Gentile associations. In Ge 38, Tamar was likely a Canaanite; she had married into Judah’s family but tragedy prevented her from bearing an heir in Judah’s line. Unable to secure a brother-in-law to fulfill the levirate custom of providing her husband an heir through her, she deceived Judah himself into doing it. Judah, who had helped sell his brother Joseph into slavery (Ge 37:26–27),

is confronted with his own sinfulness (Ge 38:26) and changes (Ge 44:33–34).

1:5 *Rahab.* Because Rahab joined Israel, it was natural for her to marry into Israel. Though not an Israelite, she hid Israel’s spies on her roof, betrayed Jericho and saved her family; she contrasts with Achan of Judah, who hid loot under his tent, betrayed Israel and destroyed his family (Jos 2:1–21; 6:23–25; 7:1–26). Already in the book of Joshua, then, God used Rahab to show that he valued loyalty to his covenant more than ethnic background. *Ruth.* Normally Moabites were not allowed to become Israelites (Dt 23:3), but God welcomed Ruth because she followed him (Ru 1:16), and she became an ancestor of King David.

1:6 *Uriah’s wife.* Matthew calls Solomon’s mother not by her name (Bathsheba) but the woman who “had been Uriah’s wife,” his widow. Bathsheba may have been from Judah (compare her father’s name in 2Sa 11:3 with 2Sa 23:34), but she had married into a Hittite family (2Sa 11:3). Thus each of the four women in Matthew’s genealogy (vv. 3–6) is somehow closely associated with Gentiles.

1:7–11 The list of David’s royal descendants summarizes the history of Judah until the exile (the material covered in 1–2 Kings and 2 Chronicles). By slight changes in orthography (used by other Jewish teachers to make theological points), Matthew evokes other elements of Israel’s history as well (the Psalms and the Prophets). In his Greek text, “Asa” (vv. 7–8) is literally “Asaph,” the name of a leader of Israel’s worship (1Ch 16:5, 7, 37; 25:1–6; the superscriptions of Ps 50; 73–83). Likewise, in the Greek Matthew changes the name of the wicked king Amon to the name of the prophet Amos (v. 10).

1:12 *Jeconiah.* Although God judged Jeconiah (Jer 22:24, 28; 24:1 [“Jehoiachia” in these vv.]), God restored his descendant Zerubbabel to leadership (e.g., Ezr 3:8; Hag 2:2, 23).

1:13–16 Israelite genealogies could skip generations; thus Matthew lists only 11 generations from the exile before Joseph, whereas Luke lists about 20.

¹⁵Elihud the father of Eleazar,
 Eleazar the father of Matthan,
 Matthan the father of Jacob,
¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph, the
 husband of Mary,^m and Mary

^{1:16} ^mLk 1:27

ⁿMt 27:17

was the mother of Jesus who is
 called the Messiah.ⁿ

¹⁷Thus there were fourteen generations
 in all from Abraham to David, fourteen

1:17 *fourteen generations.* Even though Matthew skips some generations, the three sets of names he has listed in this verse do not come out to exactly the same number each. Matthew is giving a rounded number, showing that

at roughly equivalent intervals in Israel's history, something dramatic happened. These focal times of conspicuous divine activity surround Abraham, David, the exile, and now the coming of the Messiah, son of David (see

MATTHEW 1:1 – 17



MATTHEW'S GENEALOGY

People often preserved genealogies, especially if they included some important or prominent ancestors. In Egypt, e.g., genealogies were important for determining tax status, so there were sometimes financial implications of not preserving the list of one's ancestors correctly! Among the Jewish people, priests and Levites could perform their duties only if they could demonstrate their ancestry. But no Jewish family ancestry could be more prominent than the Davidic royal line. Although Matthew's and Luke's genealogies trace Jesus' royal ancestry on Joseph's side of the family through somewhat different paths (which some attribute to levirate marriage adoptions), both emphasize that, many centuries earlier, Jesus' line proceeded from King David (cf. Ro 1:3; Rev 5:5).

Ancient Jewish genealogies had several purposes. One was often to highlight the purity of one's Israelite (or Levite, etc.) ancestry. It is thus striking that Matthew includes in his genealogy four women who had clear associations with Gentiles (see notes on Mt 1:3,5,6). These women include three ancestors of King David and the mother of King Solomon; Matthew thus highlights God's welcome for God-fearing Gentiles already in his opening paragraph, based on Israel's history.

Another purpose of *Biblical* genealogies was to provide a connection between significant generations. Genesis does not narrate the activities of every generation between Adam and Noah or between Noah and Abraham. Rather, Genesis focuses on those major figures and summarizes the time between them by listing others (see note on Mt 1:1). In the same way, Matthew lists many generations, here in schematic groups of roughly 14 each, connecting the most momentous occasions in Israel's history: Abraham, David, the exile and now the Messiah (see note on Mt 1:17).

Jewish teachers observed that one's ancestry showed God's faithfulness; some remarked that arranging all the marriages in people's ancestry was a greater miracle than the parting of the sea in Moses' day. Matthew's genealogy sets the tone of this Gospel by evoking the Biblical history of Israel. Jewish recipients familiar with Scripture would hear the names of most of these ancestors with rich nuances of how God had guided his people's history. Far from being foreign to their heritage, Jesus was its climax.

Although the genealogy does not quote Scripture, it evokes the entire Biblical narrative of Israel's history. Ancient rabbis sometimes developed wordplays by changing a letter here or there, and some scholars find such wordplays in Matthew's genealogy. In addition to Jesus being the direct heir of the royal line of David, he is the spiritual heir to the Psalms and the Prophets. Thus, these scholars note, the Greek text of Matthew's genealogy speaks of not precisely "Asa" but the psalmist Asaph (Mt 1:8) and not precisely the wicked king "Amon" but the prophet Amos (Mt 1:10). ♦

from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son

¹⁸This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about^a: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.^o ¹⁹Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^b did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce^p her quietly.

²⁰But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is

1:18 ^oLk 1:35
1:19 ^pDt 24:1

1:21 ^qLk 1:31
^rLk 2:11;
Ac 5:31; 13:23,
28
1:23 ^sIsa 7:14;
8:8, 10
1:25 ^vver 21

from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^q because he will save his people from their sins.”^r

²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”^{ds} (which means “God with us”).

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.^t

^a 18 Or *The origin of Jesus the Messiah was like this*
^b 19 Or *was a righteous man and* ^c 21 *Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means the LORD saves.*
^d 23 *Isaiah 7:14*

note on v. 1). Some scholars point out that when “David” is spelled in Hebrew letters and calculated as numbers (Hebrew used letters also as numbers), it comes out to 14. Some other scholars attribute this to coincidence.

1:18 *before they came together.* Whenever possible, biographers of important figures reported the figures’ honorable ancestry, honorable behavior of their parents, or special circumstances surrounding their birth. Those who compare Jesus’ virgin birth to Greek stories about gods impregnating women, however, appeal to a milieu quite foreign to this account. In the Greek stories, the gods are many, are immoral, and impregnate women who are thus not virgins. Much more relevant are Biblical accounts of God empowering supernatural births in the OT (Ge 21:1–2; 25:21; 30:22; Jdg 13:3). Even among miraculous births, however, God does something new: Jesus is born not merely from someone previously unable to bear, but from a virgin.

Greek men, on average, were more than ten years older than their brides, because Greeks had a shortage of marriageable women (sources suggest that girl babies were discarded more often than boys). Jewish men, however, were usually only a few years older than their wives; both genders assumed some adult responsibilities at puberty, but men would often work a few years so they could provide financial stability for marriage. Betrothal involved a financial agreement between families. It often lasted about a year; in conservative Galilean families the couple could not be together alone before the wedding, so Joseph may not have known Mary very well.

1:19 *divorce her quietly.* More binding than modern Western engagements, betrothal could be ended only by divorce or by the death of one of the partners. Sexual unfaithfulness was grounds for divorce throughout the ancient world; both law and custom in fact required a man to divorce an unfaithful wife or fiancée. (Romans did not allow subject peoples to execute convicted persons without Roman permission in this period; although some lynchings may have occurred in secret, they were rare, so Mary likely faced divorce rather than death [see Lev 20:10].) A Jewish man who divorced a faithful wife had to refund the money she brought into the marriage (normally a gift from her father). In the case of an unfaithful wife, however, the husband could keep this money, plus he was entitled to a refund of any money he may have paid the father as a bride price. (Paying the father was the traditional Israelite custom; the father giving his daughter a monetary gift was a more recent but now widespread custom.) Joseph

might thus have profited financially by divorcing Mary in front of elders, in a court setting. Instead, sensitive to her shame, he prefers a private divorce. A private divorce meant giving her a certificate of divorce, which would specify her freedom to marry someone else, in front of two or three witnesses.

1:20 *angel.* The angel of the Lord sometimes announced births (Ge 16:10; Jdg 13:3) and other events (e.g., Ge 22:15–18). This angel appears to Joseph especially in dreams (here; 2:13,19), a common way that God speaks in Scripture (e.g., Ge 20:3; 31:24; 1Ki 3:5), sometimes by his angel (Ge 31:11; cf. Ge 28:12). The first Joseph heard God through dreams (Ge 37:5,9). As here, divine messages often encouraged people not to fear (e.g., Ge 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; 46:3). Greeks often reported dreams about deceased persons, but in Biblical dreams God or angels are the most common speakers.

1:21 Biblical birth announcements sometimes included these elements: an angel “will bear a son” (Ge 16:11; 17:19,21; Jdg 13:3,5) “and you will call his name” (Ge 16:11; 17:19; Isa 7:14; 8:3). Jesus is the same name in Greek as Joshua, which in its earliest form (*Yehoshua*) means “God is salvation” (eventually contracted to *Yeshua*).

1:22–23 *to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive . . . and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).* In context, the son of Isa 7:14 was a sign to King Ahaz, and was probably Isaiah’s own son (Isa 7:10–17; 8:3–4). Isaiah’s children’s names were for “signs” to Israel (Isa 8:18). Nevertheless, Isaiah’s son signified not only immediate deliverance in their own time, but pointed to the ultimate deliverance with the future birth of the ultimate Davidic ruler (Isa 9:6–7; cf. Isa 11:1–5). That would be the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of “Immanuel” (Isa 7:14, “God with us”: the king would himself be the “Mighty God” (Isa 9:6), a title for God elsewhere in Isaiah (Isa 10:21). Matthew has in mind the context of the entire section of Isaiah, which he again cites soon afterward (see Isa 9:1–2 in Mt 4:15–16).

1:24 *took Mary home as his wife.* If Mary’s pregnancy was known, Joseph could repudiate responsibility and perhaps evade suspicion by divorcing her. By instead marrying her, Joseph assumes responsibility for the pregnancy, embracing her shame. The couple could long be a matter of village gossip. Joseph valued God’s direct calling through a dream more than what others thought of him.

1:25 *did not consummate their marriage.* Joseph and Mary could not avoid physical closeness; often newly married couples lived together in a small room on top of the home

The Magi Visit the Messiah

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea,^u during the time of King Herod,^v Magi^a from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?”^w We saw

2:1 ^uLk 2:4-7
^vLk 1:5
2:2 ^wJer 23:5;
Mt 27:11;
Mk 15:2; Jn 1:49;
18:33-37
^xNu 24:17

his star^x when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.
4 When he had called together all the

^a 1 Traditionally *wise men*

of the groom’s parents. Most people in antiquity supposed that a man and woman together alone for even a short time (less than an hour) would give way to sexual temptation. This would be all the more the case with those who were young; young men were considered particularly prone to passion. On average Jewish men married when about 18 to 20, with their brides in their mid-teens (sometimes even as young as 12 to 14). Yet Joseph and Mary abstained from intercourse before Jesus’ birth. On the first night of a wedding feast, intercourse would normally rupture the bride’s hymen, and the bloody sheet could be displayed as proof that she had entered marriage as a virgin. By making love on the first night of their wedding, Joseph and Mary could have proved that she had a virgin conception. Yet God’s plan was not merely a virgin conception, but a virgin birth (v. 23). Joseph and Mary chose God’s honor above their own.

2:1–2 *Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.* It was common for dignitaries to come and congratulate a new ruler. Magi undoubtedly came with a significant caravan. *Magi.* These were a famous class of astrologers and dream-interpreters who served the Persian king. Their title appears in the most common Greek version of the OT only in Daniel, where it applies to Daniel’s enemies; this is not surprising, since astrology, as a form of divination, was forbidden in Scripture. Yet these Magi come to worship the new king (vv. 2,11); as Matthew often emphasizes, God calls followers from unexpected places (cf. 3:9; 8:10–12; 12:41–42; 21:31).

2:2 *star.* Some scholars think this is a conjunction of the heavenly sign that Persians associated with Judea together with the one they associated with kingship. Others associate it with other reported celestial anomalies about this time.

2:3 *he was disturbed.* Although Scripture forbade astrol-

MATTHEW 2:1



HEROD THE GREAT

Herod the Great achieved power in Judea with Roman backing; he brutally suppressed all opposition. Herod was a friend of Marc Antony but, unfortunately, an enemy of Antony’s mistress Cleopatra. When Octavian (Augustus) Caesar defeated Antony and Cleopatra, Herod submitted to him. Noting that he had been a loyal friend to Antony until the end, Herod promised that he would now be no less loyal to Caesar, and Caesar accepted this promise. Herod named cities for Caesar and built temples in his honor.

Ethnically Herod was an Idumean (an Edomite); his ancestors had been forcibly converted to Judaism, and he built for Jerusalem’s God the ancient world’s largest and most magnificent temple. Politically astute, however, Herod also built temples honoring the divine emperor Augustus and made lavish contributions to Gentile cities in or near his territory. Among his other reported politically savvy acts was the execution of members of the old Sanhedrin who opposed him; he replaced those council members instead with his own political supporters. He did not usually tolerate dissent. When some young disciples of religious teachers took down the golden eagle that Herod had erected on the temple, he had them executed.

Most of our sources about Herod focus on his acts in Jerusalem, but the character of Herod that they reveal fits what Matthew says about him. So protective was Herod of his power and so jealous of potential rivals that his more popular brother-in-law, a very young high priest, had a drowning “accident”—in a pool that archaeology shows was very shallow. When his favorite wife Mariamne, a Maccabean princess, was falsely accused of adultery he had her strangled, though he later named a tower in his palace in her honor. He executed two of his sons who were falsely accused of plotting against him. Five days before he died he executed another son (the one who had falsely framed the other two).

continued on next page

people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵"In Bethlehem^y in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶" 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

2:5 ^y Jn 7:42

2:6 ^z 2Sa 5:2;
Mic 5:2

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.^{a,z}

⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time

^a 6 Micah 5:2,4

ogy, most of the ancient world had come to believe in astrology from the east, considered the "science" of its day. Jewish people generally doubted that the stars controlled Israel's future, but they granted that the stars predicted the Gentiles' future. It was also widely believed that comets and other heavenly signs predicted the demise of rulers; for this reason some rulers reportedly executed other members of the elite, so that the other deaths, rather than their own, could fulfill the predicted demise. Herod undoubtedly respected foreign ideas. Besides honoring Israel's God, Herod built temples for Caesar in Gentile cities.

2:4–6 *where the Messiah was to be born ... in Judea ... Bethlehem.* If the star specified a king born in Judea, the Magi naturally expected to find him in Jerusalem's pal-

ace. But it is Scripture that specifies the new king's exact birthplace, and for this Herod consults his own wise men. (There is a parallel to this in one Jewish tradition, in which a scribe warned Pharaoh about the birth of Moses, Israel's deliverer.) Probably most of the "chief priests and teachers of the law" (v. 4) Herod gathered were members of the Sanhedrin, Jerusalem's municipal aristocracy. Herod had reportedly killed members of the Sanhedrin that opposed him and replaced them with his own political supporters. These Bible experts know precisely where the expected king should be born: in David's hometown of Bethlehem, as prophesied in Mic 5:2. Although everyone knows the Magi's mission (vv. 2–3), there is no indication that the Bible experts join them in their quest. Knowing the Bible is not always the same thing as obeying it.

So much did Herod crave honor it is said that when he was on his deathbed he ordered many nobles arrested. He thought that if many people were executed on the day that he died, he could ensure that there would be mourning rather than celebration at the time of his death. When he died, however, the nobles were released and the people celebrated. ♦



A model of Herod's palace in Jerusalem. The towers were named after important people in Herod's life: Hippius (a friend), Phasael (Herod's brother), and Mariamne (Herod's wife).

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the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.^a Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts^b of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned^c in a dream^d not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Escape to Egypt

¹³When they had gone, an angel^e of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.^f “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Her-

2:11 ^aIsa 60:3
^bPs 72:10
2:12 ^cHeb 11:7
^dver 13, 19, 22;
Mt 27:19
2:13 ^eAc 5:19
^fver 12, 19, 22

2:15 ^gEx 4:22,
23; Hos 11:1
2:18 ^hJer 31:15
2:19 ⁱver 12,
13, 22

od. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”^{ag}

¹⁶When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸“A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”^{bh}

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dreamⁱ to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

²¹So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was

^a 15 Hosea 11:1 ^b 18 Jer. 31:15

2:8 *Bethlehem.* It is perhaps six miles (nine kilometers) from Jerusalem, perhaps not much more than a three-hour journey for the caravan.

2:11 *bowed down.* Prostration was a way that Persians venerated rulers as well as deities. Magi could be Zoroastrian dualists, but in this period may have still been polytheists (worshippers of multiple gods). *gold, frankincense and myrrh.* Frankincense and myrrh mostly came from southern Arabia and Somaliland, and thus were very expensive. People often used these spices in royal courts and other lavish settings (cf. Ps 72:10; Isa 60:6).

2:12 *warned in a dream.* Magi were known for their reported ability to interpret dreams. Because their large caravan could have been visible during the day from Herod’s nearby fortress Herodium, they presumably left under cover of night. Herod would expect them to return to Jerusalem, and from there to follow a road that would take them to the north and the east. Instead, they travel southward toward Hebron, then north along a coastal road or east along a caravan route.

2:13 *Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.* In one Jewish tradition, a dream warned Moses’ father to protect him from Pharaoh. *escape to Egypt.* A large Jewish community already lived in Egypt. Alexandria, a Greek-founded city in the northern delta region of Egypt, included perhaps the largest Jewish community outside Judea and Galilee. Perhaps one-third of Alexandria was Jewish, so the family could easily find refuge there. Further, if they had means to transport safely even some of the gold and spices (v. 11) they would have means to support themselves for a long period of time.

2:15 *what the Lord had said through the prophet.* In context, Hos 11:1 describes God bringing Israel as his “son” from Egypt. The context, however, also goes on to speak of a new exodus, when God would save his people from captivity (Hos 11:5,11; on the new exodus,

see also note on Mt 3:3). Because Jesus identifies with and recapitulates the history of his people (see note on 1:1), the principles in passages about the exodus, captivity (v. 18) and testing in the wilderness (4:1–11) apply also to him.

2:16 *gave orders to kill all the boys.* Herod acts here in keeping with what we know of his character from other sources (see the article “Herod the Great,” p. XXXX). The actual size of ancient Bethlehem is unclear, but some estimate perhaps 20 boys under the age of two were killed. Jewish people considered abandoning or killing babies a pagan practice, conspicuously associated with evil kings such as Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The most widely known example, however, was Pharaoh in the OT (Ex 1:16,22). In this narrative, the pagan Magi worship the true king, whereas the Jewish ruler acts like a pagan one. (For Matthew’s interest in Gentiles, see the Introduction to Matthew: Provenance and Date; see also 28:19.)

2:17–18 Matthew quotes from Jer 31:15; Matthew undoubtedly knew that the context calls Israel God’s “son” (Jer 31:20) and goes on to promise a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34). Jer 31:15 depicts Rachel weeping as her descendants are carried into captivity in the exile. Matthew would have known that Rachel’s tomb was near Bethlehem (Ge 35:19); like Israel’s exile, the slaughter of Bethlehem’s infants is a tragedy, but one that could not prevent the ultimate promise of God’s restoration in the new covenant.

2:20 *go to the land of Israel... those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.* The angel’s promise here evokes Ex 4:19: Moses can return to Egypt because those who sought his life have died. Jesus here is thus like Moses, Israel’s deliverer—and, ominously, Judea has become like Egypt in Moses’ day.

2:22 *Archelaus was reigning.* A few days before Herod died in 4 BC, Archelaus, his son by a Samaritan wife,

reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream,^j he withdrew to the district of Galilee,^k 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.^l So was fulfilled^m what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.ⁿ

2:22 ^lver 12, 13, 19; Mt 27:19
^kLk 2:39
2:23 ^lLk 1:26;
 Jn 1:45, 46
^mMt 1:22
ⁿMk 1:24

3:1 ^oLk 1:13, 57-66; 3:2-19

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

3:1-12pp — Mk 1:3-8; Lk 3:2-17

3 In those days John the Baptist^o came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea² and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven^p has come near.”³ This is he

3:2 ^pDa 2:44; Mt 4:17; 6:10; Lk 11:20; 21:31; Jn 3:3, 5; Ac 1:3, 6

became ruler. Scholars often observe that Archelaus shared his father’s vices while lacking his administrative competence. Archelaus made many enemies, and his inability to keep peace during the turbulence of AD 6 led to Rome removing him and banishing him to Gaul.

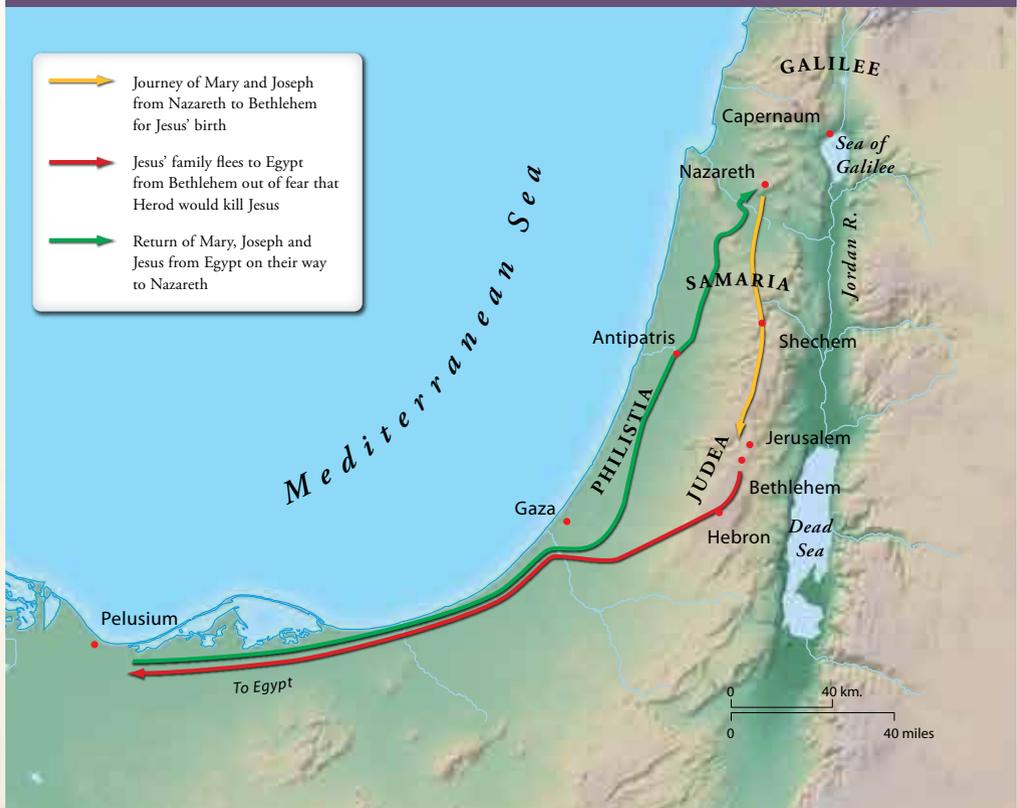
2:23 *Nazareth.* Population estimates for Nazareth vary; the village proper may have contained perhaps 500 residents (smaller than Bethlehem). Nazareth was a traditional and religiously conservative Galilean town; pottery suggests that many of its residents had migrated from Judea. Ancients sometimes built arguments on wordplays, and Jewish teachers often interpreted the OT this way. Some think that Matthew plays on Jdg 13:5: he “is to be a Nazirite.” Others, probably more commonly, believe that Matthew plays on Isa 11:1, which depicts the Messiah as a “Branch,” in Hebrew, *nezer*. Other Biblical passages depict the Messiah as a branch (Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zec 3:8; 6:12), as do Dead Sea Scrolls.

3:1–2 A first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, also reports that John baptized people in the wilderness, invit-

ing them to spiritual transformation. Josephus, however, adapts his description of John to appeal to Greek readers, as he depicts the “sects” of Judea—Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes—along the lines of Greek philosophic sects. The Gospels, however, portray John in a way more in keeping with authentic Judean prophets: a preacher of the imminent new era of God’s reign. “Kingdom of heaven” was an accepted Jewish way of speaking about God’s reign (cf. Da 2:44; 4:26). The wilderness was one of the few places where prophetic figures could safely draw crowds, but of course it lacked the amenities of civilization.

3:3 Matthew quotes Isa 40:3. Some Biblical prophets, including Isaiah, had prophesied a new exodus, by which God would gather his people from exile (Isa 11:16; Jer 23:7–8; Hos 2:14–15). He would establish a way through the wilderness, as he had led his people through the wilderness of old. John was a herald preparing the people for this event, and for the coming of “the Lord”—by which the Hebrew text of Isaiah referred to God himself.

JESUS’ EARLY LIFE



who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”^{aq}

⁴John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist.^r His food was locusts^s and wild honey. ⁵People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers!^t Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?^u ⁸Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.^v ⁹And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.^w

3:3 ^qIsa 40:3; Mal 3:1; Lk 1:76; Jn 1:23
3:4 ^r2Ki 1:8
^sLev 11:22
3:7 ^tMt 12:34; 23:33 ^uRo 1:18; 1Th 1:10
3:8 ^vAc 26:20
3:10 ^wMt 7:19; Lk 13:6-9; Jn 15:2,6

3:11 ^xMk 1:8
^yIsa 4:4; Ac 2:3,4
3:12 ^zMt 13:30
3:13 ^aMk 1:4
3:16 ^bIsa 11:2; 42:1
3:17 ^cMt 17:5; Jn 12:28
^dPs 2:7; 2Pe 1:17, 18
^eIsa 42:1; Mt 12:18; 17:5; Mk 1:11; 9:7; Lk 9:35

¹¹“I baptize you with^b water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with^b the Holy Spirit^x and fire.^y ¹²His winning fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”^z

The Baptism of Jesus

3:13-17pp — Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21,22; Jn 1:31-34

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.^a ¹⁴But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

¹⁵Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

¹⁶As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God^b descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven^c said, “This is my Son,^d whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”^e

^a 3 Isaiah 40:3 ^b 11 Or in

3:4 *leather belt*: It evokes Elijah (2Ki 1:8), who was to prepare the way for God’s coming (Mal 4:5–6). See note on Mk 1:6.
3:7 *brood of vipers*. Many people in antiquity thought that vipers were born by hatching inside their mother, then gnawing their way through their mothers’ wombs—killing their mothers in the process. Comparing people to a “brood of vipers,” then, was analogous to calling them “parent-murderers”—one of the most reprehensible offenses conceivable.
3:9 *Abraham as our father*. Many Jewish people believed that Israel as a whole would be saved because God chose Israel in Abraham. Prophets, however, sometimes challenged Israel’s dependence on their chosenness (Am 3:2; 9:7). *stones . . . children*. Sometimes in the OT stones were used to symbolize the 12 tribes of Israel (Ex 28:21; Jos 4:8; 1Ki 18:31). In Hebrew and Aramaic, “children” and “stones” sound very similar; prophets often made wordplays (note examples in the Hebrew texts of Jer 1:11–12 [see NIV text note]; Am 8:1–2; Mic 1:10–15 [see NIV text notes]).
3:10 *ax is already at the root of the trees*. Cutting down or burning a tree could symbolize a nation’s judgment (Ps 80:14–16; Jer 11:16; Eze 31:10–18; Da 4:23). The image here probably involves dead trees or small trees, the kind that could be felled easily by most farmers’ axes. Fruit trees that yielded no fruit typically served best as firewood.
3:11 *baptize you with water*. Many people, including Jewish people, had ritual washings; some Jewish sects required ritual immersion to purify those entering their sect, and Gentiles converting to Judaism were immersed to cleanse them from the impurity of idolatry (see the article “Baptism,” p. XXXX). *sandals . . . to carry*. Handling sandals was the sort of servile task that only a servant would normally perform; the prophets were “servants of God” (2Ki 9:7; Jer 7:25; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4), but John considers himself unworthy even for this role. Clearly he envisions himself as preparing for the coming of God himself (see notes on vv. 3,4). *baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire*. Biblically only God could pour out his own Spirit, as he

promised to do at the time of the coming restoration (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Eze 39:29; Joel 2:28). In contrast to the Spirit, the “fire” here presumably signals end-time judgment (see notes on vv. 10,12).
3:12 *gathering his wheat . . . burning up the chaff*. After harvest farmers had to separate the edible wheat from the inedible chaff. They would toss the grain into the air so that the wind could blow out the chaff, which was lighter. Scripture often used “chaff” as an image for the worthless that God would destroy (e.g., Ex 15:7 [stubble]; Ps 1:4; Isa 17:13; 29:5; Hos 13:3). Indeed, “Elijah’s” mission (see note on 3:4) was to prevent the nation from becoming like burned chaff (Mal 4:1,5). Real chaff burns too quickly to be good fuel; the chaff here, however, burns with “unquenchable” fire (cf. Isa 66:24). Jewish people had various views of *Gehinnom* (or Gehenna), or hell: the wicked would burn up instantly; they would be tortured for a year and then either released or destroyed; or they would burn forever. In his message to the religious elite (v. 7) John sides with the harshest option articulated by his contemporaries.
3:14 *I need to be baptized by you*. Given John’s expectation that the coming one would be divine and baptize in the Spirit (see note on v. 11), that John feels unworthy to baptize Jesus makes sense.
3:16 *heaven was opened*. The heavens could be opened for revelations from God (Eze 1:1). *dove*. Doves had various symbolic functions in ancient sources; perhaps the most widespread and relevant for Jewish hearers would be the dove’s role as a harbinger of a new world in Ge 8:8–12.
3:17 Sometimes God spoke with a voice from heaven (e.g., Ge 22:15–18). Later Jewish teachers called this means of God speaking a *bat qol*; though they felt that it was an inferior substitute for prophecy, the prophet here also recognizes Jesus’ identity (v. 14). The voice here seems to blend allusions to two Biblical texts; the first is Ps 2:7, a promise to the Davidic line especially applicable to the promised, end-time Davidic ruler. For Mark (1:11), the second might be Ge 22:2, but Matthew probably intends an

Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness

4:1-11pp — Mk 1:12,13; Lk 4:1-13

4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted^a by the devil. ²After fasting forty days and forty nights,^f he was hungry. ³The tempter^g came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God,^h tell these stones to become bread.”

4:2 ^fEx 34:28; 1Ki 19:8
4:3 ^g1Th 3:5
^hMt 3:17; Jn 5:25; Ac 9:20

4:4 ⁱDt 8:3
4:5 ^jNe 11:1; Da 9:24; Mt 27:53

⁴Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’^{b”i}

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city^j and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶“If you are the Son of

^a 1 The Greek for *tempted* can also mean *tested*.

^b 4 Deut. 8:3

allusion instead to Isa 42:1, given the way Matthew translates this passage in 12:18.

4:1 *to be tempted.* In Scripture, God’s servants generally faced testing before they were ready for their public ministries. Following Biblical precedent, ancient Judaism recognized the devil as tempter (cf. 1Ch 21:1), accuser (Job 1:9–11; 2:4–5; Zec 3:1) and deceiver. Jesus being led into the wilderness probably evokes Israel’s experience (cf. Ex 13:18; see note on Mt 4:2). “Led,” “wilderness,” and being tempted or tested for “forty” periods of time all appear together in Dt 8:2; Jesus quotes Dt 8:3 in v. 4.

4:2 *fasting forty days and forty nights.* This period of fasting before Jesus’ ministry recalls Moses fasting 40 days and nights before receiving the law (Ex 24:18; 34:28; cf. 2:20); Elijah also followed the same example (1Ki 19:8). Jesus being tested in the wilderness 40 days also likely recalls Israel being tested in the wilderness for 40 years (see notes on 2:15,17–18).

4:3 The tempter directly challenges or reinterprets God’s words in 3:17; cf. Ge 3:1–4. Magicians sometimes claimed the power to change one substance into another. Jesus can multiply food, but trusts his Father’s care (cf. v. 11; 6:11; 14:19–20).

4:4 *It is written.* A common formula for citing Scripture (already in, e.g., Jos 8:31; 2Ch 31:3; Ezr 6:18). In vv. 4–10, Jesus quotes three texts given to Israel when they were tempted in the wilderness. Here he quotes from Dt 8:3, which in context addressed Israel as God’s “son” (Dt 8:5). The devil might seek to offer a different interpretation of Jesus’ sonship (v. 3; cf. 3:17); Jesus, however, appeals to Scripture to define this sonship.

4:5 *highest point of the temple.* Might refer to the temple complex’s southeast corner overlooking the Kidron Valley.

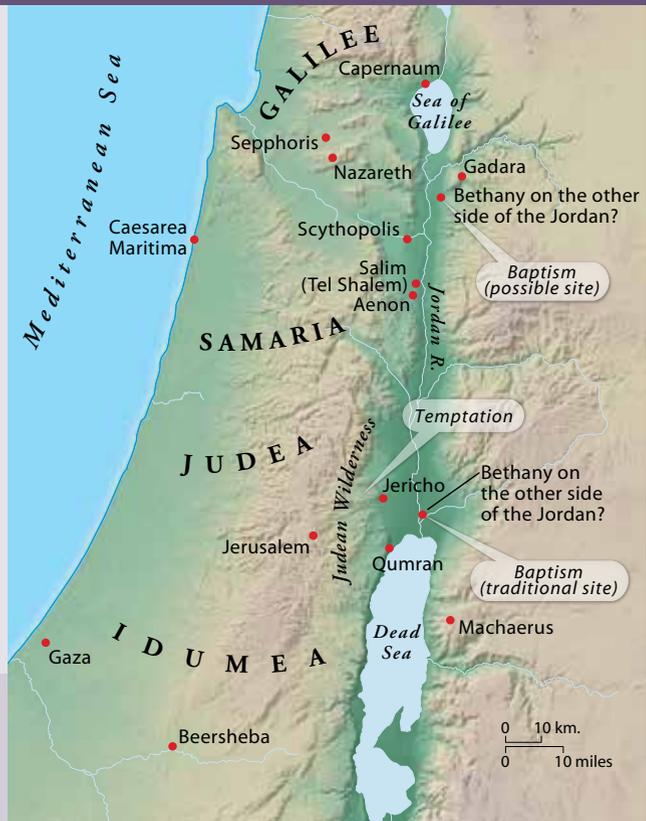
4:6 Later rabbis also expected that even the devil and demons knew Scripture, though the devil did not obey it. Again reframing Jesus’ sonship (3:17; see note on 4:4),

JESUS’ BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION

Events surrounding Jesus’ baptism reveal the intense religious excitement and social ferment of the early days of John the Baptist’s ministry. Herod had been cruel and rapacious; Roman military occupation was harsh. Some agitation centered around the change of governors from Gratus to Pilate in AD 26. Most of the people hoped for a religious solution to their intolerable political situation, and when they heard of a new prophet, they flocked out into the desert to hear him. The religious sect (Essenes) from Qumran professed similar doctrines of repentance and baptism. Jesus was baptized at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan (see Jn 1:28). John also baptized at “Aenon near Salim” (Jn 3:23).

For Jesus’ temptation, see notes on Mt 4:1–11; Lk 4:1–13.

Many interpreters place John’s baptismal ministry at a point on the middle reaches of the Jordan River, where trade routes converge at a natural ford not far from the modern site of Tel Shalem.



God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”^a ^k

⁷Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’^b”^l

4:6 ^kPs 91:11, 12
4:7 ^lDt 6:16

4:10 ^m1Ch 21:1
ⁿDt 6:13
4:11 ^oMt 26:53;
Lk 22:43;
Heb 1:14

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan!^m For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’^c”ⁿ

¹¹Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.^o

^a 6 Psalm 91:11,12 ^b 7 Deut. 6:16 ^c 10 Deut. 6:13

the devil quotes Ps 91:11 – 12 out of context. The psalm refers to God’s protection if one falls; it does not refer to jumping.

4:7 Continuing the general context of his previous quotation, Jesus quotes Dt 6:16, which in context warns against Israel’s dissatisfaction with God’s provision in the wilderness.

4:10 Still following the context, Jesus cites Dt 6:13, which prohibited idolatry (Dt 6:14), recognizing the one true God (Dt 6:4 – 5,12).

4:11 *angels ... attended him.* Trusting the Father rather than creating bread (vv. 3–4) or presuming on angels (vv. 6–7), Jesus here receives angelic help after his fast (cf. 26:53).

MATTHEW 4:17



KINGDOM

In Biblical languages, the term translated into English as “kingdom” usually meant “reign,” “rule,” or “authority.” Jewish people recognized that God reigned as king over the world he created (Ps 22:28; 145:12 – 13; Da 4:3,34). Some believed that they affirmed this whenever they recited the *Shema*, acknowledging that there was just one true God (Dt 6:4).

But while Jewish people acknowledged God’s present rule, most looked for God’s unchallenged reign in the age to come (Da 2:44 – 45; 7:14,27). Many prayed regularly for God’s future kingdom — for him to reign unopposed, to fulfill his purposes of justice and peace for the world. One familiar prayer that came to be prayed daily was the *Kaddish*, which in its ancient form began: “Exalted and hallowed be his great name ... May he cause his kingdom to reign.”

By Jesus’ day, many were familiar with Daniel’s prophecy about four kingdoms and believed the fourth and final kingdom to be the current Roman Empire (Da 2:37 – 43). Daniel prophesied that in the time of that fourth kingdom, God would establish an eternal kingdom, overthrowing the other ones (Da 2:44). This kingdom belonged to a “Son of man,” a human one, whose rule was associated with the deliverance of God’s people and contrasted with the preceding empires that were compared with beasts (Da 7:12 – 14,17 – 18,21 – 22). Daniel spoke of these truths as “mysteries” (Da 2:28 – 29; cf. 2:47). Thus it is not surprising that the Gospels speak of the “secret” or “secrets” of the kingdom (Mt 13:11; Mk 4:11; Lk 8:10).

Jesus’ first followers in the New Testament, who believed that the coming Messianic king had already come once and that the first fruits of the future resurrection had occurred, often treated the future kingdom as also present. We recognize that just as the king has both come and will come again, his kingdom has already invaded this world but remains to be consummated. Where the other Gospels use “kingdom of God,” Matthew uses “kingdom of heaven” with just four or five exceptions. This Jewish expression appears elsewhere and reflects the Jewish use of “heaven” at times as a respectful and roundabout way of saying “God.” ♦

Jesus Begins to Preach

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison,^p he withdrew to Galilee.^q ¹³Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum,^r which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali — ¹⁴to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles —
¹⁶the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”^{as}

¹⁷From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven^t has come near.”

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

4:18-22pp — Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:2-11; Jn 1:35-42

¹⁸As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee,^u he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter^v and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹“Come, follow me,”^w Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ²⁰At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his

4:12 ^pMt 14:3
^qMk 1:14
4:13 ^rMk 1:21;
Lk 4:23, 31;
Jn 2:12; 4:46, 47
4:16 ^sIsa 9:1, 2;
Lk 2:32
4:17 ^tMt 3:2
4:18 ^uMt 15:29;
Mk 7:31; Jn 6:1
^vMt 16:17, 18
4:19
^wMk 10:21,
28, 52

4:21 ^xMt 20:20
4:23 ^yMk 1:39;
Lk 4:15, 44
^zMt 9:35;
13:54; Mk 1:21;
Lk 4:15; Jn 6:59
^aMk 1:14
^bMt 3:2;
Ac 20:25
^cMt 8:16; 15:30;
Ac 10:38
4:24 ^qLk 2:2
^eMt 8:16, 28;
9:32; 15:22;
Mk 1:32; 5:15,
16, 18 ^fMt 17:15
^gMt 8:6; 9:2;
Mk 2:3
4:25 ^hMk 3:7, 8;
Lk 6:17
5:3 ⁱver 10, 19;
Mt 25:34

brother John.^x They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²²and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus Heals the Sick

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee,^y teaching in their synagogues,^z proclaiming the good news^a of the kingdom,^b and healing every disease and sickness among the people.^c ²⁴News about him spread all over Syria,^d and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed,^e those having seizures,^f and the paralyzed;^g and he healed them. ²⁵Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,^b Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.^h

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

5:3-12pp — Lk 6:20-23

He said:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven.ⁱ

^a 16 Isaiah 9:1, 2 ^b 25 That is, the Ten Cities

4:13 *Capernaum.* A fishing town of perhaps 1,000 or 2,000 on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is never mentioned as ministering in the two largest cities in Galilee, Sepphoris or Tiberias, but Capernaum was well situated for contact with the rest of Galilee. Later sources show that Capernaum became a stronghold for Galilean followers of Jesus.

4:15–16 The context of the cited passage (Isa 9:1–2) is clearly Messianic (Isa 9:6–7). This passage also allows Matthew to connect Jesus again (cf. 1:3, 5–6; 2:1–2) with mission to the Gentiles. Despite the historic connection with Gentiles in Galilee, however, its Jewish cities and towns observed the Law of Moses.

4:17 *the kingdom of heaven has come near.* See the article “Kingdom,” p. XXXX.

4:18 *they were fishermen.* Family businesses were common. Many scholars argue that commercial fishermen were better off economically than peasants, who comprised the majority of the empire’s (and Galilee’s) population. Most people could not usually afford meat, but fish was more available, and fishing was a major occupation on the Sea of Galilee. Note that the sea was actually a lake; only Galileans called it a sea. The Gospels’ usage of this word reflects their dependence on Jesus’ original Galilean setting.

4:19 *Come.* Respectable teachers usually waited for disciples to choose them; only the most radical sages were reputed to choose their own disciples. *follow me.* A disciple would come “after,” or walk behind, his teacher. *fish*

for people. In Scripture, God sometimes used people’s backgrounds, e.g., as shepherds (Ex 3:1; 1Sa 17:15; 2Sa 5:2; Isa 63:11).

4:22 *immediately they left the boat and their father.* Leaving one’s family and livelihood was a rare and serious commitment. Disciples were usually in their teens, and many of Jesus’ disciples may have been in this range.

4:24 *all over Syria.* Judea and Galilee belonged to the Roman province of Syria; even Syria’s major Gentile cities (such as Damascus and especially Antioch) included many Jewish residents. The Decapolis, a group of Hellenistic cities in Syria near Galilee, included such towns as Gadara, Gerasa, Hippos and Pella. The primary feature of these cities that connected them was their Hellenistic (Greek) character, but many Jewish residents lived there in this period. *all who were ill.* Sickness was pervasive and people gathered at hot springs or any place they hoped to find a cure.

4:25 *Large crowds.* That crowds would follow one reputed to work miracles is to be expected. Even hot springs with apparent curative properties drew large numbers of ailing people.

5:1 *sat down.* Senior teachers of the law would sit to explain it. Some scholars compare Jesus’ teaching from a mountain here to Moses’ giving the law from a mountain (cf. Ex 24:12).

5:3 Beatitudes constitute a common literary form (e.g., Ps 1:1). See note on Lk 6:20.

- 4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.^j
- 5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.^k
- 6 Blessed are those who hunger and
thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.^l
- 7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
- 8 Blessed are the pure in heart,^m
for they will see God.ⁿ
- 9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of
God.^o
- 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,^p
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult
you,^q persecute you and falsely say all
kinds of evil against you because of me.
12 Rejoice and be glad,^r because great is
your reward in heaven, for in the same
way they persecuted the prophets who
were before you.^s

Salt and Light

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if
the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be

5:12 JIsa 61:2,3;
Rev 7:17
5:5^k Ps 37:11;
Ro 4:13
5:6^l Isa 55:1,2
5:8^m Ps 24:3;
4ⁿ Heb 12:14;
Rev 22:4
5:9^o ver 44,45;
Ro 8:14
5:10^p 1Pe 3:14
5:11^q 1Pe 4:14
5:12^r Ac 5:41;
1Pe 4:13,16
5:13^s Mt 23:31;
37; Ac 7:52;
1Th 2:15

5:13^t Mk 9:50;
Lk 14:34,35
5:14^u Jn 8:12
5:15^v Mk 4:21;
Lk 8:16
5:16^w Mt 9:8
5:17^x Ro 3:31
5:18^y Lk 16:17
5:19^z Jas 2:10

made salty again? It is no longer good for
anything, except to be thrown out and
trampled underfoot.^t

14 “You are the light of the world.^u A
town built on a hill cannot be hidden.
15 Neither do people light a lamp and put
it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its
stand, and it gives light to everyone in the
house.^v 16 In the same way, let your light
shine before others, that they may see
your good deeds and glorify^w your Father
in heaven.

The Fulfillment of the Law

17 “Do not think that I have come to
abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have
not come to abolish them but to fulfill
them.^x 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven
and earth disappear, not the smallest let-
ter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by
any means disappear from the Law until
everything is accomplished.^y 19 Therefore
anyone who sets aside one of the least of
these commands^z and teaches others ac-
cordingly will be called least in the king-
dom of heaven, but whoever practices and
teaches these commands will be called
great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell

5:4 *those who mourn.* Repentance, whether over one’s
own sins or those of one’s society, was often expressed
in mourning. God promised future comfort to his people
(Isa 40:1; 51:3; 61:2–3; 66:13).

5:5 *the meek.* Ps 37:11 promises that the meek (the hum-
ble, the lowly, those who depend on the Lord rather than
themselves [cf. Ps 37:9; cf. also “poor in spirit” in Mt 5:3])
would inherit the earth. *the earth.* Although this could
mean simply “the land,” by Jesus’ day Jewish people
spoke of the righteous “inheriting the kingdom” and thus
ruling the world (cf. Da 7:14).

5:8 *the pure in heart.* God would bless the “pure in heart”
(Ps 73:1). God’s people in the end time would “see” him.

5:9 *the peacemakers.* Some Judeans and Galileans
believed that God would help them wage war against
the Romans to establish God’s kingdom, but Jesus assigns
the kingdom instead to the meek (v. 5), those who show
mercy (v. 7), those who are persecuted (v. 10), and those
who make peace (v. 9).

5:10 *theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Ancient writers
sometimes bracketed off a special section of material by
starting and finishing it with the same point—here, that
“the kingdom of heaven” (cf. v. 3, see also the article “King-
dom,” p. XXXX) will be given to the righteous and humble.

5:11 *because of me.* Jewish people spoke of suffering for
God’s name; Jesus thus may fill a divine role here.

5:12 *persecuted the prophets.* In Scripture, prophets some-
times faced persecution; by Jesus’ day, Jewish tradition
highlighted this point even more.

5:13 *salt loses its saltiness.* Some commentators note that
much ancient salt contained impurities, which could dis-
solve; but Jesus also uses a graphic image—how can true
salt stop being salt? When asked what to do with unsalty
salt, a later rabbi advised, “Salt it with the afterbirth of a
mule.” Mules are sterile and thus lack afterbirth; his point
was that the question was stupid. If salt *could* lose its
saltiness, what would it be useful for? Jesus compares a

disciple who does not live out the values of the kingdom
with unsalty salt—salt that cannot fulfill its purpose.

5:14 *light of the world.* God had called his people to be a
light to the nations (Isa 42:6; 49:6), so his salvation would
reach the ends of the earth (Isa 49:6). *town built on a hill.*
Many ancient cities were built on hills; their lights could
also make them visible against the horizon at night.

5:15 *light a lamp and put it under a bowl.* The most com-
mon oil lamps of this period were small enough to hold
in the hand; placing such a lamp under a container would
obscure and likely extinguish it. Invisible light was about
as useful to ancient Galileans as was tasteless salt (v. 13).

5:18 *truly I tell you.* Lit. “Amen, I tell you”; “amen” nor-
mally concluded a prayer, and most scholars believe that
beginning a saying this way implied distinctive author-
ity. *smallest letter.* The smallest Hebrew letter was a *yod*,
formed by a single stroke of the pen. One Jewish story
recounted that the *yod* removed from Sarai’s name (when
it was changed to Sarah, Ge 17:15) protested to God from
one generation to another, lamenting its removal from
Scripture, until finally God put the *yod* back in the Bible.
When Hoshea’s name was changed to Joshua (Nu 13:16),
a *yod* was reinserted in Scripture. “So you see,” remarked
Jewish teachers, “not a single *yod* can pass from God’s
Word.” In a similar Jewish story, a *yod* protested that King
Solomon was trying to remove it from Scripture; “A thou-
sand Solomons shall be uprooted,” God declared, “but not
a single *yod* will pass from my Word.” Such illustrations
were merely graphic ways of emphasizing that all of God’s
Word must be respected; no part was too small to matter.

5:19 *least of these commands.* Jewish teachers sometimes
spoke of the least and greatest commandments, and of
people who were least and greatest in the kingdom. Nor-
mally they did not mean such statements as matters of
mathematical precision, but as graphic ways of empha-
sizing the value of all the commandments. Thus, e.g., some
later rabbis declared that the least commandment was

you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Murder

5:25,26pp — Lk 12:58,59

²¹“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder,^a and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister^{b,c} will be subject to judgment.^b Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’^d is answerable to the court.^c And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.^d

²³“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or

5:21 ^a Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17
5:22 ^b 1Jn 3:15
^c Mt 26:59
^d Jas 3:6

5:27 ^e Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18
5:28 ^f Pr 6:25
5:29 ^g Mt 18:6, 8,9; Mk 9:42-47

your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Adultery

²⁷“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’^{ee} ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.^f ²⁹If your right eye causes you to stumble,^g gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

^a 21 Exodus 20:13 ^b 22 The Greek word for *brother or sister (adelphos)* refers here to a fellow disciple, whether man or woman; also in verse 23. ^c 22 Some manuscripts *brother or sister without cause* ^d 22 An Aramaic term of contempt ^e 27 Exodus 20:14

the demand that people free a mother bird (Dt 22:7), but that whoever kept this command received life, the same reward as one who kept the greatest command, honoring father and mother (Dt 5:16). The titles of least or greatest in the kingdom are also graphic and hyperbolic. A rabbi could, e.g., praise one pupil as wiser than the entire rest of the world, and the next day praise another pupil in the same terms; such statements were graphic ways of making the point, not invitations to calculate an individual's precise merit.

5:20 *the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.* Pharisees belonged to a movement scrupulous in understanding and obeying the law according to the traditions of their predecessors (the “tradition of the elders”; see 15:2; Mk 7:3,5). Far more than the aristocratic Sadducees, Pharisees were also popular with the people and respected for their piety. They tithed meticulously, were careful about ritual purity, and at least during the dry season, they often fasted twice a week. The term for “teachers of the law” can refer even to executors of legal documents in villages, but in the Gospels it normally refers to those who were literate and formally trained in the Law of Moses, often teaching others the law. Jesus’ words are again designed to shock his hearers, since Pharisees and teachers of the law would be among the people most respected for piety. But Jesus demands a deeper form of righteousness (see vv. 21–48).

5:21 *heard that it was said.* Sometimes Jewish teachers would say something like, “You have heard it said, but I say,” meaning, “You thought it meant only this, but it actually means also this ...” (cf. 1Co 7:12). *murder.* The prohibition against murder was one of the cardinal commandments (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17).

5:22 *anyone who is angry.* The law limited sin, but Jesus’ kingdom demands go deeper; the law said, “You shall not murder,” but Jesus demanded, “You shall not *want* to murder.” Some other ancient teachers agreed that desiring to kill someone revealed the same sort of heart that actually could commit murder. The insult, “Raca” (essentially meaning, “empty,” “devoid of value”) was roughly equivalent to

the common insult, “Fool.” The punishments might also be equivalent, if the “judgment” and the “court” refer to the tradition, attested in later Jewish literature, of a *heavenly* court (cf. vv. 25–26). Jesus’ word for “hell” here is a Greek rendering of *Gehinnom* (Gehenna), a place of fiery torment for the damned (see note on 3:12); by adding explicit mention of “fire,” Jesus underlines the warning even more strongly. Jesus might have employed an element of hyperbole to drive home the point (cf. his use of “fools” in 23:17).

5:23–24 God welcomed offerings only from those who acted justly (Ge 4:4–7; Pr 15:8; Isa 1:11–17; Jer 6:20; Am 5:21–24).

5:26 *paid the last penny.* The term for “penny” here refers to the *quadans*, a Roman coin equivalent to only several minutes’ wages. Some think this parable uses the image of debt imprisonment, a Gentile custom forbidden in Jewish circles in this period.

5:27 *adultery.* The prohibition against adultery was one of the cardinal commandments and allowed no exceptions (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18).

5:28 *anyone who looks at a woman lustfully.* Whereas the law merely said, “You shall not commit adultery,” Jesus demanded, “You shall not *want* to commit adultery.” Many ancient Jewish moralists condemned lust; some later rabbis even compared extreme lust to adultery. Jesus’ warning here develops the context of the prohibition against adultery in the law: the seventh commandment prohibited adultery, but the tenth commandment warned that one should not even *covet* one’s neighbor’s wife (Ex 20:17; Dt 5:21). Jesus uses here the same verb as in the standard Greek translation of the tenth commandment. He refers, then, to wanting to have one’s neighbor’s wife. The principle, of course, extends beyond Jesus’ illustration, applying to both genders and to single people, coveting one who might be someone else’s spouse someday.

5:30 *cut it off.* Corporal punishment in which a member was cut off was better than capital punishment or eternal torment. Because cutting off an offending member would not necessarily end one’s sin, Jesus here uses hyperbole, or rhetorical overstatement, to graphically

Divorce

³¹“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’^{ah} ³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.’ⁱ

Oaths

³³“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath,’^j but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.^k ³⁴But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all:^l either by heaven, for it is God’s throne;^m or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.ⁿ ³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’;^o anything beyond this comes from the evil one.^{bp}

Eye for Eye

³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’^{cq} ³⁹But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If any-

5:31 ^hDt 24:1-4
5:32 ⁱLk 16:18
5:33 ^jLev 19:12
^kNu 30:2;
Dt 23:21;
Mt 23:16-22
5:34 ^lJas 5:12
^mIsa 66:1;
Mt 23:22
5:35 ⁿPs 48:2
5:37 ^oJas 5:12
P Mt 6:13; 13:19;
38; Jn 17:15;
2Th 3:3;
1Jn 2:13, 14;
3:12; 5:18, 19
5:38 ^qEx 21:24;
Lev 24:20;
Dt 19:21

5:39 ^rLk 6:29;
Ro 12:17, 19;
1Co 6:7; 1Pe 3:9
5:42 ^sDt 15:8;
Lk 6:30
5:43 ^tLev 19:18
^uDt 23:6
5:44 ^vLk 6:27,
28; 23:34;
Ac 7:60;
Ro 12:14;
1Co 4:12;
1Pe 2:23
5:45 ^wver 9
^xJob 25:3
5:46 ^yLk 6:32
5:48 ^zLev 19:2;
1Pe 1:16

one slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.^r ⁴⁰And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.^s

Love for Enemies

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor^{dt} and hate your enemy.’^u ⁴⁴But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,^v ⁴⁵that you may be children^w of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.^x ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?^y Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.^z

^a 31 Deut. 24:1 ^b 37 Or *from evil* ^c 38 Exodus 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21 ^d 43 Lev. 19:18

underline his point: one must do whatever is necessary to evade destruction. Jesus probably mentions the eye first (v. 29) because of the sin just mentioned (v. 28).

5:31 *certificate of divorce.* Cf. Dt 24:1; such a certificate allowed a wife to remarry; the key element of such certificates was the phrase, “You are now free to marry another man” (sometimes abbreviated, “You are now free”).

5:32 *except for sexual immorality.* One school of Pharisees (the school of Hillel) allowed divorce for any reason; the other (the school of Shammai) allowed it only for “sexual immorality” (as here). A legal divorce permitted remarriage, but without a valid divorce, a wife’s new marriage was invalid, hence adultery. (In a Jewish legal setting the wife’s divorce was more at issue than the husband’s because Jewish law in principle permitted men to have multiple wives.) Jesus here depicts divorce as invalid, apart from the partner’s infidelity. Because Jesus often used graphic hyperbole (see note on v. 30), offered general statements that might be qualified in some cases (see note on 1Co 7:15), and elsewhere treated the dissolution of marriage as genuine (though normally wrong; cf. Mt 19:6; Jn 4:18), some view the present statement as hyperbole. Hyperbole was meant to graphically reinforce the point, here the warning against breaking one’s marriage.

5:33 *Do not break your oath.* An oath invoked a deity’s witness that one was telling the truth. Here Jesus alludes to texts such as Lev 19:12; Nu 30:2; Dt 23:21–22.

5:34–35 *do not swear an oath at all.* A few radical sages and sects forbade oaths, demanding that one’s integrity be so great that oaths were unnecessary. Other Jewish people sometimes tried to evade the curse incurred in broken oaths by swearing by something less than God. *heaven.* “Heaven” is God’s throne and “earth” his footstool in Isa 66:1; “Jerusalem” is “the city of the Great King” in Ps 48:2.

5:36 *cannot make even one hair white or black.* People could not control signs of aging.

5:38 *Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.* The principle of equal justice enshrined in “eye for eye” appeared widely

in ancient law; although only in Israel did it apply across class lines (see note on Lev 24:20). In a number of ancient legal collections, this rule appears beside rules pertaining to being struck on the cheek (v. 39).

5:39 *slaps you on the right cheek.* The backhanded blow on the right cheek was meant primarily as an insult, a challenge to the honor of the person struck. The striker could be taken to court and fined for this offense.

5:40 *hand over your coat.* The coat was the one possession that a creditor could not legally seize from a debtor (Ex 22:26–27; Dt 24:12–13). The very poor might have only a single coat; in such cases, surrendering both the inner and outer garments might leave one naked. In this case, an element of hyperbole might be involved, and/or (as some suggest) it might include shaming one’s aggressor with such extensive cooperation.

5:41 *forces you to go one mile.* Roman soldiers, viewed as members of the hostile occupying army, sometimes forced civilians to carry gear for them. Jesus envisions shocking compliance, voluntary cooperation far beyond what the soldier demands.

5:43 *hate your enemy.* The command to love one’s neighbor is explicit in Lev 19:18. The command to hate enemies, while emphasized by some contemporary Jewish sects, was not explicit in Scripture, but extrapolated from pious examples there (Ps 31:6; 119:113; 139:21).

5:44 Some ancient thinkers advocated nonresistance, often on the grounds that anything that could be taken away did not really matter. Jesus’ words go even deeper: to love one’s enemies.

5:45 *that you may be children of your Father.* Ancient moralists, not only Jews but also some Gentiles, often urged imitation of the perfect, divine example.

5:46 *even the tax collectors.* For mainstream Galileans and Judeans, tax collectors (see note on 9:9) and Gentiles were negative examples.

5:47 *greet.* See note on 23:7,8.

5:48 *Be perfect.* Ancient speakers and writers sometimes

Giving to the Needy

6 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.^a If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.^b

Prayer

6:9-13pp — Lk 11:2-4

⁵“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing^c in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father,^d who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what

6:1 ^aMt 23:5
6:4 ^bver 6, 18;
Col 3:23, 24
6:5 ^cMk 11:25;
Lk 18:10-14
6:6 ^d2Ki 4:33

6:7 ^eEcc 5:2
^f1Ki 18:26-29
6:8 ^gver 32
6:10 ^hMt 3:2
ⁱMt 26:39
6:11 ^jPr 30:8
6:12
^kMt 18:21-35
6:13 ^lJas 1:13
^mMt 5:37
6:14 ⁿMt 18:21-35; Mk 11:25, 26; Eph 4:32;
Col 3:13
6:15 ^oMt 18:35

is done in secret, will reward you.⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling^e like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.^f ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need⁹ before you ask him.

⁹“This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰your kingdom^h come,
your will be done,ⁱ
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹Give us today our daily bread.^j
¹²And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.^k
¹³And lead us not into temptation,^{al}
but deliver us from the evil one.^{b, m}

¹⁴For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.ⁿ ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.^o

^a 13 The Greek for *temptation* can also mean *testing*.

^b 13 Or *from evil*; some late manuscripts *one*, / *for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

concluded a section with a summary. After offering six examples, Jesus climaxes with a conclusion that encompasses all righteousness. See note on v. 45.

6:1 *Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others.* Ancient speakers and writers would sometimes state a thesis and then develop it with illustrations; Jesus illustrates this thesis with examples from charity (vv. 2–4), prayer (vv. 5–15), and fasting (vv. 16–18). Because sages offered riddles and statements meant to provoke thought rather than systematic outlines of their beliefs, some of a sage’s statements could appear to be in tension with some of his other statements. Jesus provokes thought in the tension between 5:16 and the command here in v. 1: the difference is whom one seeks to honor. (Note that the Greek term translated “honored” in v. 2 is the same Greek term translated “glorify” in 5:16.)

6:2 *Truly I tell you.* See note on 5:18. Givers did not literally use trumpets to announce their gifts; this image is graphic hyperbole. *they have received their reward in full.* When one had been paid in full, ancient business receipts used similar language. Some scholars note that “hypocrites” means “play-actors”; by this period, though, it meant anyone acting in pretense, including for insincere religious activity (Sirach 1:29; 32:15; 33:2).

6:3 Again Jesus employs hyperbole as a graphic way to focus attention on the point (see notes on v. 2; 5:22, 30, 32, 40).

6:6 *go into your room, close the door.* Most people lacked private rooms; this could be a closet or storeroom, probably again hyperbole (cf. 14:23; 26:36–44) to emphasize the importance of seeking only God’s approval by one’s religious activity.

6:7 *keep on babbling like pagans.* Gentiles sometimes piled up many names for the deities they invoked, and often appealed to deities’ “obligations” to reward the petitioners’ sacrifices and the like. This approach contrasts with simple dependence on one’s faithful heavenly Father (v. 8).

6:8 *your Father.* In Jewish culture, a father was normally someone loving and trustworthy, on whom a child could depend for needs (cf. 7:9–11).

6:9–10 Jesus here echoes a prayer regularly recited by

Jewish people, a prayer known as the *Kaddish*. Its earliest form began, “Exalted and hallowed be his great name, in the world that he created according to his will; may he cause his kingdom to reign . . .” The Jewish prayer invited God’s future reign to change the world; Jesus presumably intends it the same way, although for believers in the kingdom is “already/not yet” (see the article “Kingdom,” p. XXXX). Scripture promised that in the future God’s name would be “hallowed,” or “proved holy,” in the world (Eze 36:23; 38:23; 39:27). Even in the present, many Jewish teachers consider honoring God’s name the supreme objective and profaning it the most terrible sin. *your . . . your . . . your.* In Greek, the word “your” is emphatic in these first three petitions of Jesus’ model prayer (cf. v. 33).

6:9 *Our Father.* Some Greeks called Zeus “father”; more pervasively, Jewish people addressed God as “heavenly Father” in prayers. (On Jesus’ special use of “Abba,” see note on Mk 14:36.) For dependence on one’s father, see note on 6:8.

6:11 *our daily bread.* Prayer for food was one of the most common prayers in antiquity. God, who supplied daily bread to his people for 40 years in the wilderness (Dt 8:2–3), can be trusted for sustenance.

6:12 *forgive us our debts.* Scripture commanded God’s people to forgive all economic debts every 7th and 50th year so that no one would be permanently impoverished. Jewish teachers, however, also recognized sins as “debts” before God (cf. 18:21–35). The sixth benediction in a regularly prayed Jewish prayer, the *Amida*, included a prayer for forgiveness; cf. also note on v. 14.

6:13 *lead us not into temptation.* A similar Jewish evening prayer meant not, “Do not let us be tempted,” but “Do not let us fail when we are tested” (cf. 26:41–42, 47). The late addition, “for yours is the kingdom . . .” (see NIV text note) fits the church’s use of the prayer; Jewish people often added such doxologies at the close of prayers.

6:14 *your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* Some other Jewish sages also emphasized that one who wants to seek God’s forgiveness must also forgive other mortals (Sirach 28:1–8).

Fasting

¹⁶“When you fast, do not look somber^r as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.^q”

Treasures in Heaven

6:22,23pp — Lk 11:34-36

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,^r where moths and vermin destroy,^s and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,^t where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.^v

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy,^a your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are unhealthy,^b your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.^w”

Do Not Worry

6:25-33pp — Lk 12:22-31

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry^x about your life, what you will eat or drink;

6:16 ^pIsa 58:5
6:18 ^qver 4, 6
6:19 ^rPr 23:4;
Heb 13:5
^sJas 5:2, 3
6:20 ^tMt 19:21;
Lk 12:33;
18:22; 1Ti 6:19
^uLk 12:33
6:21 ^vLk 12:34
6:24 ^wLk 16:13
6:25 ^xver 27,
28, 31, 34;
Lk 10:41; 12:11,
22; Php 4:6;
1Pe 5:7

6:26
^yJob 38:41;
Ps 147:9
^zMt 10:29-31
6:27 ^aPs 39:5
6:29
^b1Ki 10:4-7
6:30 ^cMt 8:26;
14:31; 16:8
6:32 ^dver 8
6:33 ^eMt 19:29;
Mk 10:29-30
7:1 ^fLk 6:37;
Ro 14:4, 10,
13; 1Co 4:5;
Jas 4:11, 12
7:2 ^gMk 4:24;
Lk 6:38

or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.^y Are you not much more valuable than they?^z ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?^a

²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor^b was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith?^c ³¹So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.^d ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.^e ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Judging Others

7:3-5pp — Lk 6:41,42

7 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.^f ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.^g

^a 22 The Greek for *healthy* here implies *generous*.

^b 23 The Greek for *unhealthy* here implies *stingy*.

^c 27 Or *single cubit to your height*

6:17 *oil ... wash.* When Jewish people fasted, they not only abstained from food, but also from washing their clothes, having intercourse, shaving, and anointing themselves. People anointed their skin with olive oil and then scraped off the oil to cleanse themselves; like many Gentiles, Judeans and Galileans often anointed their heads with oil in connection with washing (even on the Sabbath).

6:19 *moths and vermin.* Expensive clothing, counted as one expression of wealth, was susceptible to moths and vermin. *thieves.* Thieves could dig through mud-brick walls; people often kept all their money in a strongbox in their home, sometimes under the floor.

6:20–21 Jewish people sometimes spoke of heavenly rewards as treasure in heaven.

6:22 The “healthy” eye here is lit. “single,” which can mean “sincere” or “genuine,” but also prepares for v. 24.

6:23 *eyes are unhealthy.* Jesus plays on a familiar expression. Jewish people sometimes spoke of a “good” (NIV “healthy”) eye as a generous one, and an “evil” (lit.; NIV “unhealthy”) eye as a stingy one. *light ... darkness.* Because light cannot be darkness, Jesus again used shocking language to hold attention (cf. salt losing its saltiness in 5:13).

6:24 *two masters.* Sharing a slave was a rare situation; it arose, e.g., when two siblings might inherit one slave. When it did occur, the slave normally preferred one mas-

ter to the other. *money.* “Mammon” (KJV) was an Aramaic designation for money or property, but here Jesus apparently personified it. (Personification was one ancient technique for communicating graphically.)

6:26 *birds of the air.* Nature had long been an interest of wise teachers (1Ki 4:33), and both Greek and Jewish sages often used lessons from nature to illustrate their points. Jewish people recognized God’s providential rule over all of nature (though some denied his concern for bird nests).

6:27 *add a single hour.* Sages could use shocking or creative language to hold hearers’ attention. Literally Jesus spoke of adding a “cubit” (KJV; a measurement of length; NIV “hour”) to one’s longevity or possibly height.

6:32 *your heavenly Father knows.* Most people in the ancient world were poor, dependent on harvests for food. Naturally, they sought basic necessities; Jesus here invites them to trust their heavenly Father enough to seek first his kingdom.

6:34 *tomorrow will worry.* “Tomorrow” may be personified in another graphic statement (see note on v. 24).

7:2 *in the same way.* In principle, many Jewish sages (and even some Greek thinkers) would have agreed with Jesus (Sirach 28:1–3). Nevertheless, following Jesus in practice requires more than agreeing with him in principle. *measure.* The need to “measure” appropriately was common in

³“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

⁶“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Ask, Seek, Knock

7:7-11pp — Lk 11:9-13

⁷“Ask and it will be given to you;^h seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds;ⁱ and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,^j for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.^k

7:7 ^hMt 21:22; Mk 11:24; Jn 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24; Jas 1:5-8; 4:2, 3; 1Jn 3:22; 5:14, 15
7:8 ⁱPr 8:17; Jer 29:12, 13
7:12 ^jLk 6:31
^kRo 13:8-10; Gal 5:14

7:13 ^lLk 13:24

7:15

^mJer 23:16; Mt 24:24; Mk 13:22; Lk 6:26; 2Pe 2:1; 1Jn 4:1; Rev 16:13

ⁿAc 20:29

7:16 ^oMt 12:33;

Lk 6:44

^pJas 3:12

7:19 ^qMt 3:10

7:21 ^rHos 8:2;

Mt 25:11

^sRo 2:13;

Jas 1:22

7:22 ^tMt 10:15

^u1Co 13:1-3

7:23 ^vPs 6:8;

Mt 25:12, 41;

Lk 13:25-27

The Narrow and Wide Gates

¹³“Enter through the narrow gate.^l For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

True and False Prophets

¹⁵“Watch out for false prophets.^m They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.ⁿ ¹⁶By their fruit you will recognize them.^o Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?^p ¹⁷Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.^q ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

True and False Disciples

²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’^r will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.^s ²²Many will say to me on that day,^t ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’^u ²³Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’^v

markets. “It is measured to one according to the measure by which one measures” was also a Jewish maxim.

7:3–5 *speck ... plank.* This graphic, hyperbolic image would likely draw laughter—and provoke thought. If a splinter endangered a person with blindness, how much more did a roof beam; ancient eye surgery was a delicate art that could result in blindness.

7:6 The meaning of this saying is debated, but some think its point is similar to Pr 23:9: “Do not speak to fools, for they will scorn your prudent words.” *dogs.* Could apply to the wicked (cf. Ps 22:16,20; 59:6,14–15; Pr 26:11); Jewish people normally despised dogs as unclean scavengers (Ex 22:31). *pigs.* Unclean (Lev 11:7) and could not appreciate what was valuable (Pr 11:22).

7:7 *Ask and it will be given.* Few others, if any, encouraged such radical, childlike confidence in God’s provision.

7:9–10 *bread ... fish.* Most Jewish fathers were dependable providers. Bread and fish were the basic staples of the Galilean diet.

7:11 *how much more ...!* Jewish teachers (and some Gentiles) often used analogy arguments from lesser to greater.

7:12 *do to others what you would have them do to you.* Some earlier Jewish teachers offered this principle of wisdom, recognized in many cultures (e.g., Letter of Aristeas 207; Greeks; even Confucius), though often in the negative form (“Whatever you do not want others to do to you, do not do to them,” Tobit 4:15; Philo, *Hypothetica* 7.6). Later rabbis also attributed to Hillel, a sage before Jesus, the claim that this principle constituted the heart of the law (Babylonian Talmud *Shabbat* 31a). Sages sometimes appealed to common wisdom to make a point, as Jesus may be doing here.

7:13–14 *leads to destruction ... leads to life.* Greek, Roman, and Jewish writers often spoke of two ways; the choice between life and death was an ancient one (Dt 30:19). Many applied this image of the two ways to the afterlife. Many mainstream Jews felt that most Jews would be saved, but some, like Jesus, warned that most people would be lost (e.g., the later apocalyptic author of 4 Ezra 7:45–61; 8:1–3).

7:15 *sheep’s clothing ... wolves.* Wolves coming disguised as sheep was a common image (even in one of Aesop’s fables), though it is also graphic hyperbole: wolves do not wear clothing, and it was impossible to transform one’s skin (Jer 13:23). Wolves were the most obvious and common predators of sheep, killing sheep to feed themselves; their image was often used to represent humans who would harm others. Judeans and Galileans were well aware that some prophets were false; indeed, on multiple occasions, in the decades following Jesus’ ministry, alleged prophets led followers to destruction at the hands of Rome’s armies.

7:16 See note on Jas 3:12.

7:21–22 Although Greek and Jewish accounts sometimes delegated judgment to an exalted human, the ultimate judge in Jewish belief was God. Some Jewish exorcists invoked Solomon’s name to try to expel demons (Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.47), but the sense here may exalt Jesus more: Jewish people more often could speak of acting (e.g., 1Sa 17:45; Ps 118:11–12) or prophesying (e.g., Dt 18:22; 1 Esdras 6:1) in the name of God.

7:23 *I never knew you.* This was a recognized formula of repudiation and rejection.

The Wise and Foolish Builders

7:24-27pp — Lk 6:47-49

²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice^w is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things,^x the crowds were amazed at his teaching,^y ²⁹because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

8:2-4pp — Mk 1:40-44; Lk 5:12-14

8 When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. ²A man with leprosy^{az} came and

7:24

^wJas 1:22-25
^{7:28} ^xMt 11:1;
13:53; 19:1;
26:1 ^yMt 13:54;
Mk 1:22; 6:2;
Lk 4:32; Jn 7:46
8:2 ^zLk 5:12

^aMt 9:18; 15:25;
18:26; 20:20
8:4 ^bMt 9:30;
Mk 5:43;
7:36; 8:30
^cLev 14:2-32
8:8 ^dPs 107:20

knelt before him^a and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

³Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, “See that you don’t tell anyone.^b But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded,^c as a testimony to them.”

The Faith of the Centurion

8:5-13pp — Lk 7:1-10

⁵When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶“Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”

⁷Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”

⁸The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.^d ⁹For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

^a 2 The Greek word traditionally translated *leprosy* was used for various diseases affecting the skin.

7:24–27 Some other Jewish teachers told a similar parable, with a major difference: In their story, the foundational rock in their parables was the Torah, God’s law (*Abot de Rabbi Nathan* 24A). Here Jesus’ teaching holds the same role as God’s message in the traditional parable (cf. also the two ways in vv. 13–14; the principle in Pr 10:25).

7:29 *as one who had authority.* Most teachers did not want to speak on their own authority; when possible, they cited earlier authorities that supported their teaching. By contrast, Jesus declares, “Truly I tell you” (5:18), and, most offensively of all, speaks of judging (vv. 21–23) and ranks his message with God’s law (vv. 24–27). On Jesus’ authority, cf. 8:9.

8:1–9:38 Some scholars count ten specific miracles (not counting summaries) in chs. 8–9, evoking Moses’ ten major judgment signs in Egypt; others note three sets of miracle stories revealing Jesus’ authority, interspersed with the demands of Jesus’ authority for his followers. Because ancient biographies were usually arranged topically, Matthew does group many miracles in this section.

8:2 *man with leprosy.* Although a majority of scholars doubt that ancient leprosy was limited to what is called leprosy today, it included severe skin conditions that led to isolation from society (in most societies; for Jewish society, see Lev 13:1—14:32). Jewish tradition compared it with the uncleanness of death (cf. Nu 12:10–12; 2Ki 5:7), and some later teachers attributed leprosy to the leper’s sin (especially the sin of slander). Out of respect, supplicants often recognized God’s prerogative to choose, even while pleading for him to act (Ge 18:27,30–32; cf. 2Sa 10:12; Da 3:17–18).

8:3 *touched the man.* Because lepers were unclean (Lev 13:45–46), anyone who touched them contracted temporary ritual impurity. Jesus here touches the unclean man (cf. 9:21–22,25) to cure him.

8:4 *don’t tell.* Ancients respected people who did not

seek their own honor. *show yourself to the priest.* A priest was required to inspect a leper who believed that he or she was cleansed, and an offering in the temple should follow (Lev 14:1–9).

8:5 *Capernaum.* See note on 4:13. *centurion.* Centurions commanded roughly 80 troops (not literally 100, despite the name) and were the backbone of the Roman army; often they worked their way up through the ranks to achieve their position. Roman military units were stationed in Caesarea, which was on the coast, and in Jerusalem; they consisted of auxiliary troops, mostly recruited from Syria. Matthew omits Luke’s messengers (Lk 7:3) as he elsewhere omits those of Mk 5:35 in 9:18; other ancient biographers used this technique of compression to keep focused on the main point.

8:6 *my servant.* Servants could be viewed as members of households; in this case, the servant could be the only member of or a significant part of the centurion’s household. During their 20 years of service, soldiers in the Roman army were not allowed to marry officially, although they sometimes took local concubines. Most soldiers could not easily afford servants (the average price of a slave was about a third of the best-paid legionary’s annual wages), but average centurions made some 15 times the wages of the lowest-paid soldiers.

8:7 *Shall I come ...?* The NIV translates Jesus’ response as a question because in Greek, the “I” here is emphatic. Jewish people were not supposed to enter the homes of unclean Gentiles (see note on Ac 10:28).

8:8 *say the word.* People in antiquity sought healing at hot springs, special shrines, sometimes through magic and occasionally through contact with holy persons. Long-distance miracles, however, were considered extraordinary; this centurion expresses special faith (v. 10).

8:9 *a man under authority.* The centurion understands how authority works: just as soldiers obey the centurion because he is backed by the authority of the empire,

¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.^e ¹¹I say to you that many will come from the east and the west,^f and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.^g ¹²But the subjects of the kingdom^h will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”ⁱ

¹³Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.”^j And his servant was healed at that moment.

Jesus Heals Many

8:14–16pp — Mk 1:29–34; Lk 4:38–41

¹⁴When Jesus came into Peter’s house, he saw Peter’s mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. ¹⁵He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.

¹⁶When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.^k ¹⁷This was to fulfill^l what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

8:10 ^eMt 15:28
8:11 ^fPs 107:3;
Isa 49:12;
59:19; Mal 1:11
9 Lk 13:29
8:12 ^gMt 13:38
^hMt 13:42, 50;
22:13; 24:51;
25:30; Lk 13:28
8:13 ^jMt 9:22
8:16 ^kMt 4:23,
24
8:17 ^lMt 1:22

^mIsa 53:4
8:18 ⁿMk 4:35
8:20 ^oDa 7:13;
Mt 12:8, 32,
40; 16:13, 27,
28; 17:9; 19:28;
Mk 2:10; 8:31
8:22 ^pMt 4:19

“He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.”^{am}

The Cost of Following Jesus

8:19–22pp — Lk 9:57–60

¹⁸When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake.ⁿ ¹⁹Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”

²⁰Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man^o has no place to lay his head.”

²¹Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

²²But Jesus told him, “Follow me,^p and let the dead bury their own dead.”

Jesus Calms the Storm

8:23–27pp — Mk 4:36–41; Lk 8:22–25

8:23–27Ref — Mt 14:22–33

²³Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵The disciples went and woke

^a 17 Isaiah 53:4 (see Septuagint)

everything will obey Jesus because he is backed by God’s authority (cf. 9:6,8; 28:18).

8:11 *the east and the west.* May include Jews in the Diaspora (Isa 43:5) but given the context here presumably include also Gentiles (Isa 25:6–7; 56:3–8). *at the feast.* Jewish people expected a banquet for the righteous in God’s end-time kingdom (cf. Isa 25:6).

8:12 *the subjects ... will be thrown outside.* Many believed that descent from Abraham (3:9) ensured their admittance to the feast (v. 11). Jewish sources often envisioned damnation in darkness, sometimes as a prelude to or alongside burning (e.g., 1 Enoch 10:4–6; 103:8). *weeping and gnashing of teeth.* People would weep over their damnation (Judith 16:17). Gnashing teeth can depict anger (Job 16:9; Ps 35:16; 37:12; 112:10) but here may reflect anguish or agony.

8:14 *Peter’s mother-in-law.* It was common for households to include members of the extended family (newly married couples sometimes lived in a room atop the home of the groom’s parents). Here Peter’s family has probably taken in his wife’s widowed mother. *fever.* Common and (in the case of malaria) often severe and recurrent.

8:16 *with a word.* Gentile exorcists often used incantations or invoked a higher spirit to drive out a lower one. Jewish exorcists sometimes used magic associated with Solomon or used smelly roots to gag spirits out. By simply expelling demons by his command, Jesus demonstrates special authority.

8:17 *took up our infirmities ... diseases.* The context of Isa 53:4 refers to the suffering servant whose death would satisfy God’s demand for Israel’s punishment. The context in Isaiah also suggests healing of spiritual sickness (Isa 53:5; cf. Isa 6:10; 42:18–19). Nevertheless, Matthew understood that Isaiah looked for a wider restoration; the promised era of restoration would also include physical restoration (Isa 35:5–6). While God heals people in the present age, death still continues; yet Jesus’ healings in this age offer a

foretaste of the promised kingdom, when God will restore people and nature permanently (Isa 35:1–10).

8:20 *no place to lay his head.* The proper response to a leader’s warning about difficulty ahead (as in 2Sa 15:19–20) was to follow him anyway (2Sa 15:21–22).

8:21 *bury my father.* Many considered honoring parents a son’s greatest obligation (e.g., Josephus *Against Apion* 2.206), and burying them was the greatest expression of that obligation (cf., e.g., Tobit 4:3–4; 6:15; 4 Maccabees 16:11). The obligation fell most heavily on the eldest son. To neglect this duty was unthinkable; it would make one an outcast from the extended family and dishonored in one’s village, normally for the rest of one’s life. But a son whose father had just died would not normally be out talking with a rabbi; on receiving news of the father’s death, he would immediately see to the father’s burial. Some scholars note that, “I must first bury my father” sometimes functions as a polite request for delay until the father dies — sometimes a delay of years — so the son can continue with filial obligations in the meantime. Others suggest that this son refers to secondary burial — the custom of reburying the father’s bones a year after the initial burial. On either of these views, the son could be requesting a considerable delay.

8:22 *let the dead bury their own dead.* Even if the son is asking for a considerable delay (see note on v. 21), Jesus’ response would be shocking; burying one’s father was one of society’s greatest obligations (see note on v. 21). In mainstream Jewish society, only God could claim honor above parents in such a dramatic way. Ancient sources sometimes refer to the spiritually (or socially) dead; alternatively, Jesus could refer to the physically dead, using shocking, graphic language to make his point, as he often did.

8:24 *furious storm.* The Sea of Galilee is far below sea level and surrounded by hills with deep ravines; thus sudden storms can strike it unexpectedly. Galilean fishing boats were normally small.

him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”

²⁶He replied, “You of little faith,⁹ why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.^r

²⁷The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

8:26 ^aMt 6:30
^rPs 65:7; 89:9;
107:29

8:28 ^sMt 4:24

Jesus Restores Two Demon-Possessed Men

8:28-34pp — Mk 5:1-17; Lk 8:26-37

²⁸When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes,^a two demon-possessed^s men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no

^a ²⁸ Some manuscripts *Gergesenes*; other manuscripts *Gerasenes*

8:26 *rebuked the winds and the waves.* Greeks had stories of gods or special heroes who could control weather, but these were legends from the distant past, not reports from within living memory of eyewitnesses, as in the Gos-

pels. For those who knew Scripture, the one with power over the winds and waves was God.

8:28 *region of the Gadarenes.* Whereas Mark identifies the territory by the better known but more distant

MATTHEW 8:16,28 – 34



DEMONS AND THE BIBLE

Many readers assume that the belief in demons attested in Scripture the superstitious beliefs of all ancient peoples. Yet anthropologists witness possession trances in most cultures today. Demons’ reality, of course, cannot be decided by archaeology. Researchers can demonstrate, however, that the notion that the New Testament writers simply reflect the pre-scientific views of their contemporaries is simplistic and misleading.

Demons in the Ancient Near East

Ancient Near Eastern society was awash in texts containing magical incantations and amulets intended to protect people from evil spirits (spells for defense against demons are called “apotropaic spells”). For example, one of the feared demons of Neo-Assyrian times was the lion-headed female figure Lamashtu, who was thought especially to attack pregnant women and babies. For protection women wore a necklace with a pendant of the god Pazuzu. An enormous number of apotropaic spells have survived from Babylonia, employing magical words and rituals involving plants, animal parts and other sacred objects. Even today in the eastern Mediterranean it is not uncommon to see amulets intended to ward off the “evil eye.”



Bronze head of Pazuzu, for protection against the demon Lamashtu, 800 – 600 BC, Iraq.

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Demons in Non-Biblical Jewish Literature

Ancient Jewish literature was also fascinated with magic as a means of dealing with demons. The Apocryphal book of Tobit tells the story of one “Sarah, daughter of Raguel,” who had been married—and widowed on her wedding night through the

continued on next page

one could pass that way. ²⁹“What do you want with us, ^tSon of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?”^u

³⁰Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. ³¹The demons begged

8:29

^tJdg 11:12;

2Sa 16:10;

1Ki 17:18;

Mk 1:24;

Lk 4:34; Jn 2:4

^u2Pe 2:4

Jesus, “If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.”

³²He said to them, “Go!” So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. ³³Those

Gerasa (for a time, the capital of the Decapolis; cf. Mk 5:1), Matthew identifies the location by the nearest significant town, Gadara. Both towns were in the area of the Decapolis, *from the tombs*. People often associated spirits with tombs.

8:29 *the appointed time*. The day of judgment, the time of their doom.

8:30 *herd of pigs*. Gadara (v. 28) is in the region of the Decapolis, the majority of whose residents were Gentiles. Jews did not rear pigs (cf. Lev 11:7).

8:32 *into the lake*. Jewish people believed that demons could be bound, sometimes beneath bodies of water; some Jews believed they could be destroyed.

intervention of the demon Asmodeus—seven times. Meanwhile Tobias, the son of the blind Tobit, journeyed to Media, where Sarah lived, traveling in the company of a man who turned out to be the angel Raphael. While Tobias was sitting by the Tigris River a fish tried to eat his foot. Raphael instructed Tobias to seize the fish and extract its gall, heart and liver. If he would burn the heart and liver in the presence of an individual afflicted by a demon, that person would be delivered. Arriving in Media, Raphael informed Tobias that he was to marry Sarah but that he could thwart the demon Asmodeus by burning the fish’s liver and heart when he went in to her. Tobias safely took Sarah as his wife, after which he used the fish gall to cure his father’s blindness.

The Testament of Solomon, a work from the third century AD, further illustrates the widespread belief in apotropaic magic. This is a pseudepigraphical work (one that falsely claims to have been written by a famous person of the Old Testament) attributed to Solomon. In this work Solomon received a powerful ring from the angel Michael. With it he could imprison or control demons and deliver people from affliction. For example, Solomon forced the demon Lix Tetrax to help build the temple by hurling stones up to the workers.

Demons in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is remarkably reticent about evil spirits, so much so that it seems to have no developed demonology. Even so, three facts stand out:

- There are no incantations, rituals or amulets prescribed for giving an individual protection from spirits. Considering how much of the Torah is devoted to ritual and to sacred objects, this is a remarkable omission.
- God is said to have complete authority over the spirits, which cannot operate in the world without his approval. If a “lying spirit” goes out it is only with divine consent (1Ki 22:23; cf. Job 1–2).
- The main concern of the Old Testament writers was that people avoid seeking to avail themselves of magical powers through contact with spirits (e.g., Dt 18:10–12).

Demons in the New Testament

The New Testament demonstrates two realities about evil spirits:

- Jesus has absolute power over them; this was a matter of divine authority, not magic or sorcery.
- The New Testament mocks the claims of magicians by describing their inability to deal with real spirits. The failed efforts of Simon the sorcerer (Ac 8:9–24) and the sons of Sceva (Ac 19:13–16) to obtain apostolic authority illustrate the point that the miracles of the New Testament had nothing in common with ancient magic.

Jesus had no use for demonic spirits and did not seek to employ them to do his bidding. ♦

tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. ³⁴Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.^v

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

9:2-8pp — Mk 2:3-12; Lk 5:18-26

9 Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town.^w ²Some men brought to him a paralyzed man,^x lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith,^y he said to the man, “Take heart,^z son; your sins are forgiven.”^a

³At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!”^b

⁴Knowing their thoughts,^c Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? ⁵Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? ⁶But I want you to know that the Son of Man^d has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.”

⁷Then the man got up and went home. ⁸When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God,^e who had given such authority to man.

The Calling of Matthew

9:9-13pp — Mk 2:14-17; Lk 5:27-32

⁹As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax col-

8:34^v Lk 5:8; Ac 16:39
9:1^w Mt 4:13
9:2^x Mt 4:24
^y ver 22
^z Jn 16:33
9:3^a Lk 7:48
9:3^b Mt 26:65; Jn 10:33
9:4^c Ps 94:11; Mt 12:25; Lk 6:8; 9:47; 11:17
9:6^d Mt 8:20
9:8^e Mt 5:16; 15:31; Lk 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 23:47; Jn 15:8; Ac 4:21; 11:18; 21:20

9:11^f Mt 11:19; Lk 5:30; 15:2; Gal 2:15
9:13^g Hos 6:6; Mic 6:6-8; Mt 12:7
^h 1Ti 1:15
9:14ⁱ Lk 18:12
9:15^j Jn 3:29
^k Ac 13:2, 3; 14:23

lector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

¹⁰While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”^f

¹²On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’^g For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”^h

Jesus Questioned About Fasting

9:14-17pp — Mk 2:18-22; Lk 5:33-39

¹⁴Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often,ⁱ but your disciples do not fast?”

¹⁵Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?^j The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.^k

¹⁶“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. ¹⁷Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

^a 13 Hosea 6:6

8:34 *pleaded with him to leave.* Especially after the destruction of the pigs, Gentiles might think of Jesus as a powerful and dangerous magician. Economic interests mattered more to them than a person, as was common (cf. Ac 16:19; 19:27).

9:2 *your sins are forgiven.* Priests might perhaps pronounce God’s forgiveness after atonement had occurred, but no sacrifice was offered here. The teachers of the law thus consider the pronouncement presumptuous (v. 3).

9:6 *the Son of Man has authority.* The Son of Man’s authority echoes Da 7:13–14. Jesus has authority not merely to pronounce God’s forgiveness (cf. v. 2), but to forgive—a divine prerogative!

9:9 *tax collector’s booth.* Most people in the Roman Empire did not like tax collectors; Jewish people viewed them as traitors. Their job affected the poor most dramatically. In fact, when harvests were bad in Egypt, it was not unheard of for the population of an entire village to leave town and start a village somewhere else when they heard that a tax collector was coming. Some consider Matthew a customs officer charging tariffs on goods passing through. Like other tax collectors, customs officers could search possessions; customs income normally went to local governments run by elites who were cooperative with Rome. See note on Mk 2:14. *Follow me.* See note on 4:19.

9:10 *having dinner.* The term often connotes a banquet (a festive meal where people reclined), which was probably

in Jesus’ honor. Eating with someone established a covenant of friendship, which normally also signified approval.

9:11 *Pharisees . . . tax collectors.* Later rabbis sometimes contrasted Pharisees, as the godliest Judeans one would normally meet, with tax collectors, as the most ungodly one would normally meet. Pharisees did not approve of eating with sinners, making Jesus’ behavior perplexing to them.

9:12 *healthy.* Ancient speakers and writers often used sickness and physicians as moral or intellectual analogies.

9:13 *go and learn.* Jewish teachers sometimes exhorted their hearers to “go and learn,” but Jesus’ exhortation might seem more insulting here (cf. 12:5). *I desire mercy, not sacrifice.* Those who valued ritual sacrifices above compassion toward others missed God’s heart (Hos 6:6; also quoted in Mt 12:7). In principle Pharisees, especially the school of Hillel, valued mercy—but none would have embraced sinners as Jesus did.

9:14 *How is it . . . ?* People in antiquity often held teachers responsible for the behavior of their disciples.

9:15 *mourn.* Fasting was often linked with mourning, whereas weddings were the supreme time for rejoicing. In fact, rabbis taught that weddings even took priority over many religious obligations.

9:17 People employed animal skins, most often goat-skins, as containers for fluids. Wine expands as it ferments; still-expanding, new wine would rupture wineskins that had already been stretched by old, fermenting wine. Jesus’ new order demanded a new approach.

Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

9:18-26pp — Mk 5:22-43; Lk 8:41-56

¹⁸While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him^l and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her,^m and she will live.” ¹⁹Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

²⁰Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak.ⁿ ²¹She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.”

²²Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.”^o And the woman was healed at that moment.^p

²³When Jesus entered the synagogue leader’s house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes,^q ²⁴he said, “Go away. The girl is not dead^r but asleep.”^s But they laughed at him. ²⁵After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. ²⁶News of this spread through all that region.^t

Jesus Heals the Blind and the Mute

²⁷As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”^u

²⁸When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?”

“Yes, Lord,” they replied.

²⁹Then he touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith let it be done to you”;^v ³⁰and their sight was restored.

9:18 ^lMt 8:2

^mMk 5:23

9:20

ⁿMt 14:36;

Mk 3:10

9:22

^oMk 10:52;

Lk 7:50;

17:19; 18:42

^pMt 15:28

9:23

^qCh 35:25;

Jer 9:17, 18

9:24 ^rAc 20:10

^sJn 11:11-14

9:26 ^tMt 4:24

9:27 ^uMt 15:22;

Mk 10:47;

Lk 18:38-39

9:29 ^vver 22

9:30 ^wMt 8:4

9:31 ^xver 26;

Mk 7:36

9:32 ^yMt 4:24

^zMt 12:22-24

9:33 ^{aa}Mk 2:12

9:34 ^{ab}Mt 12:24;

Lk 11:15

9:35 ^{ac}Mt 4:23

9:36 ^{ad}Mt 14:14

^{ae}Nu 27:17;

Eze 34:5;

6; Zec 10:2;

Mk 6:34

9:37 ^{af}Jn 4:35

^{ag}Lk 10:2

10:1 ^{ah}Mk 3:13-15; Lk 9:1

Jesus warned them sternly, “See that no one knows about this.”^w ³¹But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.^x

³²While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed^y and could not talk^z was brought to Jesus. ³³And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.”^a

³⁴But the Pharisees said, “It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.”^b

The Workers Are Few

³⁵Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.^c

³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them,^d because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.^e ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest^f is plentiful but the workers are few.^g ³⁸Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

10:2-4pp — Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16; Ac 1:13

10:9-15pp — Mk 6:8-11; Lk 9:3-5; 10:4-12

10:19-22pp — Mk 13:11-13; Lk 21:12-17

10:26-33pp — Lk 12:2-9

10:34, 35pp — Lk 12:51-53

10 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits^h and to heal every disease and sickness.

9:18 *synagogue leader.* This term encompasses different roles in different locations; a synagogue could have multiple leaders, and the title was often honorary. Generally, however, those holding this office were prominent persons of means.

9:20 *subject to bleeding.* Such a condition made someone ritually impure. Because her bleeding was long-term and intercourse was forbidden in such circumstances, she was probably divorced (if she had ever been married), fairly socially isolated, and destitute. Because anyone whose cloak she touched became ritually impure (cf. Lev 15:25–27), she does not announce that she is touching Jesus. This woman’s faith might appear scandalous to others, but she is desperate and knows that her cure lies with Jesus and him alone. *the edge of his cloak.* May refer to Jesus’ Jewish tassels (note the Greek translation in the Septuagint [the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT] of Nu 15:38–39; Dt 22:12; see note on Mt 23:5).

9:23 *noisy crowd . . . pipes.* Burials were conducted quickly in Judea and Galilee, so mourners gathered immediately when someone died. Professional mourners helped facilitate grieving; at least two might be present for a poor person, but a synagogue official’s resources could accommodate more.

9:24 *asleep.* “Sleep” was a frequent metaphor for death

in antiquity, though Jesus is also maintaining an element of privacy, as in 8:4.

9:25 *took the girl by the hand.* The touch of someone bleeding could communicate ritual impurity for one day, but touching a corpse made one impure for a week (Nu 19:11). Not ashamed to be considered unclean by others, Jesus instead makes clean those whom he touches.

9:27 *two blind men.* Biblical law mandated concern for the blind, but few professions outside of begging would be open to them. Blind men could follow Jesus’ voice. *Son of David.* Implies that Jesus is the promised ruler of Israel.

9:34 *by the prince of demons.* Even in the second century, Christianity’s detractors could not deny that Jesus performed miracles, but they attributed these to sorcery rather than to God. Jesus’ accusers would know that the required penalty for sorcery was death (Ex 22:18).

9:36 *like sheep without a shepherd.* An OT picture of God’s people (Nu 27:17; 1Ki 22:17; Eze 34:5), but God had promised to one day shepherd them himself (Eze 34:11–16).

9:37–38 Once grain was ripe, gathering it in quickly before it could spoil was an urgent task. Landowners would hire extra labor (cf. 20:1).

10:1 Disciples of teachers were like apprentices; the best could ideally carry on the teacher’s work. *twelve.* See note on 19:28.

²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.ⁱ

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans.^j ⁶Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.^k ⁷As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven^l has come near.’ ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,^a drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

⁹“Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts^m — ¹⁰no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.ⁿ ¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. ¹²As you enter the home, give it your greeting.^o

10:4ⁱ Mt 26:14–16, 25, 47; Jn 13:2, 26, 27
10:5^j 2Ki 17:24; Lk 9:52; Jn 4:4–26, 39, 40; Ac 8:5, 25
10:6^k Jer 50:6; Mt 15:24
10:7^l Mt 3:2
10:9^m Lk 22:35
10:10ⁿ 1Ti 5:18
10:12
^o 1Sa 25:26

10:14 PNe 5:13; Lk 10:11; Ac 13:51
10:15^q 2Pe 2:6
^r Mt 12:36; 2Pe 2:9; 1Jn 4:17
^s Mt 11:22, 24
10:16^t Lk 10:3
^u Ro 16:19
10:17^v Mt 5:22
^w Mt 23:34; Mk 13:9; Ac 5:40; 26:11
10:18
^x Ac 25:24–26
10:19^y Ex 4:12
10:20^z Ac 4:8
10:21^a ver 35, 36; Mic 7:6

¹³If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.^p ¹⁵Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah^q on the day of judgment^r than for that town.^s

¹⁶“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.^t Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.^u ¹⁷Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils^v and be flogged in the synagogues.^w ¹⁸On my account you will be brought before governors and kings^x as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it.^y At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father^z speaking through you.

²¹“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents^a and have them put

^a 8 The Greek word traditionally translated *leprosy* was used for various diseases affecting the skin.

10:2 *apostles*. Or “commissioned agents,” those authorized by the sender’s authority to bring the message. Some of the names in vv. 2–4 (Simon, James, John and Judas) were very common, explaining why some are given additional identifying titles.

10:5 *Gentiles* . . . *Samaritans*. Samaria bordered Galilee on the south, and Gentile cities surrounded it on the outside; Jesus’ disciples are thus essentially confined to Galilee during this mission. For Samaritans, see the article “Samaria and Samaritans,” p. XXXX; see also applicable notes on Jn 4.

10:6 *lost sheep*. For Israel as God’s lost sheep, see Isa 53:6; Jer 50:6; Eze 34:5; cf. Ps 119:176.

10:7 *proclaim this message*. Disciples normally carried on their teacher’s or school’s message; see 3:2; 4:17.

10:9 *in your belts*. Travelers often carried money in a pouch tied to one’s belt.

10:10 *no bag for the journey*. Wandering Cynic philosophers, found in some Gentile cities, carried a bag for begging, which is prohibited here. *extra shirt*. In the poorest areas, many peasants had only a single cloak. *sandals*. Judean sandals had light straps running from between the toes to just above the ankle; unlike shoes, such sandals protected only the bottom of the foot. *staff*. Travelers used a staff for protection against robbers, snakes and other creatures, and sometimes for maintaining one’s balance while walking on uneven mountain paths. Matthew’s description is slightly more demanding than Mark’s (Mk 6:8–11); ancient readers were accustomed to such minor variations in ancient historical and biographical works. Biblical prophets also had to live simply in times of widespread apostasy, not dependent on decadent society (cf., e.g., 3:1,4; 1Ki 17:4–6; 18:13; 2Ki 4:38; 5:15–16,26; 6:1).

10:11 *stay at their house*. Hospitality was one of the chief virtues in Mediterranean antiquity, and Jewish travelers could normally count on Jewish hospitality even in Diaspora cities. When Essenes (members of a strict Jewish sect) traveled, they traveled light, depending on hospitality from other Essenes.

10:12–13 *your greeting* . . . *let your peace rest*. The conventional Jewish greeting was *shalom*, “May it be well with you.” This was a blessing, i.e., an implicit prayer to God. See note on 23:7.

10:14 *shake the dust off your feet*. Jewish people sometimes shook profane dust from their feet when entering a more holy place; some did so when leaving pagan territory to enter the Holy Land (cf. v. 15).

10:15 *Sodom and Gomorrah*. Sodom rejected God’s messengers (Ge 19:4–5). Biblical prophets used Sodom as the epitome of wickedness, often applying the image to Israel (Dt 32:32; Isa 1:10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Eze 16:46–49).

10:16 *sheep among wolves*. Ancients viewed sheep as helpless against wolves, and some Jewish teachers viewed Israel as such sheep. More unusual, Jesus says that his sheep are *sent among wolves*. *doves*. Many thought of doves as timid or weak.

10:17 *local councils* . . . *synagogues*. Priests and other elders normally judged local councils. Synagogues doubled as community centers, and disciples could be meted out there. If they carried out beatings as in somewhat later tradition, the condemned person would be tied to a post, then given 26 lashes with a calf-leather whip across the back and 13 lashes across the chest. The number of lashes (39; cf. 2Co 11:24) was to prevent accidentally exceeding the Biblical limit of 40 (Dt 25:3).

10:18 *governors and kings*. In the Roman Empire, governors ruled most provinces. The emperor appointed his own representatives to govern provinces with legions, and appointed equestrians to control some other provinces; the senate appointed governors for provinces not directly under the emperor’s control. The emperor also allowed some states to retain client kings answerable to Rome, such as Herod the Great (2:1), Aretas (2Co 11:32) and, briefly, Herod Agrippa I (Ac 12:1).

10:20 *Spirit of your Father speaking*. Scripture and Jewish tradition often associated God’s Spirit with prophetic empowerment to speak God’s message.

10:21–23 Many Jewish people expected these suffer-

to death. ²²You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ^b ²³When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴“The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. ^c ²⁵It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, ^d how much more the members of his household!

²⁶“So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ^e ²⁷What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One ^f who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. ^a ³⁰And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ^g ³¹So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ^h

³²“Whoever acknowledges me before others, ⁱ I will also acknowledge before my

10:22
^bMt 24:13;
 Mk 13:13
10:24 ^cLk 6:40;
 Jn 13:16; 15:20
10:25
^dMk 3:22
10:26
^eMk 4:22;
 Lk 8:17
10:28 ^fIsa 8:12,
 13; Heb 10:31
10:30
^g1Sa 14:45;
 2Sa 14:11;
 Lk 21:18;
 Ac 27:34
10:31
^hMt 12:12
10:32 ⁱRo 10:9

10:33 ^jMk 8:38;
 2Ti 2:12
10:35 ^kver 21
10:36 ^lMic 7:6
10:37
^mLk 14:26
10:38
ⁿMt 16:24;
 Lk 14:27
10:39
^oLk 17:33;
 Jn 12:25
10:40
^pMt 18:5;
 Gal 4:14
^qLk 9:48;
 Jn 12:44; 13:20

Father in heaven. ³³But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. ^j

³⁴“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to turn

“ ‘ a man against his father,
 a daughter against her mother,
 a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law ^k —

³⁶ a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. ^l

³⁷“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ^m

³⁸Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ⁿ ³⁹Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. ^o

⁴⁰“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, ^p and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ^q

⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a

^a 29 Or will; or knowledge ^b 36 Micah 7:6

ings of the righteous to precede the end. Although some regarded fleeing (v. 23) as dishonorable, most preferred it to dying.

10:24 *student is not above the teacher.* Apart from attending to the master’s feet, disciples would ideally do for their rabbi anything a servant would do. A mature disciple could become a rabbi but was not normally considered greater than the one who schooled him.

10:25 *Beelzebul.* Because Jesus’ first hearers spoke Aramaic, they may have caught a wordplay: *Beelzebul* literally means “master of the house”; it probably plays on *Baal-Zebub*, a pagan deity (2Ki 1:2–3,6,16). *Beelzebul* was also used with reference to Satan; cf. 12:24–28.

10:27 *from the roofs.* Neighbors could sometimes communicate from their flat rooftops as opposed to the narrow streets below, but their shouting, unobstructed by buildings, would be audible over a longer distance.

10:28 *kill the body.* Many Jewish people by this period distinguished the body from the identity, or soul, that persisted after death. Most Judeans affirmed the resurrection of the body as well as the persistence of the soul; the wicked would be resurrected for torment (Da 12:2).

10:29 *two sparrows ... penny.* The poor could purchase sparrows, probably the cheapest meat in the market. *penny.* An *assarion*, worth less than an hour’s wage for the average worker (cf. a roughly equivalent calculation in Lk 12:6).

10:30 *hairs of your head.* A promise that not a hair would fall meant that one would be completely protected (1Sa 14:45; 2Sa 14:11; 1Ki 1:52); here, no detail of care goes unnoticed by their Father (for the father image, see note on 7:9–10).

10:31 *more.* Jewish teachers often reasoned by means

of *qal vaomer*, “How much more?” arguments. If God watches over sparrows (v. 29), he certainly watches over his children.

10:32 *acknowledges me.* Jewish teachers emphasized “acknowledging” or “confessing” God, a principle Jesus here applies to himself.

10:35 *daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.* Because Mic 7:6 addresses grievous sins characteristic of Israel before announcing Israel’s restoration, Jewish tradition sometimes applied its image of familial division to the final tribulation. Because newly married couples sometimes lived with the groom’s family, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law are natural examples (more than, e.g., son-in-law).

10:37 *loves their father or mother more than me.* Many Jewish people considered the mandate to honor one’s parents the greatest commandment; they accorded only God himself greater honor.

10:38 *take up their cross.* A person condemned to be executed would often carry the horizontal beam of his cross out to the site of his execution, where it would be affixed to an upright stake. Because authorities liked to make executions as public as possible, for their deterrent effect, those being led to execution were typically led naked through busy streets, exposing the condemned to public humiliation and sometimes mockery.

10:40 *welcomes me.* However one treated an agent or ambassador reflected one’s feelings toward the sender; one’s treatment of a prophet reflected one’s treatment of God (Ex 16:8; 1Sa 8:7).

10:41 On hospitality to Jesus’ agents, see note on v. 11. God would reward hospitable treatment of his prophets (e.g., 1Ki 17:12–16; 2Ki 4:8–17).

righteous person's reward. ⁴²And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."^r

Jesus and John the Baptist

11:2-19pp — Lk 7:18-35

11 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples,^s he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.^a

²When John, who was in prison,^t heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come,^u or should we expect someone else?"

⁴Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^b are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.^v ⁶Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."^w

⁷As John's^x disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. ⁹Then what did you go out to see? A prophet?^y Yes, I

10:42 ^rMt 25:40; Mk 9:41; Heb 6:10
11:1 ^sMt 7:28
11:2 ^tMt 14:3
11:3
^uPs 118:26; Jn 11:27; Heb 10:37
11:5 ^vIsa 35:4-6; 61:1; Lk 4:18, 19
11:6 ^wMt 13:21
11:7 ^xMt 3:1
11:9 ^yMt 21:26; Lk 1:76

11:10 ^zMal 3:1; Mk 1:2
11:14 ^aMal 4:5; Mt 17:10-13; Mk 9:11-13; Lk 1:17; Jn 1:21
11:15 ^bMt 13:9, 43; Mk 4:23; Lk 14:35; Rev 2:7
11:18 ^cMt 3:4
^dLk 1:15

tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."^z

¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence,^d and violent people have been raiding it. ¹³For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.^a ¹⁵Whoever has ears, let them hear.^b

¹⁶"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

¹⁷"We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

¹⁸For John came neither eating^c nor drinking,^d and they say, 'He has a demon.'

^a 1 Greek in their towns ^b 5 The Greek word traditionally translated *leprosy* was used for various diseases affecting the skin. ^c 10 Mal. 3:1
^d 12 Or been forcefully advancing

10:42 *even a cup of cold water.* The poorest person might have only water to offer, but hospitality obligations demanded sharing with a visitor what one had. Hot and weary travelers usually preferred water cold.

11:2-3 John understood that Jesus' *deeds* (such as healings) were good, but he may have been concerned that they differed from John's message of end-time outpourings of the Spirit and fire (see note on 3:11).

11:2 *in prison.* Herod Antipas imprisoned John in his Per-ean fortress Machaerus (14:3).

11:4-5 *report... what you hear and see.* Jesus depicts his current mission of restoring the disabled and preaching to the poor as a foretaste of the promised coming era of restoration. He does so by borrowing language from Isa 35:5-6; 61:1. Josephus mentions two first-century prophetic figures after Jesus who each promised an end-time sign that they failed to deliver; with the possible exception of these failed leaders, no ancient workers of unusual acts besides Jesus claimed that the future kingdom was arriving in their own ministry or signs.

11:6 *Blessed.* On beatitudes, see note on 5:3. *stumble.* Often used as a metaphor for sin or falling away.

11:7 *reed.* The emblem on Antipas's coins was a reed. John's hearers would be familiar with reeds, since they grew as tall as 16 feet (5 meters) around the Jordan, where John had baptized. Reeds were used figuratively for what was weak and undependable in time of trouble (1Ki 14:15; 2Ki 18:21; 3 Maccabees 2:22).

11:8 *kings' palaces.* Herod Antipas, who imprisoned John, was only a tetrarch but was the closest to a king with palaces that Jesus' Galilean hearers might ordinarily see.

11:10 The promised messenger of Mal 3:1 may be one like Elijah (see Mal 4:5; cf. Mt 3:4 and 2Ki 1:8).

11:11 *least in the kingdom... is greater than he.* Both Jews and Gentiles offered comparisons not only between good and bad, but also between good and better; this is clearly a case of the latter kind of comparison. Such comparisons were meant to exalt the better all the more by virtue of its superiority to something else good.

11:12 *subjected to violence.* Some Jewish people sought to establish God's kingdom by force, striking against Romans and the Jewish aristocrats who supported them. Some suggest that Jesus speaks here parabolically of spiritual warriors, who prevail in laying hold of the kingdom not with physical but with spiritual force.

11:13 *until John.* Jewish people often summarized Scripture as "the Law and the Prophets." Although some of the elite believed that prophets ceased after Malachi, most people recognized John the Baptist as a prophet (14:5; 21:26).

11:14 On John as Elijah, see note on v. 10.

11:15 *Whoever has ears.* This is the language of riddles, inviting the wise to consider the meaning. Israel was not always ready to hear (Isa 6:10; Jer 6:10; Eze 12:2).

11:16 *To what can I compare...?* Rabbis often began parables with phrases such as this. *children.* They sometimes played games of weddings or funerals (e.g., burying a grasshopper). Here Jesus envisions spoiled children who argue inconsistently so long as they get their way.

11:17 *dance... mourn.* Dancing was appropriate for the celebrations of weddings, and mourning for funerals. Both were community events; as funeral processions passed, e.g., bystanders were often expected to join in the procession.

11:18 *has a demon.* A prophet with a demon would be assumed a false prophet—for which the penalty was death (Dt 13:5).

¹⁹The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’^e But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

Woe on Unrepentant Towns

11:21-23pp — Lk 10:13-15

²⁰Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ²¹“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!^f For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon,^g they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.^h ²²But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.ⁱ ²³And you, Capernaum,^j will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.^{ak} For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”^l

The Father Revealed in the Son

11:25-27pp — Lk 10:21,22

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father,^m Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them

11:19 ^eMt 9:11
11:21 ^fMk 6:45;
Lk 9:10;
Jn 12:21
9Mt 15:21;
Lk 6:17;
Ac 12:20
^hJnh 3:5-9
11:22 ⁱver 24;
Mt 10:15
11:23 ^jMt 4:13
^kIsa 14:13-15
11:24 ^lMt 10:15
11:25
^mLk 22:42;
Jn 11:41

ⁿ1Co 1:26-29
11:27
^oMt 28:18
^pJn 3:35; 13:3;
17:2 ^qJn 10:15
11:28 ^rJn 7:37
11:29 ^sJn 13:15;
Php 2:5;
1Pe 2:21;
1Jn 2:6
^tJer 6:16
11:30 ^u1Jn 5:3
12:1 ^vDt 23:25
12:2 ^wver 10;
Lk 13:14; 14:3;
Jn 5:10; 7:23;
9:16
12:3 ^x1Sa 21:6
12:4
^yLev 24:5,9

to little children.ⁿ ²⁶Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

²⁷“All things have been committed to me^o by my Father.^p No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.^q

²⁸“Come to me,^r all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,^s for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.^t ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”^u

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

12:1-8pp — Mk 2:23-28; Lk 6:1-5

12:9-14pp — Mk 3:1-6; Lk 6:6-11

12 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain^v and eat them. ²When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”^w

³He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?^x ⁴He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread — which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.^y ⁵Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple

^a 23 That is, the realm of the dead

11:19 *a glutton and a drunkard.* Like a false prophet, someone who is a habitual glutton and a drunkard was deemed worthy of death (Dt 21:20–21).

11:21 *Woe to you.* Prophets sometimes announced judgments with the form, “Woe to you ...” (e.g., Isa 29:1; Eze 16:23; Am 5:18). *Chorazin ... Bethsaida.* No one should question historically that Jesus as a prophet denounced these towns. Virtually no one outside of Galilee knew of Chorazin (about two miles [three kilometers] from Capernaum). Probably soon after Jesus’ ministry, around the year 30 (though some do suggest earlier), Bethsaida began to be called Julia; although Josephus later uses both names, the Gospels use only the earlier, local name. *Tyre and Sidon.* These Phoenician cities had been objects of God’s judgment (e.g., Isa 23; Eze 26–28); Jezebel (Ahab’s wife) was from the region of Sidon (1Ki 16:31). *sackcloth and ashes.* Appropriate dress to show mourning or repentance (e.g., Jer 6:26; Da 9:3).

11:22 Cf. note on 12:39–42.

11:23 Jesus applies to Capernaum an image from the prophecy against Babylon in Isa 14:11–12.

11:29 *Take my yoke ... find rest.* Only the poorest people would use a yoke to pull their loads. When used figuratively, a yoke represented slavery or submission; Jewish teachers spoke of bearing the yoke of God’s kingdom, through the yoke of the law. Only God would call the yoke of the kingdom or of the law “my yoke.” A sage before Jesus’ era said, “Come near me, you who are unlearned ... Get wisdom, put your neck under her yoke ... Look with your eyes: I have labored only a little and I have found for myself great rest” (Sirach 51:23–27). Jesus evokes such

words, but whereas the earlier sage referred to wisdom’s yoke, Jesus speaks of his own. Those who turned back to God’s ways would find rest for their souls (Jer 6:16). Jesus’ understanding of rest (v. 28) clearly differs from that of the Pharisees (12:1–14).

12:1 *pick some heads.* On normal days, it was legal to pick heads of grain from others’ fields (Dt 23:25; cf. Ru 2:2); Pharisaic tradition, however, viewed such activity as work, and thus illegal on the Sabbath (cf. Ex 31:13–14; 35:2). Scripture itself prohibited preparing food on the Sabbath (Ex 16:22–30; 35:3), but Jewish people often feasted on the Sabbath (on food that was prepared the previous day) and Jewish tradition prohibited fasting on it. Jesus’ disciples might thus pick grain if other food was unavailable.

12:2 *the Pharisees saw.* One would not normally find Pharisees in wheat fields on the Sabbath, unless they were traveling with Jesus or seeking to evaluate his activity (or perhaps they observed from afar in a town). Teachers were held responsible for their disciples’ behavior.

12:3,5 *Haven’t you read ...?* Such a question would insult the learned Pharisees.

12:4 Whether David actually had with him the companions mentioned in 1Sa 21:4–5 or the high priest merely believed that David did, the high priest’s actions show that he understood that hunger and an urgent situation took priority over ritual law.

12:5 *priests ... in the temple.* During debates about what was permissible on the Sabbath or other holy days, Jewish teachers sometimes appealed to the activity of priests in the temple on such days.

desecrate the Sabbath² and yet are innocent? ⁶I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.^a ⁷If you had known what these words mean, ¹I desire mercy, not sacrifice;^{ab} you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸For the Son of Man^c is Lord of the Sabbath.”

⁹Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, ¹⁰and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”^d

¹¹He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?^e ¹²How much more valuable is a person than a sheep!^f Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

¹³Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. ¹⁴But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.^g

God’s Chosen Servant

¹⁵Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill.^h ¹⁶He warned them not to tell others about him.ⁱ ¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁸“Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
the one I love, in whom I delight;^j
I will put my Spirit on him,

12:5 ²Nu 28:9, 10; Jn 7:22, 23
12:6 ^aver 41, 42
12:7 ^bHos 6:6; Mic 6:6-8; Mt 9:13
12:8 ^cMt 8:20
12:10 ^dver 2; Lk 13:14; 14:3; Jn 9:16
12:11 ^eLk 14:5
12:12
12:12 ^fMt 10:31
12:14 ^gMt 26:4; 27:1; Mk 3:6; Lk 6:11; Jn 5:18; 11:53
12:15 ^hMt 4:23
12:16 ⁱMt 8:4
12:18 ^jMt 3:17

12:21
12:21 ^kIsa 42:1-4
12:22 ^lMt 4:24; 9:32-33
12:23
12:24 ^mMt 9:27
12:24 ⁿMk 3:22
12:25 ^oMt 9:34
12:25 ^pMt 9:4
12:26 ^qMt 4:10
12:27 ^rAc 19:13

and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

¹⁹He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.

²⁰A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory.

²¹ In his name the nations will put their hope.”^{bk}

Jesus and Beelzebul

12:25-29pp — Mk 3:23-27; Lk 11:17-22

²²Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.¹ ²³All the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?”^m

²⁴But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul,ⁿ the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”^o

²⁵Jesus knew their thoughts^p and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶If Satan^q drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people^r drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁸But if it is by the Spirit

^a 7 Hosea 6:6 ^b 21 Isaiah 42:1-4

12:6 Jesus claims to bear God’s presence more than does the temple.

12:7 See note on 9:13.

12:10 In general, Jewish teachers felt that whatever one could do before the Sabbath should not be done on the Sabbath. Life-saving procedures were acceptable; other medical treatments on the Sabbath were debated.

12:11 People often dug and disguised pits to capture predators, but sometimes their own animals fell into these or natural pits. Unlike Essenes, who were stricter, Pharisees and most other people did try to help their animals out of pits on the Sabbath, sometimes using a rope.

12:12 Jewish teachers often used “How much more?” arguments; no one would have disagreed with the premise that a person is more valuable than a sheep.

12:13 *he stretched it out.* Cf. 1Ki 13:6. Technically Jesus does not apply medical treatment or even lay hands on the man; no one considered a command to stretch out one’s hand as work!

12:14 The Pharisaic school of Hillel permitted prayer for the sick on the Sabbath; the dominant Pharisaic school, the school of Shammai, rejected this but did not persecute Hillelites for allowing it. Jesus, however, may have appeared a more direct threat. Later sources suggest that Pharisees would have weighed their traditions more heavily than other teachers’ miracles. Nevertheless, in contrast to Jerusalem’s Sadducees, Pharisees in this period nor-

mally lacked the kind of political power needed to carry out such plans against Jesus.

12:18–21 Matthew cites Isa 42:1–4. As elsewhere in this section of Isaiah (Isa 41:8; 44:1–2, 21; 45:4; 49:3), the “servant” in Isa 42:1–4 is Israel; but because the servant fails in his mission (Isa 42:18–19), God raises up one within Israel to fulfill the mission and suffer on behalf of Israel (Isa 49:5–7; 52:13—53:12, especially 53:4–6, 9). Jesus fulfilled this mission, though in ways that his contemporaries did not expect. Matthew translates the wording in a way that brings it into alignment with the heavenly proclamation in Mt 3:17, so that the heavenly proclamation evokes Isaiah’s servant.

12:21 Those quoting a passage might end on a point they did not want to omit—here concern for the Gentiles (cf. 4:15; 28:19). The Hebrew text speaks of “coasts” or “islands,” giving an example of distant peoples, but Matthew follows here the common Greek translation that captures the text’s theological sense, applying it to all Gentiles.

12:23 *Son of David.* Alludes to the promised Davidic ruler (see 1:1; cf. Psalms of Solomon 17:21).

12:24 *by Beelzebul.* See note on 10:25. This is the charge of performing feats by sorcery—an activity that warranted death (e.g., Ex 22:18).

12:27 *by whom do your people drive them out?* Other Jewish people engaged in exorcism (Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.47; 4Q242 f1 3.4 in the Dead Sea Scrolls; cf. Tobit 8:3). *your people.* This phrase (lit. “your sons”) could refer to disciples or apprentices.

12:28 *by the Spirit of God.* Because many Jewish people

of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

²⁹“Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.

³⁰“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.⁵ ³¹And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.^t ³²Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age^u or in the age to come.^v

³³“Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.^w

³⁴You brood of vipers,^x how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks^y what the heart is full of. ³⁵A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

³⁶But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. ³⁷For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

The Sign of Jonah

12:39–42pp — Lk 11:29–32

12:43–45pp — Lk 11:24–26

³⁸Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.”^z

12:30
⁵Mk 9:40;
 Lk 11:23
12:31 ¹Mk 3:28,
 29; Lk 12:10
12:32
^uTitus 2:12
^vMk 10:30;
 Lk 20:34,
 35; Eph 1:21;
 Heb 6:5
12:33
^wMt 7:16, 17;
 Lk 6:43, 44
12:34
^xMt 3:7; 23:33
^yMt 15:18;
 Lk 6:45
12:38 ^zMt 16:1;
 Mk 8:11, 12;
 Lk 11:16;
 Jn 2:18; 6:30;
 1Co 1:22

12:39 ^aMt 16:4;
 Lk 11:29
12:40
^bJnh 1:17
^cMt 8:20
^dMt 16:21
12:41 ^eJnh 1:2
^fJnh 3:5
12:42
^g1Ki 10:1;
 2Ch 9:1
12:45
^h2Pe 2:20
12:46 ⁱMt 1:18;
 2:11, 13, 14,
 20; Lk 1:43;
 2:33, 34, 48, 51;
 Jn 2:1, 5; 19:25,
 26; Mt 13:55;
 Jn 2:12; 7:3,
 5; Ac 1:14;
 1Co 9:5;
 Gal 1:19

³⁹He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.^a ⁴⁰For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish,^b so the Son of Man^c will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.^d ⁴¹The men of Nineveh^e will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah,^f and now something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴²The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came^g from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

⁴³“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.^h That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

Jesus’ Mother and Brothers

12:46–50pp — Mk 3:31–35; Lk 8:19–21

⁴⁶While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his motherⁱ and brothers^j stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers

believed that the fullness of the Spirit had been quenched after the last Biblical prophets and would be poured out again fully only in the end time, Jesus presents his activity by the Spirit as evidence that the end-time kingdom had come upon them.

12:29 *strong man*. People understood that no one could seize a strong person’s possessions (cf. Psalms of Solomon 5:3) without first tying him up; Jesus can take away what Satan possessed because Jesus first defeated him (cf. Isa 49:24–25).

12:30 *Whoever is not with me*. Among both Jews and Greeks, some recognized the principle that where opposition existed, one would be on either one side or the other. (The same principle existed in Roman party politics.)

12:32 *in this age or in the age to come*. Jewish people distinguished the present age from the promised future age of righteousness. Jewish sources often viewed deliberate sin as unforgivable (Nu 15:30–31; Dt 29:18–20); some teachers believed that even these sins could be atoned for if the sinner was repentant. The sin here appears to involve rejection even of the Spirit’s clear attestation of Jesus through signs (v. 28) — perhaps implying a heart too hard to repent. (The sort of person fearful of having committed the sin is not the hard-hearted kind of person the sin addresses.)

12:34 *brood of vipers*. See note on 3:7.

12:38 *sign*. Later sources suggest that most Pharisaic teachers would have weighed their traditions more heav-

ily than they did miracles; their reception of Jesus’ signs so far has not been friendly (see v. 24).

12:39–42 *the sign of the prophet Jonah ... men of Nineveh ... Queen of the South*. The Ninevites apparently did not witness the sign of Jonah in the fish’s belly; they repented instead through his preaching. One Jewish tradition claims that Jonah tried to avoid preaching to Ninevites lest their repentance shame Israel for failing to do likewise (*Mekilta Pisha* 1.80–82; cf. Jnh 3:10—4:2); if any of Jesus’ hearers were familiar with this tradition, it would make Jesus’ comparison here all the more graphic. The Gentile “Queen of the South” respected Solomon’s wisdom (1Ki 10:1–13); some Jewish traditions from this period identify her as the queen of Ethiopia. In some Jewish traditions, God would render the unrepentant without excuse on the day of judgment; he would do this through the testimonies of those who repented despite better excuses. Although Jewish people expected God to vindicate Israel against the nations on the day of judgment, some later rabbinic traditions claim that repentant Gentiles would testify against unrepentant Israelites at that time.

12:43–45 Speakers often returned charges against their accusers; some have accused Jesus of acting by Satan (v. 24), but Jesus implies that it is his accusers who do so; he was driving out demons, but “this wicked generation” (v. 45) was welcoming them back in!

12:47–50 Children were obligated to honor their parents. The expected response is for Jesus to immediately

are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

⁴⁸He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers.” ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven^k is my brother and sister and mother.”

The Parable of the Sower

13:1-15pp — Mk 4:1-12; Lk 8:4-10

13:16,17pp — Lk 10:23,24

13:18-23pp — Mk 4:13-20; Lk 8:11-15

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house^l and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat^m and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred,ⁿ sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹Whoever has ears, let them hear.”^o

12:50^kJn 15:14
13:1^lver 36;
Mt 9:28
13:2^mLk 5:3
13:8ⁿGe 26:12
13:9^oMt 11:15

13:11
P^tMt 11:25;
16:17; 19:11;
Jn 6:65;
1Co 2:10,
14; Col 1:27;
1Jn 2:20, 27
13:12
9^qMt 25:29;
Lk 19:26
13:13^rDt 29:4;
Jer 5:21;
Eze 12:2
13:15^sIsa 6:9,
10; Jn 12:40;
Ac 28:26, 27;
Ro 11:8
13:16^tMt 16:17

¹⁰The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

¹¹He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you,^p but not to them. ¹²Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.^q ¹³This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”^r

¹⁴In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

¹⁵For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.”^{as}

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.^t

^a 15 Isaiah 6:9,10 (see Septuagint)

welcome his mother and brothers, but he avails himself of the occasion to illustrate a point. As often, he does so in a way that his contemporaries would have viewed as dramatic and shocking.

13:2 *got into a boat.* Pushing out from shore provided sufficient distance for Jesus’ voice to carry. Galilee had many acoustic settings—including a cove near Capernaum—that could allow one’s voice to carry to vast numbers of hearers.

13:3 See the article “Parables,” p. XXXX. Most Galileans, like most people in the Roman Empire, were rural farmers. Whereas the parables of later rabbis focus more often on royal courts, Jesus’ parables most often address the agrarian settings of most of his hearers. *seed.* Some Jewish sources compare God’s Word to seed.

13:4 Many ancient sources speak of plowing before sowing (which would have prevented the farmer from wasting some seed in this case), but others clearly speak of sowing before plowing. Jesus chooses the latter method for this parable, since only God knows the different kinds of hearts among whom the Word is sown. *some fell along the path.* Paths often led through fields.

13:5 *rocky places.* Much of the soil in the Holy Land is rocky.

13:7 *thorns.* A kind of thistle is common around roads and can reach more than three feet (a meter), typically in the month of April.

13:8 The average yield of seed in ancient Israel was probably between seven and a half to tenfold. A hundredfold was a remarkably good harvest (Ge 26:12), but even thirtyfold was exceptional.

13:9 See note on 11:15.

13:10 Rabbis often used parables as sermon illustrations,

but without the sermon that the parable illustrated, a parable might function instead as a riddle, in which the listener is challenged to figure out what the parable means. Disciples often asked their teachers questions, sometimes seeking understanding privately after a public lecture.

13:11 *secrets of the kingdom.* Jesus refers to special revelations about God’s promised kingdom, not information that would never be known; see Da 2:28–30,45. Here the secrets go to those who understand (v. 23)—that is, the true disciples who remained after the crowds had gone, and thus received the interpretation from Jesus. See note on Mk 4:11.

13:12 *will be given more.* The principle that one who has can receive more worked in ancient economics; some also recognized this principle with knowledge of wisdom or the law.

13:13–15 Rabbis who taught in parables frequently related them to Scripture. Many passages address similar issues in Israel (e.g., Dt 29:4; Isa 42:19–20; 43:8; 44:18; Jer 5:21; Eze 12:2), but one key text often picked up in the NT is cited in vv. 14–15. In Isa 6:9–10, God calls Isaiah to reveal truth to Israel that Israel will not receive, until the impending judgment (Isa 6:11). Their increasing spiritual blindness was punishment for their refusal to heed what God was already speaking (cf. Isa 29:9–10). Those who did turn, however, would be “healed,” i.e., restored (cf. Isa 53:5; Hos 11:3; 14:4).

13:16 *blessed are your eyes.* Jewish people often praised one person by uttering a beatitude over someone who knew them; the disciples are blessed because they receive revelation about Jesus and his kingdom (cf. 1Ki 10:8).

¹⁷For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see^u but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

¹⁸“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹When anyone hears the message about the kingdom^v and does not understand it, the evil one^w comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.^x ²²The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth^y choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”^z

The Parable of the Weeds

²⁴Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like^a a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

²⁸“An enemy did this,’ he replied.

13:17 ^uJn 8:56; Heb 11:13; 1Pe 1:10-12
13:19 ^vMt 4:23
^wMt 5:37
13:21 ^xMt 11:6
13:22
^yMt 19:23; 1Ti 6:9, 10, 17
13:23 ^zver 8
13:24 ^aver 31, 33, 45, 47; Mt 18:23; 20:1; 22:2; 25:1; Mk 4:26, 30

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

²⁹“No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’^b

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

13:31, 32pp — Mk 4:30-32

13:31-33pp — Lk 13:18-21

³¹He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like^c a mustard seed,^d which a man took and planted in his field. ³²Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”^e

³³He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like^f yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds^a of flour^g until it worked all through the dough.”^h

³⁴Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.ⁱ ³⁵So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

“I will open my mouth in parables,
 I will utter things hidden since the
 creation of the world.”^{bj}

The Parable of the Weeds Explained

³⁶Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and

^a 33 Or about 27 kilograms ^b 35 Psalm 78:2

13:18 *what the parable... means.* Rabbis often gave interpretations with their parables (see note on v. 10), but Jesus gives these interpretations privately (see note on v. 11).

13:24 *kingdom of heaven is like.* Jewish parables often began with, “Such-and-such is like ...”; the named subject (here, the kingdom) was compared not simply with the next noun (here, a man) but with the entire parable that followed.

13:25 *enemy came and sowed weeds.* Ancient legal sources show that feuding, rival farmers occasionally did sow poisonous plants in one another’s fields.

13:26–29 The poisonous weeds here are darnel (*Lolium temulentum*), which cannot be distinguished from wheat in the early stages. Once past the early stages, however, the weeds’ roots become entwined with those of the wheat. Workers thus could not uproot the darnel without damaging the wheat.

13:30 *Let both grow together.* Once the wheat was full grown and ready to be harvested, the darnel, now distinguishable from it, could be uprooted and used as cheap fuel. Laborers gathered wheat into sheaves, transporting it (often on donkeys) to a village’s threshing floor, or in this case to that of this large estate. Once threshed, it would be stored in a barn.

13:31 *mustard seed.* Scholars do not all agree about which plant is in view here, but ancient sources agree in describing the mustard seed as proverbially small (v. 32). Some argue that this shrub often grew to eight to ten feet (two and a half to three meters) high around the Sea of Galilee; others that the likeliest shrub in view rarely grew to more than five feet (one and a half meters). If so, birds could only “perch” (v. 32) in its branches (not “nest,” as the term might be translated); the language, however, evokes the image of a great kingdom of old that would be supplanted by God’s kingdom (Da 4:12). The glorious future kingdom was already active in a hidden way in Jesus’ ministry.

13:33 *yeast.* Some Jewish texts used “yeast” to symbolize evil, but it did not always mean that (Ge 19:3; Ex 12:11, 39; Lev 23:17) and does not mean that here. Although bakeries might prepare large amounts of bread, Jesus refers to a Galilean housewife. The amount here is thus exorbitant: her labor would produce enough bread to feed more than 100 people.

13:35 Matthew quotes Ps 78:2, attributing it to a prophet, because the psalms were considered prophetically inspired (cf. 1Ch 25:1–6; 2Ch 29:30).

said, “Explain to us the parable^k of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man.^l ³⁸The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one,^m ³⁹and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvestⁿ is the end of the age,^o and the harvesters are angels.^p

⁴⁰“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man^q will send out his angels,^r and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴²They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.^s ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun^t in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.^u

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like^v treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.^w

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like^x a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

13:36
^kMt 15:15
13:37 ^lMt 8:20
13:38
^mJn 8:44, 45;
ⁿJn 3:10
13:39
ⁿJoel 3:13
^oMt 24:3; 28:20
^pRev 14:15
13:41 ^qMt 8:20
^rMt 24:31
13:42 ^sver 50;
 Mt 8:12
13:43 ^tDa 12:3
^uMt 11:15
13:44 ^vver 24
^wIsa 55:1;
 Php 3:7, 8
13:45 ^xver 24

13:47 ^yver 24
^zMt 22:10
13:49
^aMt 25:32
13:50 ^bMt 8:12
13:53 ^cMt 7:28
13:54 ^dMt 4:23
^eMt 7:28
13:55 ^fLk 3:23;
 Jn 6:42
^gMt 12:46

The Parable of the Net

⁴⁷“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like^y a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds^z of fish. ⁴⁸When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous^a ⁵⁰and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.^b

⁵¹“Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.

“Yes,” they replied.

⁵²He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

A Prophet Without Honor

13:54-58pp — Mk 6:1-6

⁵³When Jesus had finished these parables,^c he moved on from there. ⁵⁴Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue,^d and they were amazed.^e “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. ⁵⁵“Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?^f Isn’t his mother’s^g name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon

13:37 *Son of Man.* See Da 7:13–14.
13:39 *harvest.* Some other ancient Jewish sources also apply the familiar image of harvest to the end of the age (see, e.g., 2 Baruch 70:2).
13:41 *will send out his angels.* That the Son of Man commands angels shows that he is no ordinary human figure.
13:42 *blazing furnace.* Jewish people often conceived of Gehinnom, or hell, as a place of fiery torment and/or destruction. *weeping and gnashing of teeth.* See note on 8:12.
13:43 *shine like the sun.* Developing the image of Da 12:3, as here, many Jewish sources spoke of the righteous “shining” in the future age. Cf. 17:2.
13:44 *treasure hidden.* Given widespread poverty in antiquity, it is no surprise that stories of buried treasure were popular; people sometimes stored their wealth by burying it in a strongbox, sometimes under the floor of their home. *bought that field.* Ancient title deeds to land normally specified ownership of both the land and everything in it. Here a peasant, perhaps a tenant living on and working a wealthy landowner’s field, apparently finds a hoard of coins. The focus of most such stories was the finder’s subsequent wealth, but Jesus emphasizes the great worth of the kingdom and the price one must be willing to pay for it.
13:45 *merchant.* Unlike the peasant noted in v. 44, this merchant is a person of means. *looking for fine pearls.* Divers gathered pearls from the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Red Sea; wealthy women in Rome wore pearls in necklaces, the most expensive of which would have cost tens of millions of dollars in today’s currency. Jewish

teachers sometimes used expensive pearls to represent the teaching of Torah; Jesus applies it to his message about the kingdom. Ancient pearl stories often emphasize the finder’s piety; Jesus instead emphasizes the value of God’s kingdom (v. 46).
13:47 *net.* Jesus probably refers here not to the smaller casting net, but to a seine net, also known as a dragnet, pulled between two boats. Floaters on top of such nets kept one part of the net on the surface while sinkers allowed the bottom to gather in fish from deep below. *all kinds of fish.* Many of the more than 20 kinds of fish available in the Sea of Galilee were inedible or ritually impure, but a seine net would catch all varieties of fish.
13:52 *new treasures as well as old.* The old treasures of the OT could be employed usefully in light of the newer and fuller message of the kingdom.
13:55 *carpenter’s son.* When Jesus was still a young child, the Galilean city of Sepphoris, just four miles (six kilometers) from Nazareth, was burned to the ground. Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, immediately set to rebuilding it and may have eventually made it his capital. Carpenters (the term here includes woodwork) were thus in demand during the period in which Jesus grew up, and he would have likely also learned the trade from his father. (Boys could learn trades as apprentices to anyone, but this included their fathers, and Jesus became a carpenter; Mk 6:3.) *mother’s name . . . brothers.* “Mary” was the most popular Jewish woman’s name in this period, and the names of Jesus’ brothers here were also very common.

and Judas? ⁵⁶Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" ⁵⁷And they took offense^h at him.

But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home."ⁱ

⁵⁸And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

John the Baptist Beheaded

14:1-12pp — Mk 6:14-29

14 At that time Herod^j the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus,^k ²and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist;^l he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

³Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison^m because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,ⁿ ⁴for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her."^o ⁵Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.^p

⁶On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much ⁷that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. ⁸Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." ⁹The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his

13:57 ^hJn 6:61

ⁱLk 4:24;

Jn 4:44

14:1 ^jMk 8:15;

Lk 3:1, 19; 13:31;

23:7, 8; Ac 4:27;

12:1 ^kLk 9:7-9

14:2 ^lMt 3:1

14:3 ^mMt 4:12;

11:2 ⁿLk 3:19,

20

14:4

^oLev 18:16;

20:21

14:5 ^pMt 11:9

14:10

^qMt 17:12

14:12 ^rAc 8:2

14:14 ^sMt 9:36

^tMt 4:23

14:17 ^uMt 16:9

14:19 ^v1Sa 9:13;

Mt 26:26;

Mk 8:6; Lk 24:30;

Ac 2:42; 27:35;

1Ti 4:4

dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted ¹⁰and had John beheaded^q in the prison. ¹¹His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. ¹²John's disciples came and took his body and buried it.^r Then they went and told Jesus.

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

14:13-21pp — Mk 6:32-44; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-13

14:13-21Ref — Mt 15:32-38

¹³When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them^s and healed their sick.^t

¹⁵As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

¹⁶Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

¹⁷"We have here only five loaves^u of bread and two fish," they answered.

¹⁸"Bring them here to me," he said.

¹⁹And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.^v Then he gave them to the disciples, and the

13:56 *his sisters.* Ancient sources sometimes name men but not women; possibly their names were thus not available to Matthew.

13:57 Scripture noted prophets being rejected, even in their hometowns (Jer 1:1; 11:21); Jewish traditions about the prophets amplified this pattern even further.

14:1 *Herod the tetrarch.* Whereas Mark calls Herod a "king" (Mk 6:14), Luke and (usually) Matthew use the more precise "tetrarch," governor-prince of a small territory. (The term "tetrarch" no longer carried its original sense of "one-fourth" of a territory.) Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea in 4 BC on the death of his father, King Herod the Great (2:19); a Samaritan wife of Herod was mother of both Antipas and Archelaus (cf. Mt 2:22).

14:3-5 John opposed Antipas's affair with Herodias on moral grounds, but it had also become a political embarrassment to Antipas that eventually nearly cost him his kingdom (see note on Mk 6:17). For this reason, allowing John's continuing criticism was to risk fueling further dissent within the kingdom. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus shows that John was popular with the people, and that Antipas feared the risk that this popularity posed (*Antiquities* 18.116-119). Political considerations about John's popularity both demanded John's arrest and delayed John's execution.

14:6 *Herod's birthday.* Birthdays remained in this period a largely Gentile custom, but Antipas and the ruling class were thoroughly Hellenized. Persons of status expected those invited to attend their birthday parties, which typically included excessive drinking. *daughter of Herodias.* Herodias's daughter Salome was probably between 12 and 14 years old, and perhaps already betrothed or

married to Philip the tetrarch. Sensuous dancing was common at such parties but not for members of the royal family; the Herodian family, however, was known for such excesses.

14:7 *promised with an oath.* An oath called a deity to attest the truth of one's claim (or to punish one for dishonoring the deity's name by invoking it falsely). Ancients had stories of people regretting their oaths; rabbis could release people from oaths like this one, but to not keep his public word would be a matter of shame.

14:10 *beheaded.* Beheading was considered the most merciful form of execution, since it killed quickly (although executioners did not always succeed on the first blow).

14:11 *head was brought in on a platter.* Ancient accounts in which heads were displayed at banquets, especially to please the woman or boy for whom the banquet host was lusting, emphasize that the hosts abused their authority in a detestable manner.

14:12 *disciples came and took his body.* Bodies were more readily granted to family members. Normally the eldest son would bury someone who died, but John's disciples fulfill this role for him (for disciples as sons, see note on 23:9; Jn 13:33). This act highlights the failure of most of Jesus' male disciples in 27:55-60.

14:15 *they can ... buy themselves some food.* Nearby villages, with a few hundred or at most a few thousand people each, would not have had enough spare bread ready to feed more than 5,000 people (v. 21).

14:17-18 God often used what people had to perform wonders (Ex 4:1-3; 14:16; 2Ki 4:1-7).

14:19 The feeding miracle resembles those of Moses, Elijah, and in this case especially Elisha (2Ki 4:42-44).

disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Jesus Walks on the Water

14:22-33pp — Mk 6:45-51; Jn 6:16-21

14:34-36pp — Mk 6:53-56

²²Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the

14:20 *disciples picked up twelve basketfuls.* Ancient moralists condemned waste; cf. also use of leftovers in 2Ki 4:7,44.

14:21 *five thousand men.* The number is higher than that

of most Galilean villages, including much higher than the currently estimated population of Capernaum. Ancient sources often numbered only men; Matthew thus might not know the number of women and children, but he

MATTHEW 14



HOUSES IN THE HOLY LAND OF THE FIRST CENTURY AD: PETER'S HOUSE IN CAPERNAUM; INSULAE

Housing conditions in the first-century Holy Land varied dramatically according to people's financial situations. The best preserved homes are those that were built for the upper classes and constructed with obvious craftsmanship from lasting materials. Of these, the most splendid examples are the remains of Herod the Great's lavish palaces in Jerusalem, Masada and Jericho.

These structures, along with other luxurious houses discovered in Jerusalem's upper city, reflect the stylistic conventions of contemporary Roman villas. The villa was structured around an open, colonnaded courtyard and contained a large reception room and dining area to accommodate large gatherings. Floors were covered with detailed stone mosaics, and walls were painted with frescoes. These upper-class houses and palaces in Judea also contained distinctively Jewish features, such as ritual baths alongside ordinary bathrooms, the absence of human or animal representation in mosaics and frescoes and the presence of Jewish symbols (e.g., the menorah).

Since relatively few people lived in palatial homes, many more examples of middle-class dwellings have been revealed through archaeology. An important example, discovered in Jerusalem in 1970, is known as the "burnt house." This home was completely buried with soot and ash from the destruction of the city in AD 70 and, therefore, has been well preserved. The floor plan reflects a common pattern of three medium-sized rooms, a small storage room, a small kitchen and a stepped, ritual bath built around a paved courtyard. The walls were covered with a thin layer of limestone plaster, and the floors consisted of pressed earth. Furnishings within the house included rectangular stone tables, bowls, plates, cups and cylindrical weights, one of which identifies the owner as Bar Karos.

Other significant examples of first-century houses have been unearthed in Capernaum. Excavations near the ruins of the ancient synagogue there revealed a group of approximately 12 homes constructed of black basalt rocks and small pebbles and arranged around a central courtyard containing ovens and grinding stones. These single-story dwellings had floors of beaten black earth and stairways leading to flat

continued on next page

crowd. ²³After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.^w Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buf-

14:23 ^wLk 3:21

feted by the waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake,

mentions them anyway, reminding us of the magnitude of Jesus' miracle.

14:25 *before dawn*. Literally the text speaks of the "fourth watch of the night," based on the Roman division of the night into four parts; the fourth watch refers to the final

hours before dawn. Jesus was approaching them from the east, which might make his approach more visible.

14:26 *ghost*. Apparitions were usually frightening (though Josephus employs the term here translated "ghost" for angels). Jewish tradition warned of dangerous

roofs. The less-substantial roofs were probably built with tree branches covered with mud and straw (cf. Mk 2:4).

The largest of these homes attracted particular attention in that it featured a crushed limestone floor and had plastered walls filled with decorations (including flowers, pomegranates and numerous crosses) and inscriptions, which were fragmentary and in many languages: 124 in Greek, 18 in Syriac, 15 in Hebrew and 1 in Latin. Most of the inscriptions were short prayers, such as "Christ have mercy" or "Lord Jesus Christ help." Others contained the name of Peter, suggesting that this home was venerated in antiquity as a place of Christian pilgrimage and associated with the memory of Peter. Thus, this dwelling has become known as the house of Peter in Capernaum (Mt 8:14; Mk 1:29; Lk 4:38).

The lowest urban classes in many cities inhabited crowded tenement buildings called *insulae*—multistoried buildings divided into numerous apartments called *cenaculi*. The lowest floor generally contained a shop in which the proprietor also lived. The upper floors were accessed through outside staircases. The *insulae* usually lacked any system of heating, running water or sewage. Eutychus most likely fell from the third floor window of an *insula* while listening to Paul preach Christ in Troas (Ac 20:7–12). ♦



An artist's recreation of first-century houses in Capernaum. The houses were built with black basalt rocks covered with plaster and had stairs leading to flat roofs that were probably built with branches and covered with mud and straw.

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they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,”^x they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”**^z

²⁸“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

²⁹“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. **“You of little faith,”**^a he said, **“why did you doubt?”**

³²And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”^b

³⁴When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. ³⁵And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him ³⁶and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak,^c and all who touched it were healed.

That Which Defiles

15:1-20pp — Mk 7:1-23

15 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ²“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”^d

14:26
^xLk 4:37
14:27 ^yMt 9:2; Ac 23:11
^zDa 10:12;
 Mt 17:7; 28:10;
 Lk 1:13, 30; 2:10;
 Ac 18:9; 23:11;
 Rev 1:17
14:31 ^aMt 6:30
14:33 ^bPs 2:7;
 Mt 4:3
14:36 ^cMt 9:20
15:2 ^dLk 11:38

15:4 ^eEx 20:12; Dt 5:16; Eph 6:2
^fEx 21:17;
 Lev 20:9
15:9 ^gCol 2:20-22 ^hIsa 29:13;
 Mal 2:2
15:11 ⁱAc 10:14, 15 ^jver 18
15:13
^kIsa 60:21; 61:3;
 Jn 15:2
15:14
^lMt 23:16, 24; Ro 2:19
^mLk 6:39

³Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’^{ae} and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’^{bf} ⁵But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ ⁶they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

⁸ “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”^{g’h}

¹⁰Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. ¹¹What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them,ⁱ but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”^j

¹²Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

¹³He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted^k will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴Leave them; they are blind guides.^l If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”^m

^a 4 Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16 ^b 4 Exodus 21:17; Lev. 20:9 ^c 9 Isaiah 29:13 ^d 14 Some manuscripts *blind guides of the blind*

night spirits. On a popular level, many Gentiles and probably a number of Jews believed in ghosts, although such a belief technically contradicted mainstream Jewish views of the afterlife (heaven or hell and future resurrection). Gentiles often believed that the ghosts of those drowned at sea hovered over the sites of their deaths.

14:27 *It is I.* Literally, Jesus says, “I am”; although this can mean, “It is I,” the activity in the context supports an allusion to Jesus’ deity (cf. Ex 3:14, where the same Greek phrase used in the Septuagint, the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT, is used here also).

14:29 *walked on the water.* Peter had Biblical precedent for stepping into water with faith in the divine command (Jos 3:8,13,15 – 17), though in Exodus and Joshua the water parted rather than sustained one’s weight.

14:32 *wind died down.* They would recognize God’s power to calm the sea (Job 26:12; Ps 65:7; 89:9 – 10; 107:29; Jnh 1:15; Sirach 43:23).

14:34 *Gennesaret.* A plain of several square miles/kilometers that lay between Capernaum and the large city of Tiberias.

14:36 *edge of his cloak.* See note on 9:20.

15:1 *from Jerusalem.* The largest number of Pharisees and teachers of the law resided in Jerusalem.

15:2 *wash their hands.* Pharisees were particularly known for passing on and following earlier but post-Biblical traditions (see, e.g., Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.297). Washing hands before meals for the sake of maintaining ritual purity was probably originally a custom of the Jews in the Diaspora. Pharisees were known to be very meticulous regarding this practice.

15:4 Virtually all Jewish people would have agreed with the requirement to honor father and mother (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16) and not to curse them (Ex 21:17; Lev 20:9). Many Jewish teachers considered honoring parents the greatest commandment in the law, and labored hard to fulfill this commandment. Jesus, however, points out that some of their other traditions have been used to subvert it. Like Jesus, Pharisees could suspend aspects of the law to ensure that its intention was met. Individual practice, however, does not always match the highest ideal of their group.

15:5 – 6 People could make vows by God, dedicating property for the temple. By declaring property so dedicated one prohibited others from using it; even outside the Holy Land, some teachers employed vows like these to prohibit objects from use by relatives. Although many teachers may have agreed with Jesus that people who acted in this way were abusing the system, they would not have tried to annul the vows or challenge the system.

15:8 – 9 Isa 29:13 addressed a people who valued their human traditions over Isaiah’s prophetic message.

15:10 – 11 At least some rabbis agreed with this principle, but taught it only in private, lest it be abused.

15:12 *Pharisees were offended.* Offending respected people, such as the Pharisees, could create powerful social and political enemies. Most Pharisees held little direct political power, but they were highly influential with the people (especially around Jerusalem).

15:13 *pulled up.* Jesus uses the Biblical image of building up or tearing down God’s people (Ps 28:5; Jer 1:10; 11:17; 18:7 – 8; 24:6; 31:4,28; 42:10; 45:4; compare Jer 12:2 with Isa 29:13).

15:14 *blind guides.* Those who were literally blind often

¹⁵Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”ⁿ
¹⁶“Are you still so dull?”^o Jesus asked them. ¹⁷“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart,^p and these defile them. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts — murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.^q ²⁰These are what defile a person;^r but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

15:21-28pp — Mk 7:24-30

²¹Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.^s ²²A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David,^t have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”^u

²³Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

²⁴He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”^v

²⁵The woman came and knelt before him.^w “Lord, help me!” she said.

²⁶He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

²⁷“Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

²⁸Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith!^x Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand

15:29-31pp — Mk 7:31-37

15:32-39pp — Mk 8:1-10

15:32-39Ref — Mt 14:13-21

²⁹Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. ³⁰Great crowds

15:15
ⁿMt 13:36
^oMt 16:9
15:18
^pMt 12:34;
 Lk 6:45; Jas 3:6
15:19
^qGal 5:19-21
15:20 ^rRo 14:14
15:21
^sMt 11:21
15:22 ^tMt 9:27
^uMt 4:24
15:24 ^vMt 10:6, 23; Ro 15:8
15:25 ^wMt 8:2
15:28 ^xMt 9:22

came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.^y ³¹The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.^z

³²Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people;^a they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”

³³His disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”

³⁴“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.”

³⁵He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. ³⁶Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them^b and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. ³⁷They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.^c ³⁸The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

The Demand for a Sign

16:1-12pp — Mk 8:11-21

16 The Pharisees and Sadducees^d came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.^e

²He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’³ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the

15:30 ^yMt 4:23
15:31 ^zMt 9:8
15:32 ^aMt 9:36
15:36
^bMt 14:19
15:37
^cMt 16:10
16:1 ^dAc 4:1
^eMt 12:38

had someone sighted who could guide them. *pit*. For the prevalence of pits, see note on 12:11; for falling into a pit as a metaphor of judgment, see, e.g., Ps 7:15; Pr 26:27; Isa 24:18; Jer 48:43–44; Eze 19:4.

15:15 Disciples could ask teachers for private explanations.
15:19 *murder ... slander*. Lists of vices are common in ancient literature. Two thirds of the offenses listed here are violations of the Ten Commandments (see 19:18, in the same order as here and as in Ex 20:13–16).

15:21 *Tyre and Sidon*. Leading cities of Phoenicia. Jezebel was from Sidonian territory, but so were a widow and her child who received healing through the ministry of Elijah (1Ki 17:8–24). Many dispossessed Canaanites from the Israelite conquest had moved north into Phoenician territory.

15:22 *Son of David*. Implies this Gentile’s recognition that Jesus is rightful ruler of Israel.

15:26 *toss it to the dogs*. Though not used as a direct label here, when it was so used, “dog” was a harsh insult for either

gender. (When used negatively, Gentiles associated dogs with dung, promiscuity, and the devouring of corpses.) Jewish people often viewed dogs as no better than rodents, and figuratively as hostile predators (e.g., Ps 22:16,20).

15:27 *dogs eat the crumbs*. Gentiles sometimes raised dogs as pets; they could clean up scraps of food left by the family. Too desperate to take offense, this woman humbles herself to seize any opportunity for healing. Many people appreciated quick-witted retorts.

16:1 *Pharisees and Sadducees*. Pharisees and Sadducees usually worked together only when they had a common mission or a common enemy they considered very dangerous. *sign from heaven*. Could mean simply a sign from God, but in this context may mean predicting a heavenly sign such as an eclipse or other phenomenon.

16:3 *how to interpret ... the sky*. In the Holy Land, Mediterranean winds bringing rain from the west could yield a red sky in the morning.

appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.^{af} ⁴A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.”⁹ Jesus then left them and went away.

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees

⁵When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. ⁶“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”^h

⁷They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn’t bring any bread.”

⁸Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith,ⁱ why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? ⁹Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?^j ¹⁰Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?^k ¹¹How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹²Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.^l

16:3
^fLk 12:54-56
16:4 ^gMt 12:39
16:6 ^hLk 12:1
16:8 ⁱMt 6:30
16:9
^jMt 14:17-21
16:10
^kMt 15:34-38
16:12 ^lAc 4:1

16:14 ^mMt 3:1;
 14:2 ⁿMk 6:15;
 Jn 1:21
16:16 ^oMt 4:3;
 Ps 42:2;
 Jn 11:27;
 Ac 14:15;
 2Co 6:16;
 1Th 1:9;
 1Ti 3:15;
 Heb 10:31;
 12:22
16:17
^p1Co 15:50;
 Gal 1:16;
 Eph 6:12;
 Heb 2:14
16:18 ^qJn 1:42
^rEph 2:20
16:19
^sIsa 22:22;
 Rev 3:7
^tMt 18:18;
 Jn 20:23
16:20
^uMk 8:30

Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

16:13-16pp — Mk 8:27-29; Lk 9:18-20

¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴They replied, “Some say John the Baptist;^m others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”ⁿ

¹⁵“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”^o

¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood,^p but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter,^q and on this rock I will build my church,^r and the gates of Hades^c will not overcome it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys^s of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be^d bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^d loosed in heaven.”^t ²⁰Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone^u that he was the Messiah.

Jesus Predicts His Death

16:21-28pp — Mk 8:31 – 9:1; Lk 9:22-27

²¹From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to

^a 2,3 Some early manuscripts do not have *When evening comes . . . of the times.* ^b 18 The Greek word for Peter means rock. ^c 18 That is, the realm of the dead ^d 19 Or will have been

16:4 *the sign of Jonah.* See note on 12:39–42.

16:5 *forgot to take bread.* Teachers sometimes delegated to particular disciples the task of procuring food for a journey.

16:6 *yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.* Yeast was sometimes used as a symbol for evil, and for what spreads; since the disciples would not likely want to borrow yeast from Pharisees and Sadducees to bake new bread, they should not take Jesus literally.

16:13 *Caesarea Philippi.* A Gentile city at the northern boundary of ancient Israel (see note on Mk 8:27). That Jesus chose this site for discussing his identity with his disciples might prefigure the mission to the Gentiles (28:19).

16:16 *Son of the living God.* “Son of God” was an appropriate title for the Davidic line, especially the ultimate ruler (cf. 2Sa 7:14; Ps 2:7), as also recognized in the Qumran scrolls.

16:17 *Blessed are you, Simon.* For beatitudes, see note on 5:3; teachers sometimes pronounced blessings on students who offered wise answers. *flesh and blood.* A common way of saying, “human beings” or “mortals.”

16:18 *Peter, and on this rock.* In the Greek of this period, *Petros* (Peter’s name) was used interchangeably with *petra* (“rock”). Prophets and others commonly used wordplays to make a point; but while Peter may be a rock in his role of confessing Christ (v. 16), he becomes a stumbling block in his role of resisting the meaning of that confession, namely, Jesus’ calling to the cross (vv. 22–23). Teachers and founders of schools normally expected their disciples to carry on after them and spread their movements. *church.* The Greek term was used in the Septuagint, the

pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT, for the community of Israel; the Qumran sect applied the same Hebrew term behind it to their own community. *gates of Hades.* A familiar ancient expression for the realm of the dead (both in Greek literature and in the Greek translation of the Biblical gates of Sheol or of death, e.g., Job 38:17; Isa 38:10); even martyrdom (vv. 21,24) cannot stop God’s plan.

16:19 *keys of the kingdom.* Palace keys were large, and an important official carried them (Isa 22:22). In contrast to those who were shutting people out of God’s kingdom (23:13), those who confess Jesus as Christ (v. 16) can usher people in. *bind . . . loose.* May include disciplinary authority (see note on 18:18) but perhaps also authority to evaluate those to be admitted (cf. an officer with a similar function at Qumran). The basis for true admission is the shared confession of v. 16.

16:20 *not to tell anyone.* For the “Messianic secret,” see Introduction to Mark: Messianic Secret. In Mediterranean society, the honorable man did not directly boast unless it could be justified as necessary. Some suggest that direct Messianic claims were not to be made until God had publicly vindicated the claimants. More generally, healers and leaders drew impossibly large crowds (cf. Mk 3:8–10), and political deliverers risked being viewed as a threat and hunted down by the Romans prematurely.

16:21 *must be killed.* Even aside from their presupposing that Jesus could not have been a prophet, the more skeptical scholars who doubt that Jesus could have foreknown his death misunderstand Jesus’ milieu. No one could make a commotion in the temple and challenge the priestly elite, as Jesus did, and *not* expect to be executed.



A Roman house key that doubled as a ring. Jesus said to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 16:19).

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Jerusalem and suffer many things^v at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day^w be raised to life.^x

²²Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

²³Jesus turned and said to Peter, “**Get behind me, Satan!**^y You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Who-

16:21
^vMk 10:34;
 Lk 17:25
^wJn 2:19
^xMt 17:22, 23;
 27:63; Mk 9:31;
 Lk 9:22; 18:31-33; 24:6, 7
16:23 ^yMt 4:10

16:24
^zMt 10:38;
 Lk 14:27
16:25
^aJn 12:25
16:27 ^bMt 8:20
^cAc 1:11
^dJob 34:11;
 Ps 62:12;
 Jer 17:10;
 Ro 2:6;
 2Co 5:10;
 Rev 22:12

ever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.^z ²⁵For whoever wants to save their life^a will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.^a ²⁶What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷For the Son of Man^b is going to come^c in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.^d

²⁸“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

The Transfiguration

17:1-8pp — Lk 9:28-36

17:1-13pp — Mk 9:2-13

17 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

⁴Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

⁵While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from

^a 25 The Greek word means either *life* or *soul*; also in verse 26.

The exceptions might be if the challenger were insane, fled, or raised an army, but there is no reason to expect any of these in Jesus’ case. Jesus intended to die; regarding the purpose, see notes on 20:28; 26:28 — where Jesus tells us that he died for us.

16:22 Messianic expectations were diverse, but usually involved the Davidic Messiah’s triumph over Israel’s enemies. Peter may intend encouragement, but disciples were not supposed to rebuke their teachers.

16:23 *Get behind me.* Disciples were expected to walk behind their teachers, and Jesus might allude figuratively to that posture here. *Satan.* By offering the kingdom without the cross (v. 22), Peter fills Satan’s role (see 4:8–10; cf. 27:42–43). *stumbling block.* Plays on Peter’s name (see note on v. 18).

16:24 *take up their cross.* Those condemned to execution would often carry the horizontal beam of their cross (the *patibulum*) out to the site of their execution, through an often hostile and mocking mob. Ironically, Jesus’ disciples fail even in carrying Jesus’ cross (26:69–75), so that his executioners have to draft a bystander to carry it (27:32).

16:25–26 Jewish apocalyptic writers agreed that eternal life was well worth losing one’s life in this age (e.g., 1 Enoch 108:10; 2 Baruch 51:15–16).

16:28 *not taste death . . . coming in his kingdom.* In context, the Synoptic Gospels apply this promise in the short term to the transfiguration (17:1–9), of which Peter, James and John were witnesses. This event points proleptically to

Jesus’ postresurrection reign (cf. Eph 1:19–23) and ultimately to his return, but these three disciples experience a foretaste.

17:1 *six days.* Might evoke Ex 24:16, the context of Moses receiving God’s revelation on the mountain (Ex 24:15).

17:2 *face shone like the sun.* Although some other stories about shining people appear in antiquity, the most obvious one — and the one that would have been known to all of Matthew’s audience — was Moses, transformed as he saw God’s glory (Ex 34:29–30,35). Yet Jesus is no mere Moses (vv. 3–5).

17:3 *Moses and Elijah.* Elijah had been caught up to heaven alive (2Ki 2:11) and Moses was buried by God himself (Dt 34:5–6); a few even believed that Moses, like Elijah, had not died (e.g., *Sipre Dt* 357.10.5). More importantly, Scripture had promised the coming of Elijah (Mal 4:4–5) and a prophet like Moses (Dt 18:15–19). The disciples experience a divine revelation on the mountain just as Moses and Elijah each did at Mount Sinai.

17:4 *put up three shelters.* Because of the Festival of Tabernacles, not only field workers but all Jewish men would know how to erect temporary shelters.

17:5 *bright cloud covered them.* Recalls the cloud of glory at Sinai when God revealed himself; Jewish teachers spoke of the cloud of God’s presence as the *shekinah*. On the divine voice from heaven, see note on 3:17. Here the voice adds, “Listen to him,” which some see as an allusion to the promised prophet like Moses (Dt 18:15).

the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.^e Listen to him!”^f

⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”^g ⁸When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone^h what you have seen, until the Son of Manⁱ has been raised from the dead.”^j

¹⁰The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

¹¹Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things.^k ¹²But I tell you, Elijah has already come,^l and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished.^m In the same way the Son of Man is going to sufferⁿ at their hands.” ¹³Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

Jesus Heals a Demon-Possessed Boy

17:14-19pp — Mk 9:14-28; Lk 9:37-42

¹⁴When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. ¹⁵“Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures^o and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. ¹⁶I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

¹⁷“You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” ¹⁸Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment.

¹⁹Then the disciples came to Jesus in

17:5 ^eMt 3:17;
2Pe 1:17
fAc 3:22, 23
17:7 ^gMt 14:27
17:9 ^hMk 8:30
iMt 8:20
jMt 16:21
17:11 ^kMal 4:6;
Lk 1:16, 17
17:12 ^lMt 11:14
mMt 14:3, 10
nMt 16:21
17:15 ^oMt 4:24

private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

²⁰He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith^p as small as a mustard seed,^q you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move.^r Nothing will be impossible for you.” ^{[21]a}

Jesus Predicts His Death a Second Time

²²When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, “The Son of Man^s is going to be delivered into the hands of men. ²³They will kill him,^t and on the third day^u he will be raised to life.”^v And the disciples were filled with grief.

The Temple Tax

²⁴After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax^w came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?”

²⁵“Yes, he does,” he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes^x— from their own children or from others?”

²⁶“From others,” Peter answered.

“Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. ²⁷“But so that we may not cause offense,^y go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”

^a 21 Some manuscripts include here words similar to Mark 9:29.

17:6 *fell facedown.* A common way to humble one’s self before God, and a usual response to revelations from God and sometimes angels (1Ch 21:16; Eze 1:28; 3:23; 43:3; 44:4; Da 8:17–18; 10:8–9; also in other ancient Jewish accounts). People also feared Moses when he was radiant (Ex 34:30). **17:7** *Don’t be afraid.* Revelers often commanded those who fell facedown during revelations to arise or not to be afraid (Eze 2:1–2; Da 8:18; 10:11–12; also other ancient Jewish accounts). Beyond these examples, the encouragement not to be afraid is common in Biblical revelations (Ge 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; Jos 8:1; Jdg 6:23).

17:10 *Elijah must come first.* Mal 4:5–6 predicted Elijah’s return, which was therefore widely anticipated (e.g., Sirach 48:10).

17:12–13 *Elijah ... John the Baptist.* Ancient peoples recognized that whereas some prophecies were literal, others were figurative. Writers also sometimes spoke of an individual as a “new” so-and-so—e.g., a “new Caesar” or a “new Alexander.”

17:15 *seizures.* Although the epileptic activity here is caused by a spirit (v. 18), as many people in antiquity would expect, Matthew recognizes that not all epileptic activity involves spirits (he distinguishes the two issues in 4:24).

17:20 *mustard seed ... mountain.* Some later sources suggest that “moving mountains” was a Jewish figure of speech for doing what was considered impossible. A massive mountain was a graphic contrast to a tiny mustard seed (see note on 13:31).

17:22–23 See note on 16:21.

17:24 *temple tax.* Until the revolt against Rome, all Jewish adult males in the Roman Empire paid an annual two-drachma tax for the support of the Jerusalem temple. This tax yielded so much revenue that the temple authorities simply began constructing a golden vine, to which they added annually. Some Jewish sects refused to contribute to this tax, so the collectors asked Peter what Jesus’ response would be. (After the temple’s destruction in AD 70, Rome required Jewish people to continue to pay this tax—now to Rome.)

17:25–26 *their own children ... are exempt.* Tax regulations often listed those who were exempt. Conquerors charged tribute from the conquered, not from the conquerors’ own people; a king’s dependents were exempt from his taxes. Priests (and later rabbis) were exempted from the two-drachma tax noted here.

17:20
PMt 21:21
qMt 13:31;
Mk 11:23;
Lk 17:6
r1Co 13:2
17:22 ^sMt 8:20
17:23 ^tAc 2:23;
3:13 ^uMt 16:21
^vMt 16:21
17:24
^wEx 30:13
17:25
^xMt 22:17-21;
Ro 13:7
17:27 ^yJn 6:61

The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven

18:1-5pp — Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

²He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children,² you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.^a ⁴Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.^b ⁵And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.^c

Causing to Stumble

⁶“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.^d ⁷Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!^e ⁸If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble,^f cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to stumble,^g gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one

18:3 ²Mt 19:14; 1Pe 2:2 ^aMt 3:2
18:4 ³Mk 9:35
18:5 ²Mt 10:40
18:6 ²Mk 9:42; Lk 17:2
18:7 ^eLk 17:1
18:8 ^fMt 5:29; Mk 9:43, 45
18:9 ^gMt 5:29

^hMt 5:22

18:10

ⁱGe 48:16;

Ps 34:7;

Ac 12:11, 15;

Heb 1:14

18:15

^jLev 19:17;

Lk 17:3; Gal 6:1;

Jas 5:19, 20

18:16

^kNu 35:30;

Dt 17:6;

19:15; Jn 8:17;

2Co 13:1;

1Ti 5:19;

Heb 10:28

eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.^h

The Parable of the Wandering Sheep

18:12-14pp — Lk 15:4-7

¹⁰“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angelsⁱ in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. [11]^a

¹²“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

Dealing With Sin in the Church

¹⁵“If your brother or sister^b sins,^c go and point out their fault,^j just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’^{dk}

^a 11 Some manuscripts include here the words of Luke 19:10. ^b 15 The Greek word for *brother or sister* (*adelphos*) refers here to a fellow disciple, whether man or woman; also in verses 21 and 35. ^c 15 Some manuscripts *sins against you* ^d 16 Deut. 19:15

18:1 *greatest in the kingdom.* Jewish teachers sometimes debated what kind of person would be greatest in the kingdom; expecting Jesus the Messiah (16:16) to soon establish his kingdom, the disciples’ concerns here are less theoretical. Jewish sages praised humility, but men nevertheless often had ambition.

18:2 *little child.* In ancient society, children were powerless and often overlooked. Ancient speakers and writers typically offered powerful leaders as heroes and models for imitation.

18:3 *like little children.* Children lacked social power; they also needed to depend on their fathers or other providers (see note on 7:9–10).

18:5 *in my name.* Jesus treats powerless children as his representatives (see note on 10:40).

18:6 *large millstone hung around their neck.* Romans sometimes executed people guilty of particularly heinous crimes by drowning them, tied down with a heavy weight; Jewish people normally regarded this punishment as too inhumane. *millstone.* Used by women to grind, but the term here refers to the much larger kind of grinding stone at the community mill; grain was crushed between an upper and lower millstone. The stone was turned by donkeys (a donkey could pull more than 100 pounds [45 kilograms]); one so encumbered would sink quickly (more quickly than with the type of stone described in Jer 51:63–64; cf. 1 Enoch 48:9).

18:7 *stumble.* The law forbade placing stumbling blocks in front of those who might be hurt by them (Lev 19:14); by Jesus’ day, many used the expression figuratively for what would cause someone to sin or turn from God.

18:8 *enter life maimed.* In many Jewish traditions, one

would first be resurrected in the form in which one died before being fully restored (e.g., 2 Baruch 50:2–4). The righteous expected to receive back any limbs lost in God’s service (e.g., 2 Maccabees 7:11; 14:46). Against many Jewish traditions, the resurrection would include the raising of the damned as well as the righteous (Da 12:2).

18:10 *their angels.* Many Jewish people believed in guardian angels (see note on Heb 1:14; also e.g., Tobit 5:22; Pseudo-Philo’s *Biblical Antiquities* 11:12; 59:4; in the Tosefta see *Shabbat* 17:2–3). In Jewish tradition, the angels who saw God’s face were the most powerful angels, who were typically the ones closest to God’s throne.

18:12 Most people of status in the ancient Mediterranean world looked down on shepherds as lower-class, dirty or uncivilized. (Despite many Biblical examples of shepherds, ancient sources suggest that the Judean elite agreed with the high-status consensus.) One hundred was an average size for a flock. Shepherds and other herders did leave their flocks to search for missing animals; often they left them with other shepherds or herders working with them in the same vicinity (cf. Lk 2:8).

18:15 *just between the two of you.* Jesus here agrees with other Jewish teachers: Jewish ethics heavily emphasized reproving a person privately first, so they would have opportunity to make matters right without facing shame.

18:16 *take one or two others along.* Evidence needed to be collected in case the offender did not repent. The demand for at least two witnesses (Dt 17:6; 19:15) was foundational in Jewish law, especially as understood by Pharisees and Essenes.

¹⁷If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church;¹ and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.^m

¹⁸“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be^a bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^a loosed in heaven.ⁿ”

¹⁹“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them^o by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?^p Up to seven times?”^q”

²²Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.^{b r}”

²³“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like^s a king who wanted to settle accounts^t

18:17 ¹1Co 6:1-6 ^mRo 16:17; 2Th 3:6, 14
18:18 ⁿMt 16:19; Jn 20:23
18:19 ^oMt 7:7
18:21 ^pMt 6:14
^qLk 17:4
18:22 ^rGe 4:24
18:23
^sMt 13:24
^tMt 25:19

18:25 ^uLk 7:42
^vLev 25:39; 2Ki 4:1; Ne 5:5, 8
18:26 ^wMt 8:2

with his servants. ²⁴As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold^c was brought to him. ²⁵Since he was not able to pay,^u the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold^v to repay the debt.

²⁶“At this the servant fell on his knees before him.^w ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.^d He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹“His fellow servant fell to his knees

^a 18 Or will have been ^b 22 Or seventy times seven
^c 24 Greek ten thousand talents; a talent was worth about 20 years of a day laborer’s wages. ^d 28 Greek a hundred denarii; a denarius was the usual daily wage of a day laborer (see 20:2).

18:17 *tell it to the church.* Synagogues functioned as community centers, and thus could also double as community courts. Even outside the Holy Land, Rome allowed Jewish communities to exercise discipline within Gentile cities’ minority Jewish communities. The church here functions similarly. The Greek terms translated “church” (*ekklēsia*) and “synagogue” (*synagōgē*) are both used to translate the OT term *qahal*, used for the community of God’s people. If the offender still did not repent, the highest level of discipline was exclusion from the community of God’s people. This discipline appears both in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in later rabbinic sources.

18:18 *bound . . . loosed in heaven.* The community following the above procedures (vv. 15–17) acts on the authority of heaven. (Later rabbis believed that their decisions based on Scripture and tradition coincided with the decrees of the heavenly court.) Later rabbis employ the terminology “binding” and “loosing” for their authority to interpret the law. Here the phrase extends to judicial decisions, reflecting the figurative application of what “binding” or “loosing” a prisoner normally meant.

18:19 *two of you on earth agree.* Although the principle that God answers prayer is broader, the two or three people in vv. 19–20 presumably refer to the two or three witnesses in v. 16 (“earth” and “heaven” likewise echo v. 18). Some suggest that it might be relevant that in Scripture, the witnesses were to be the first to strike the offender (Dt 17:7); here they are to pray.

18:20 *two or three gather in my name.* One familiar Jewish saying was that where two or three gathered to study God’s law, God’s presence was among them (in the Mesh-nah see *’Abot* 3:2, 6; *Mekilta Bahodesh* 11). Jewish people considered God alone omnipresent; Jesus speaks of himself here as the divine presence (cf. 1:23; 28:20).

18:21 *Up to seven times?* Although Jewish tradition valued forgiveness, some teachers allowed only three occasions for deliberate sin, since they doubted the offender’s sincerity beyond that point.

18:22 *seventy-seven times.* Some scholars argue that Jesus here reverses the principle of vengeance in Ge 4:24 (77 times). Hyperbole reinforces the point.

18:23 *the kingdom of heaven is like.* See note on 13:24. *king.* A frequent figure in Jewish parables; he normally

represented God. Jesus uses characteristics of a Gentile kingdom in this parable because some of the most shocking images (especially vv. 25,34) would not work in a Jewish setting. The king may resemble what we know of Ptolemaic rulers in Hellenistic, pre-Roman Egypt. Such a king would settle accounts with his tax farmers. The tax farmers are responsible to pay him the taxes for the people they are assigned to tax; they would then recoup their cost and make a profit by collecting the taxes from the people. After bad harvests or other crises, however, the tax revenue might not be available.

18:24 *ten thousand bags of gold.* Unlike many realistic details in the parable, the servant who has fallen so far in debt would shock Jesus’ hearers. If the talents (translated here “bags of gold”) are gold rather than silver (cf. Est 3:9), the amount this servant owes may be more than the amount of money in circulation in any petty kingdom in Jesus’ day (by comparison, Herod the Great’s annual tax revenue was about 800 talents). This was as much as 100 million denarii (as much as 70 or even 100 million days’ wages for a peasant). Indeed, perhaps the only reason the figure is not placed even higher is that the term translated “bags of gold” here was the largest currency available, and “ten thousand” was the largest numerical designation in Greek.

18:25 *his wife and his children and all that he had be sold.* The king could not hope to recoup his losses by selling the man and his family; the most expensive slave might sell for one talent, and often this could be the price for 20 slaves. The man’s property could also not match the amount mentioned in v. 24. The sale might make the angry king feel better, however. Jewish teachers forbade selling wives or children to repay debts, but this is presumably a Gentile king.

18:26 *I will pay back.* “I will repay” commonly appeared in ancient promissory notes; the promise to repay is in this case impossibly absurd.

18:27 *took pity on him.* Selling the man will not recoup the king’s losses (see notes on vv. 24–25); in a culture valuing honor, however, showing mercy would at least serve the king’s reputation for benevolence.

18:28 *hundred silver coins.* The other servant owes the merciless man perhaps nearly as little as a millionth of

and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

³⁰“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³²“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”^x

Divorce

19:1-9pp — Mk 10:1-12

19 When Jesus had finished saying these things,^y he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other

18:35 ^xMt 6:14;
Jas 2:13
19:1 ^yMt 7:28

19:2 ^zMt 4:23
19:3 ^aMt 5:31
19:4 ^bGe 1:27;
5:2
19:5 ^cGe 2:24;
1Co 6:16;
Eph 5:31
19:7 ^dDt 24:1-4;
Mt 5:31
19:9 ^eMt 5:32;
Lk 16:18

side of the Jordan. ²Large crowds followed him, and he healed them^z there.

³Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife^a for any and every reason?”

⁴“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’^{ab} ⁵and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’^{b?} ⁶So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

⁷“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”^d

⁸Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”^e

^a 4 Gen. 1:27 ^b 5 Gen. 2:24

what that man had owed the king. *choke him*. Ancient sources show that creditors sometimes did in fact choke their debtors when demanding payment. The fellow servant may have had no money available at that point because he too had been settling accounts with the king (v. 23). (Some suggest that the merciless man, having failed to collect sufficient tax revenue from his subjects previously, has now determined to ruthlessly exact all that is owed.)

18:30–33 By imprisoning his fellow servant, the merciless man not only renders him unable to repay his debt (unless friends or relatives come to his aid) but also takes him out of active service for the king, costing the king even more money! Nor will the king’s benevolence toward the merciless servant help the king’s reputation, in light of this servant’s current behavior.

18:34 *tortured*. Most Jewish hearers would have recoiled at the sound of torture, but they would have known that some Gentile rulers practiced this, sometimes to extort money from the tortured person’s friends. Seeing that this servant had fallen from the king’s favor, however, his former friends will not be so foolish politically as to come to his defense. The man will never repay his debt—and thus he will never escape.

19:3 *divorce his wife for any . . . reason*. Jewish teachers in general regarded divorce as tragic but the choice of the husband; they would not normally interfere. Although wealth could buy exceptions for powerful women, the usual Judean custom was that only the husband had the option of divorce. (If the husband were abusive, however, a court could force him to grant his wife a divorce.) There were two schools of thought among the Pharisees: the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. Shammaites outnumbered Hillelites in Jesus’ day (unlike after AD 70), but various ancient sources suggest that on the question of divorce the Hillelite view probably reflected the dominant practice in the larger society (cf. Sirach 25:26; Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.253; *Life* 415, 426). Shammaites interpreted the grounds for divorce in Dt 24:1 (“something indecent about her,” emphasizing *indecent*) as a reference to the wife’s unfaithfulness; by contrast, Hillelites

emphasized the word *something* and believed that a husband could divorce his wife for any cause (rendered here “for any and every reason”). Some sages recommended divorcing a disrespectful or disobedient wife (Sirach 25:25–26). Although few husbands would have taken advantage of the rule, Hillelites graphically claimed that a husband could divorce his wife even for burning the bread; a later Hillelite rabbi added, “or if he finds someone more beautiful” (in the Mishnah see *Gittin* 9:10; *Sipre Dt* 269.1.1).

19:4 *Haven’t you read . . . ?* Jesus’ question would insult the Pharisees. Nevertheless, his line of argument would be hard to discredit; many other Jewish thinkers of this period found divine ideals in the creation narrative. The Qumran sectarians, e.g., used Ge 1:27 (cited here) to prohibit kings from marrying multiple wives (Damascus Document 4.20—5.2; Temple Scroll 56.18–19). For many Jewish people, the ideals of the “beginning” also foreshadowed the future kingdom.

19:5–6 Teachers sometimes challenged other teachers’ interpretations of verses (here some Pharisees’ understanding of Dt 24:1) by appealing to other texts that contradicted those interpretations. Jesus here appeals to Ge 2:24.

19:8 *because your hearts were hard*. Ancient teachers of the law sometimes recognized that some of Moses’ laws were concessions to human weakness. Civil laws by their nature represent not God’s ideals but merely limits on human sin (see notes on 5:22,28).

19:9 *commits adultery*. Viewing remarriage as adultery treats a first marriage as indissoluble in God’s sight. This was shocking hyperbole, however, since Jesus’ point is that marriage should not be broken, not that it never is broken (see v. 6). Shammaites allowed divorce only for grounds of unfaithfulness; Jesus sides with them as against the many others who allowed it “for any and every reason” (v. 3; see note there). (The other NT exception, in 1Co 7:15, also involves a matter beyond the believer’s control; the principle common to both passages seems to be that believers should never break their marriage covenant, but that neither are they ultimately responsible for the other partner doing so.)

¹⁰The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

¹¹Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.^f ¹²For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

The Little Children and Jesus

19:13-15pp — Mk 10:13-16; Lk 18:15-17

¹³Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them^g and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

¹⁴Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs^h to such as these.”ⁱ ¹⁵When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

The Rich and the Kingdom of God

19:16-29pp — Mk 10:17-30; Lk 18:18-30

¹⁶Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”^k

¹⁷“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”^l

¹⁸“Which ones?” he inquired.

19:11
^fMt 13:11;
¹Co 7:7-9, 17
19:13 ^gMk 5:23
19:14
^hMt 25:34
ⁱMt 18:3;
¹Pe 2:2
19:16
^jMt 25:46
^kLk 10:25
19:17 ^lLev 18:5

19:18 ^mJas 2:11
19:19
ⁿEx 20:12-16;
Dt 5:16-20
^oLev 19:18;
Mt 5:43
19:21 ^pMt 5:48
^qLk 12:33;
Ac 2:45; 4:34-35
^rMt 6:20
19:23
^sMt 13:22;
¹Ti 6:9, 10
19:26
^tJob 18:14;
Job 42:2;
Jer 32:17;
Zec 8:6; Lk 1:37;
18:27; Ro 4:21
19:27 ^uMt 4:19
19:28
^vMt 20:21;
25:31

Jesus replied, “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery,^m you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹honor your father and mother;^{an} and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’^{b”o}

²⁰“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

²¹Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect,^p go, sell your possessions and give to the poor,^q and you will have treasure in heaven.^r Then come, follow me.”

²²When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich^s to enter the kingdom of heaven.

²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁵When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁶Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”^t

²⁷Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you!^u What then will there be for us?”

²⁸Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne,^v you who have followed me will also sit on twelve

^a 19 Exodus 20:12-16; Deut. 5:16-20 ^b 19 Lev. 19:18

19:10 *better not to marry.* Ancient marriage contracts often included a clause specifying what would happen in case of divorce. Because parents arranged many marriages, and many Galilean couples had no unchaperoned time together before marriage, the disciples fear the prospect of marriage with no escape for difficult circumstances.

19:12 *eunuchs.* Although eunuchs in Near Eastern royal courts could exercise power, Greco-Roman society often ridiculed eunuchs as effeminate or “half-men.” Jewish people abhorred castration, and eunuchs were excluded from the covenant (Dt 23:1). Speaking figuratively of long-term singleness, Jesus explains that there are some “who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” Apart from some Essenes, most of Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries regarded marriage and rearing children as an important duty.

19:13 *place his hands on them.* A person blessed by God could lay hands on someone to pray for a blessing on them (e.g., Ge 48:14). *disciples rebuked them.* Disciples sometimes tried to protect their teachers from distractions (cf. 2Ki 4:27).

19:14 *do not hinder them.* See note on 18:5. A man of God could overrule his disciple from keeping a supplicant away (cf. 2Ki 4:27).

19:16 *eternal life.* If later Jewish sources are representative, sometimes people asked Jewish teachers how to have eternal life. Eternal life was the life of the coming age (Da 12:2), thus of the kingdom (cf. v. 23).

19:17 *keep the commandments.* God had promised Israel life if they obeyed his commandments (e.g., Lev 25:18; Dt 4:1,40; 30:19–20); this originally referred to long life in the promised land, but Jewish teachers by Jesus’ day understood it to apply also to eternal life.

19:18–19 Of the six stipulations in the Ten Commandments that deal with one’s neighbor (Ex 20:12–17), Jesus lists five (Matthew omits Mark’s “defraud” [Mk 10:19], which was not specifically one of these commandments). Jesus also lists the commandment from Lev 19:18, which he treats as a summary of the law toward one’s neighbor (see note on 22:39).

19:22 *he had great wealth.* Sages usually welcomed would-be disciples, but some radical teachers made harsh demands to weed out those who would not be serious, especially when prospective disciples were wealthy or arrogant. Accounts of such sages emphasize that they were not impressed by worldly status and that wealth is not what makes us important.

19:24 *camel... eye of a needle.* See note on Lk 18:25.

19:26 *with God all things are possible.* Scripture was clear that nothing was impossible for God (Ge 18:14; Jer 32:17,27), apart from something contrary to his character.

19:28 *at the renewal of all things.* The term translated “the renewal” was used by Stoic philosophers for the fiery destruction and restoration of the cosmos; in a Jewish setting, it refers to the promised new creation (cf. Isa 65:17; 66:22). *twelve tribes.* Most Jewish people expected God to restore the 12 tribes of Israel at the time of the end.

thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.^w ²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife^a or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.^x ³⁰But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.^y

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

20 “For the kingdom of heaven is like^z a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.^a ²He agreed to pay them a denarius^b for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

⁷“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸“When evening came,^b the owner of

19:28
w Lk 22:28-30;
 Rev 3:21; 4:4;
 20:4
19:29 *Mt 6:33;
 25:46
19:30
y Mt 20:16;
 Mk 10:31;
 Lk 13:30
20:1 ^zMt 13:24
a Mt 21:28, 33
20:8
b Lev 19:13;
 Dt 24:15

20:11 ^cJnh 4:1
20:12 ^dJnh 4:8;
Lk 12:55;
 Jas 1:11
20:13
e Mt 22:12;
 26:50
20:15 ^fDt 15:9;
Mk 7:22
20:16
g Mt 19:30
20:18 ^hLk 9:51
i Mt 8:20

the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

⁹“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When they received it, they began to grumble^c against the landowner. ¹²“These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat^d of the day.’

¹³“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend.^e Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’^f

¹⁶“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”^g

Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time

20:17-19pp — Mk 10:32-34; Lk 18:31-33

¹⁷Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, ¹⁸“We are going up to Jerusalem,^h and the Son of Manⁱ will be

^a 29 Some manuscripts do not have *or wife*. ^b 2 A denarius was the usual daily wage of a day laborer.

Qumran documents even speak of a group of 12 leaders, apparently because of their expectation that God would restore the 12 tribes. Jesus was preparing for the restoration of his people and of creation.

19:30 *first will be last... last will be first.* Many Jewish thinkers expected the coming age to reverse current fortunes: the lowly would be exalted and the exalted brought low. Most Jewish people expected that God would exalt the people of Israel and punish their Gentile oppressors.

20:1 *like a landowner.* Jewish parables often began with, “Such-and-such is like...”; the named subject (here, *kingdom*) was compared not simply with the next noun (here, *a man*) but with the entire parable that followed. Because of God’s greatness, Jewish teachers often compared him in parables to a king or landowner. *hire workers for his vineyard.* Most Galileans worked in agriculture. During harvest time, those who owned large amounts of land needed to hire many extra workers to bring in the harvest quickly so that none of it would spoil. Landless unemployed people were numerous and could be available for work as early as sunrise; shepherds and goatherds might also add their services. Most workers were hired as harvesters; a smaller number might stand watch to prevent theft, and some boys could drive the donkeys.

20:2 *denarius.* Roughly a day’s normal wage.

20:3 *nine in the morning.* Lit. the “third hour” from sunrise. Others may have been finishing smaller harvests on their own land or simply arrived later than the first group. The

day began at sunrise, but people might work 12 hours a day during harvest.

20:8 *pay them their wages.* Subsistence-level workers were to be paid daily so they could feed themselves and their families (Lev 19:13; Dt 24:15).

20:11 – 12 Rarely would subordinates in antiquity speak so rudely to a landowner from whom they might hope for future employment or favors. Although by their culture’s standards the landowner is socially superior, they fail to greet him with a title.

20:13 – 15 Ancients valued and praised benevolence; this landowner has not wronged the complaining workers by showing extra benevolence to others. The landowner shames the complainers, showing that they are complaining about benevolence. Grace is not fair; it is generous.

20:16 *the last will be first, and the first will be last.* See note on 19:30. Ancient speakers and writers sometimes bracketed a passage by repeating at the end what they said at the beginning. With the above parable (vv. 1 – 15) some scholars compare a later rabbinic parable: a king paid a worker representing Israel, who worked particularly diligently, much more than he paid the other workers, who represented Gentiles. The parable’s point was that in this world God paid Gentiles back in full for any good they did, but that Israel would be blessed forever in the world to come (*Sipra Behuqotai* 2.262.1.9). Jesus’ point was quite different: God is gracious to bless all who serve him, including those who seem the most unexpected to enter his kingdom.

20:17 – 19 See note on 16:21.

delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law.^j They will condemn him to death¹⁹ and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged^k and crucified.^l On the third day^m he will be raised to life!ⁿ

A Mother’s Request

20:20-28pp — Mk 10:35-45

²⁰Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons^o came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down,^p asked a favor of him.

²¹“What is it you want?” he asked.

She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”^q

²²“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup^r I am going to drink?”

“We can,” they answered.

²³Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup,^s but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

²⁴When the ten heard about this, they were indignant^t with the two brothers.

²⁵Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,^u ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — ²⁸just as the Son of Man^v did not come to be served, but to

20:18
jMt 16:21; 27:1,2
20:19
kMt 16:21
lAc 2:23
mMt 16:21
nMt 16:21
20:20 oMt 4:21
pMt 8:2
20:21
qMt 19:28
20:22
rIsa 51:17; 22; Jer 49:12; Mt 26:39,42; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42; Jn 18:11
20:23 sAc 12:2; Rev 1:9
20:24
tLk 22:24,25
20:26
uMt 23:11; Mk 9:35
20:28 vMt 8:20

wLk 22:27; Jn 13:13-16; 2Co 8:9; Php 2:7
xIsa 53:10; Mt 26:28; 1Ti 2:6; Titus 2:14; Heb 9:28; 1Pe 1:18, 19
20:30 yMt 9:27
21:1 zMt 24:3; 26:30; Mk 14:26; Lk 19:37; 21:37; 22:39; Jn 8:1; Ac 1:12

serve,^w and to give his life as a ransom^x for many.”

Two Blind Men Receive Sight

20:29-34pp — Mk 10:46-52; Lk 18:35-43

²⁹As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him.

³⁰Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David,^y have mercy on us!”

³¹The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

³²Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

³³“Lord,” they answered, “we want our sight.”

³⁴Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

21:1-9pp — Mk 11:1-10; Lk 19:29-38
 21:4-9pp — Jn 12:12-15

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives,^z Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

20:20 *mother of Zebedee’s sons.* Women, and especially older women, could get away with requests and demands that men could not (or might even get in trouble for).

20:22,23 *cup.* Biblical prophets used a cup to symbolize sufferings, normally as divine judgment (Isa 51:17; Jer 25:15 – 17; 51:7; Hab 2:16; Zec 12:2); here it applies to Jesus’ painful death (26:39).

20:24 *they were indignant.* Rivalry and competition for honor were common and expected in ancient Mediterranean society.

20:25 *lord it over them.* For the pervasive emphasis on rank even among Jewish people, see notes on 23:6 – 7; but Gentile rulers offered a particularly obvious example, and one that Jewish people would view negatively.

20:28 *give his life as a ransom for many.* This verse recalls Isaiah’s description of the suffering servant: Jesus gave “his life” (Isa 53:12) “as a ransom” (cf. Isa 53:10 – 11) “for many” (Isa 53:11 – 12). The idea of one person suffering to ransom others was understood in Jewish and many Gentile cultures; Jewish people believed that righteous martyrs could also satisfy and turn away God’s wrath from their people (see especially 4 Maccabees 17:7 – 18:5).

20:29 *were leaving Jericho.* In Mark, they *approached* Jericho (Mk 10:46). Some point out that the OT site of Jericho had been largely abandoned, and that the new Jericho lay south of it, suggesting that Mark refers to old Jericho and Matthew to the new one. Others suggest that Matthew highlights the proximity to Jerusalem (some 17 miles [27

kilometers] farther southwest). Given the range of differences accepted in ancient biography, the difference between the two accounts here might even be considered negligible.

20:30 *Two blind men.* Matthew has two blind men whereas Mark has one (Mk 10:46). Some think that Mark highlighted only one whose name he knew (Mk 10:46), whereas Matthew knew of a second one; others suggest, on the analogy of some Jewish interpretive practices, that Matthew simply compensates for omitting another account of another blind man’s healing (Mk 8:22 – 26). Many think that Matthew might also reuse the same story in two places where it fits relevantly (Mt 9:27 – 30). If so, it fits the recognition that ancient biographies were often arranged topically; because of this a biography occasionally could mention the same story in two places (in this case, topically in ch. 9 but here in ch. 20 following Mark’s sequence).

21:1 *approached Jerusalem.* The Roman road from Jericho (20:29) to Jerusalem led 17 miles (27 kilometers) farther southwest and 3,000 feet (900 meters) higher. Jerusalem would become visible when travelers reached Bethphage on the Mount of Olives; officially a Jerusalem suburb, it lay on the other side of the valley of the brook Kidron.

21:3 *the Lord needs them.* Authorities could temporarily commandeer people or animals for service (see note on 5:41). Jesus uses his authority in this exceptional instance; he is a king (v. 5).

⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵“Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a
donkey.’”^{aa}

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks^b on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna^b to the Son of David!”^c

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”^{cd}

“Hosanna^b in the highest heaven!”^e

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

21:5 ^aIsa 62:11;
Zec 9:9
21:8 ^b2Ki 9:13
21:9 ^cver 15;
Mt 9:27
^dPs 118:26;
Mt 23:39
^eLk 2:14

21:11 ^fLk 7:16,
39; 24:19;
Jn 1:21, 25; 6:14;
7:40

21:12

^gDt 14:26

^hEx 30:13

ⁱLev 1:14

21:13 ^jIsa 56:7

^kJer 7:11

21:14 ^lMt 4:23

21:15 ^mver 9;

Mt 9:27

ⁿLk 19:39

¹¹The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet^f from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Jesus at the Temple

21:12-16pp — Mk 11:15-18; Lk 19:45-47

¹²Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying^g and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers^h and the benches of those selling doves.ⁱ ¹³“It is written,” he said to them, “**My house will be called a house of prayer;**^{dj} but you are making it **a den of robbers.**”^e^{kk}

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.^l ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,”^m they were indignant.ⁿ

¹⁶“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

^a 5 Zech. 9:9 ^b 9 A Hebrew expression meaning “Save!” which became an exclamation of praise; also in verse 15 ^c 9 Psalm 118:25,26 ^d 13 Isaiah 56:7
^e 13 Jer. 7:11

21:5–7 Hopes for redemption ran high at Passover, and many Judeans interpreted redemption as deliverance from foreign oppression. Zec 9:9 speaks of a “lonely” king (when applied to rulers the description meant gracious, merciful); he comes as a king, but not as a warrior-conqueror. He comes not riding on a horse (cf. Est 6:8) but on a donkey (cf. 1Ki 1:33). In Zechariah, the king is said to ride on a donkey, even on a donkey colt. Unlike Mark (Mk 11:4–7), Matthew mentions the disciples bringing not only the colt but also the mother. Jewish interpreters sometimes read literally everything they could in a text, even if the parallel lines were two ways of saying the same thing. In Hebrew, however, though the mother is mentioned, the adult donkey on whom the king rides appears male (the common Greek version is more ambiguous, but Matthew apparently translates the Hebrew here). Whether or not Matthew mentions the mother because of Zechariah’s wording, it is hard to imagine that the disciples would not have brought the mother; the colt was an unweaned foal, so it’s unlikely to have cooperated easily without its mother’s presence, perhaps in the lead. Although Matthew mentions cloaks on both animals, Jesus sat on the cloaks only on the colt.

21:8 *spread their cloaks on the road.* People could honor new kings by throwing their cloaks down where the kings would sit (v. 7) or tread; see, e.g., 2Ki 9:13. *others cut branches.* Branches were used for celebrations (Ps 118:27), though not as much at Passover as at the later Festival of Tabernacles.

21:9 The crowds would know Ps 118:25–26 by heart. It was part of the Hallel, consisting of Ps 113–118, which was sung at the Passover season (see Mt 26:30). *Hosanna.* Means, “Save!” (a cry for deliverance). *Son of David.* The title leaves no doubt that some in the crowds already think of Jesus as a Messianic figure (see note on 1:1).

21:11 *from Nazareth in Galilee.* Most of Jesus’ supporters, those who knew most about him at this point, would have been Galileans.

21:12 If merely prophesying the temple’s demise could stir the temple authorities to hostile action (Jer 26:11; Josephus, *Wars* 6.300–9), it is not surprising that within a week of this incident Jesus was executed. Because Passover pilgrims came from all over the ancient world and each locality had its own special currency, money changers were necessary before people could buy sacrifices in the temple. Those who traveled from far away could not bring their own sacrifices, but would have to buy sacrifices at the temple. The issue is not the service provided but the location, as v. 13 makes clear. Jesus was not interfering with the massive tourist trade or other merchants outside the temple; his concern was with the distraction in the temple courts.

21:13 *a house of prayer ... ‘a den of robbers.’* Isa 56:7 explained the temple’s purpose: a house for prayer. Jesus charged that his people were instead making it “a den of robbers,” quoting Jer 7:11. The context in Jeremiah was that God’s people were committing sins, yet felt safe from God’s judgment in the temple, like robbers felt safe in their dens. God thus promised that he would destroy the temple — probably an implication of Jesus as well (cf. 24:2).

21:14 *The blind and the lame came to him.* Pharisaic teachers did not require the blind or those unable to walk to come to festivals in Jerusalem; many scholars argue that some Jewish traditions also excluded them from the court of Israel in the temple. Jesus, however, takes special interest in helping them.

21:15 *chief priests and the teachers of the law.* The aristocratic priests belonged to Jerusalem’s wealthy ruling class, which was responsible to keep peace for the Romans. The teachers of the law might have additional theological objections; because those referred to here may belong to the ruling council (cf. 26:57), they probably also have political objections. *Hosanna.* See note on v. 9.

21:16 *From the lips ... praise.* Jesus here quotes the Greek version of Ps 8:2; the Hebrew reads “strength” instead of “praise.” Jewish interpreters frequently chose the textual

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“‘From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise’^{a?}”^o

¹⁷And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany,^p where he spent the night.

Jesus Curses a Fig Tree

21:18-22pp — Mk 11:27-14,20-24

¹⁸Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered.^q

²⁰When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.

²¹Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt,^r not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. ²²If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for^s in prayer.”

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

21:23-27pp — Mk 11:27-33; Lk 20:1-8

²³Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority^t are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

²⁴Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁵John’s baptism — where did it come

21:16 ^oPs 8:2
 21:17 ^pMt 26:6;
 Mk 11:1;
 Lk 24:50;
 Jn 11:1, 18; 12:1
 21:19 ^qIsa 34:4;
 Jer 8:13
 21:21
^rMt 17:20;
 Lk 17:6;
 1Co 13:2;
 Jas 1:6
 21:22 ^sMt 7:7
 21:23 ^tAc 4:7;
 7:27

from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’²⁶ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ — we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”^u

²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

The Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’^v

²⁹“‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰“Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

³¹“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors^w and the prostitutes^x are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness,^y and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors^z and the prostitutes^a did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent^b and believe him.

The Parable of the Tenants

21:33-46pp — Mk 12:1-12; Lk 20:9-19

³³“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted^c a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower.^d Then he rented

^a 16 Psalm 8:2 (see Septuagint)

tradition or translation that best communicated their point. The primary language of the Sadducees was probably Greek (the dominant language of their tomb inscriptions). The psalm refers primarily to infants, but Jesus may reason: if infants, then “how much more” (see note on 7:11) other children.

21:17 *went out... to Bethany.* Many pilgrims would arrive as much as a week early for the festival. Jerusalem’s population would swell during the festival, so some visitors would lodge in nearby villages.

21:19 Passersby were welcome to take a small amount of fruit for their needs (see note on 12:1). On the reasons for the tree lacking fruit, see note on Mk 11:13. Matthew’s sequence differs from Mark’s, but biographies did not normally pretend to be arranged chronologically, and minor differences were common in ancient biography.

21:21 *say to this mountain.* Some later sources suggest that “moving mountains” was a Jewish figure of speech for doing what was considered impossible. Some scholars think that “this mountain” (emphasis added) refers to the Mount of Olives, which was within sight of the disciples (v. 1; cf. Zec 14:4).

21:23 *what authority.* The chief priests and elders exercised traditional authority over the people, supported by Rome.

21:24 *I will also ask.* Jewish teachers often countered questions with questions.

21:28–31 Jewish culture demanded that sons honor, obey and answer their fathers respectfully. Minor sons also often worked on the family’s farm or learned a trade from their father.

21:28 *What do you think?* Allows for one ancient function of parables: inviting the hearers to condemn themselves from their own mouths (2Sa 12:4–7).

21:32 *the way of righteousness.* A familiar Jewish phrase for “the way of God’s will” or “the right way” (e.g., Pr 8:20; 12:28; 16:31). *tax collectors.* See note on 9:9. *prostitutes.* Although Jewish texts speak of prostitution as primarily a Gentile practice, both foreign and Jewish prostitutes are attested in ancient Israel, including in Jerusalem.

21:33–34 Profits from vineyards usually did not begin to be realized until four years after planting; the owner is presumably wealthy enough to be able to afford the delay. Although many Galileans owned their own plots of land,

the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.^e ³⁴When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants^f to the tenants to collect his fruit.

³⁵“The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.^g ³⁶Then he sent other servants^h to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

³⁸“But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir.ⁱ Come, let’s kill him^j and take his inheritance.’^k ³⁹So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

⁴¹“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,”^l they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants,^m who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

⁴²Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’^{a?n}”

⁴³“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you^o

21:33
^eMt 25:14, 15
21:34 ^fMt 22:3
21:35
^g2Ch 24:21;
Mt 23:34, 37;
Heb 11:36, 37
21:36 ^hMt 22:4
21:38 ⁱHeb 1:2
^jMt 12:14
^kPs 2:8
21:41 ^lMt 8:11,
12 ^mAc 13:46;
18:6; 28:28
21:42
ⁿPs 118:22, 23;
Ac 4:11; 1Pe 2:7
21:43 ^oMt 8:12

21:44 ^pLk 2:34
21:46 ^qver 11,
26
22:2 ^rMt 13:24
22:3 ^sMt 21:34
22:4 ^tMt 21:36

and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”<sup>b

o</sup>

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.^q

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

22:2-14Ref — Lk 14:16-24

22 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven is like^r a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his servants^s to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

⁴“Then he sent some more servants^t and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

⁵“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷The king

^a 42 Psalm 118:22, 23 ^b 44 Some manuscripts do not have verse 44.

many landless peasants found work on larger estates. Wealthy absentee landowners were common; they usually either contracted laborers or rented their land to tenant farmers (serfs). Tenant farmers lived and worked their estates and merely paid the landowners a portion of the harvest (v. 34). Farmers used rough stone walls or hedges to keep out hungry animals; watchtowers for guards (usually huts with flat roofs) might also provide some shelter during harvest (cf. 2Ch 26:10; Isa 1:8). The arrangements for the vineyard here thus are not unusual, but together they closely follow Isa 5:2, in the context of which Israel was the vineyard (Isa 5:7). The “tenants” in v. 34 must thus be the temporary caretakers of Israel—the chief priests and the elders (vv. 23, 45).

21:34 *to collect his fruit.* Contracts specified the tenants’ obligations. Because tenants did not own the land they worked, they sometimes had to pay the landowners half the harvest.

21:35 *seized his servants . . . killed another.* Even during war, everyone in antiquity viewed the murder of unarmed messengers as treachery. Jewish people hearing the parable would think of the tradition of Israel persecuting God’s prophets (cf. 5:12; 23:34).

21:37 *he sent his son.* In Jewish parables, a landowner often represented God and his son was generally Israel; here, however, it is clear that Jesus means himself as the son. Ancient hearers would have expected the landowner to seek to destroy the tenants before this point, and would regard the gesture of sending his son as naively gentle. No one has a right to complain that God is not merciful enough.

21:38 *take his inheritance.* No court would have given

the inheritance to these tenants; the state would have executed them instead.

21:42 See notes on Mk 11:9, Lk 20:17.

21:43 *given to a people.* Some relate the new “nation” here to the holy nation of Ex 19:5–6, suggesting the people of a new exodus (1Pe 2:9).

21:44 *falls on this stone . . . be crushed.* Jewish teachers often linked various passages based on a common key word; Jesus thinks of other “stone” passages in addition to Ps 118:22 (cited in v. 42). One could stumble over God’s stone (Isa 8:14–15; cf. Isa 28:16), or it could crush one (Da 2:44).

22:2 *The kingdom of heaven is like.* See note on 13:24. Many Jewish parables depict God as a king; sometimes his son represented Israel marrying the law. Here the son is presumably Jesus. *wedding banquet.* Because the size of wedding banquets displayed honor, hosts usually invited as many people as possible.

22:3 *those who had been invited . . . refused to come.* Refusal to accept a banquet invitation insulted the inviter; insulting a king was treason. But such invitations were normally RSVP, followed up by a second notice once the food was ready. Thus the people now refusing to come, at the second notice, had already agreed to come at the first invitation (“those who had been invited”). Their refusal now was therefore a conspicuously deliberate and provocative insult.

22:4 *oxen and fattened cattle.* A fattened calf alone could feed a village (cf. Lk 15:23); the king has made massive preparations, and the meat will spoil unless the guests come quickly.

22:6 *killed them.* All ancient readers would have agreed

was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers^u and burned their city.

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹So go to the street corners^v and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good,^w and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

¹³“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’^y

¹⁴“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”^z

Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar

22:15-22pp — Mk 12:13-17; Lk 20:20-26

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians.^a “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance

22:7 ^uLk 19:27
 22:9 ^vEze 21:21
 22:10
^wMt 13:47,48
 22:12
^xMt 20:13;
 26:50
 22:13 ^yMt 8:12
 22:14
^zRev 17:14
 22:16 ^aMk 3:6

22:17
^bMt 17:25
 22:21 ^cRo 13:7
 22:22
^dMk 12:12
 22:23 ^eAc 4:1
^fAc 23:8;
 1Co 15:12
 22:24
^gDt 25:5,6

with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax^{ab} to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

²¹“Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s,^c and to God what is God’s.”

²²When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.^d

Marriage at the Resurrection

22:23-33pp — Mk 12:18-27; Lk 20:27-40

²³That same day the Sadducees,^e who say there is no resurrection,^f came to him with a question. ²⁴“Teacher,” they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him.^g ²⁵Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶The same thing happened

^a 17 A special tax levied on subject peoples, not on Roman citizens

that slaughtering messengers was an offense worthy of death. By universal ancient law, heralds, or messengers, were to be exempt from any harm, even during times of war.

22:7 *burned their city.* Conquerors burned resistant cities; a generation after Jesus’ ministry, Rome’s army burned Jerusalem.

22:9 *invite . . . anyone you find.* The first invited guests had dishonored the king; the only way to recoup some honor is to find other guests before the food can spoil.

22:11 *not wearing wedding clothes.* In another Jewish parable possibly (but not certainly) as early as the first century, wise servants waited at a king’s gate, awaiting the promised banquet; foolish servants kept laboring with soiled garments and were unprepared when his banquet was ready. Regarding the parable here in ch. 22, some scholars suggest that the host would have provided special garments; others simply note that coming to a wedding banquet in soiled clothing would insult the host. In v. 12, the king asks how the intruder made it past the servants guarding the doors; the intruder’s refusal to answer may suggest that his insulting act was deliberate. If the first invited guests represent Jerusalem’s leaders at Jesus’ first coming, the rudely dressed man perhaps represents professed followers of Jesus unprepared for his second.

22:17 *what is your opinion?* The four questions in vv. 16–17, 24–28, 36, 43 were the sorts of questions Jewish teachers often raised in this period. People often questioned speakers to try to embarrass them; failure to overcome the speaker would show the speaker’s superiority.

22:19–20 *coin . . . denarius . . . image . . . inscription.* Copper

coins minted in Judea omitted the emperor’s image, but silver and gold coins were minted elsewhere. The most likely coin here, a silver denarius (minted at Lyon, France), bore the emperor’s image and the title “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.” Conservative Jews were supposed to avoid images; a few years earlier, Jerusalemites told Pilate that they would rather die than allow the imperial standards bearing Caesar’s image into the city. Most dramatically, this coin and the attendant tax had incited a revolt a quarter century earlier. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that Jesus’ interlocutors had this coin. Jews could not pay taxes without this coin; it was mandatory for poll taxes in all the empire’s provinces.

22:21 *what is Caesar’s . . . what is God’s.* Some argue that Jesus was saying that Caesar was welcome to mere money, which bore Caesar’s image. By contrast, on this view, people should surrender to God what bears God’s image — themselves.

22:23 *who say there is no resurrection.* Pharisees, whose views were closer to the mainstream in Judea, often defended the doctrine of the future resurrection of the righteous against the Sadducees, who denied it. Pharisees believed that the Sadducees would be excluded from the life of the world to come because of the Sadducean denial of resurrection.

22:24 *must marry the widow.* Because widows could be left destitute, it was the duty of the deceased husband’s brother to marry the widow in order to provide for her and to raise up offspring for the deceased (Dt 25:5–6). She had married into the brother’s family and was therefore partly their responsibility.

22:26 *down to the seventh.* See note on Lk 20:29–31.

to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. ²⁷Finally, the woman died. ²⁸Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?”

²⁹Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures^h or the power of God. ³⁰At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage;ⁱ they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ³²‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’^{a?} He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

³³When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.^k

The Greatest Commandment

22:34–40pp — Mk 12:28–31

³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees,^l the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law,^m tested him with this question: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”^{bn} ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor

22:29^h Jn 20:9

22:30

^lMt 5:43; 38

22:32^j Ex 3:6;

Ac 7:32

22:33^k Mt 7:28

22:34^l Ac 4:1

22:35

^mLk 7:30;

10:25; 11:45;

14:3

22:37ⁿ Dt 6:5

22:39

^o Lev 19:18;

Mt 5:43; 19:19;

Gal 5:14

22:40^p Mt 7:12

22:42^q Mt 9:27

22:44

^r Ps 110:1;

Ac 2:34, 35;

1Co 15:25;

Heb 1:13; 10:13

22:46

^s Mk 12:34;

Lk 20:40

23:2^t Ezr 7:6;

25; Ne 8:4

as yourself.’^{co} ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”^p

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

22:41–46pp — Mk 12:35–37; Lk 20:41–44

⁴¹While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴²“What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”

“The son of David,”^q they replied.

⁴³He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says,

⁴⁴“The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.”^r^{dr}

⁴⁵If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.^s

A Warning Against Hypocrisy

23:1–7pp — Mk 12:38, 39; Lk 20:45, 46

23:37–39pp — Lk 13:34, 35

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ²“The teachers of the law^t and the Pharisees sit in Moses’

^a 32 Exodus 3:6 ^b 37 Deut. 6:5 ^c 39 Lev. 19:18
^d 44 Psalm 110:1

22:28 Sadducees were known to pose conundrums such as this to the Pharisees, seeking to illustrate what they believed were the absurd implications of belief in the resurrection.

22:29 *you do not know the Scriptures.* Although the most obvious Biblical text to which Jesus would allude could be Da 12:2, in v. 32 Jesus proves his case from the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). When arguing against Sadducees, Pharisees also made a case from the Pentateuch, because that was what Sadducees would readily accept.

22:30 *neither marry nor be given in marriage.* Grooms married; fathers gave their daughters in marriage. Most Jewish people agreed that angels, who were immortal, did not propagate; the same then would be true of those resurrected to immortality.

22:31 *have you not read . . .* The highly educated and literate Sadducees would hear Jesus’ question as an insult.

22:32 *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* Jewish prayers regularly referred to God in this way. Jesus articulates a position that many of his hearers would have accepted, namely, that the patriarchs remained alive before God. Some other Jewish intellectuals also supported this view (e.g., 4 Maccabees 7:18–19; 16:25; Philo, *Abraham* 50–55).

22:36 *greatest commandment in the Law.* Despite requiring obedience to all the commandments, Pharisaic teachers often debated among themselves which commandment was the greatest. Many, e.g., felt that the greatest was honoring one’s parents. One later rabbi came closer to Jesus’ view here: Rabbi Akiba thought that “Love your neighbor” (v. 39) was the greatest commandment (*Sipra Qedoshim* 4.200.3.7).

22:37 Jewish people regularly recited this passage (Dt 6:5); it provides a summary of the law, especially with regard to God.

22:39 Jesus uses Lev 19:18 as the summary for commandments regarding other people. It was common to link texts based on a common key word or phrase; Lev 19:18 here begins with the same phrase as the verse previously cited (Dt 6:5): *we’ahavta*, “you shall love.” Some other thinkers linked these two commands, but to our knowledge only Jesus linked them as the greatest commandments, which became foundational for his early followers (cf. Jn 13:34–35; Ro 13:8–10; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8).

22:40 *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these.* Others had also looked for summarizing principles of the law (e.g., Mic 6:8). See note on 7:12.

22:44 *The Lord said to my Lord.* Psalm 110:1 speaks of a ruler of the nations, a priest like Melchizedek (Ps 110:4), who is distinct from God the Father yet also called “Lord.” Since Jewish people avoided pronouncing the divine name in this period, and YHWH was pronounced “lord,” they would read the passage, both in Hebrew and in Greek, as “the Lord” speaking to “my Lord.” *under your feet.* Subdued enemies are often depicted as being under a conqueror’s feet.

22:45 *how can he be . . . ?* Rabbis sometimes grappled with reconciling apparently contradictory positions; Jesus is not denying that the Messiah is David’s descendant, a title he has not refused (9:27; 15:22; 20:30–31), but is showing that the Messiah is not *merely* like David. If David addresses this figure as “Lord,” David recognizes one greater than himself, which a mere “new David” or Davidic descendant would not be.

23:2 *Moses’ seat.* Many scholars identify Moses’ seat with

JEWISH SECTS

PHARISEES

Their roots can be traced to the Hasidim of the second century BC.

- (1) Along with the Torah, they accepted as equally inspired and authoritative all the commands set forth in the oral traditions preserved by the rabbis.
- (2) On free will and determination, they held to a mediating view that did not allow either human free will or the sovereignty of God to cancel out the other.
- (3) They accepted a rather developed hierarchy of angels and demons.
- (4) They believed in the immortality of the soul and in reward and retribution after death.
- (5) They believed in the resurrection of the dead.
- (6) The main emphasis of their teaching was ethical rather than theological.

SADDUCEES

They probably had their beginning during the Hasmonean period (166–63 BC). Their demise occurred c. AD 70 with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.

- (1) They considered only the books of Moses to be canonical Scripture, denying that the oral law was authoritative and binding.
- (2) They were very exacting in Levitical purity.
- (3) They attributed everything to free will.
- (4) They argued that there is neither resurrection of the dead nor a future life.
- (5) They rejected the idea of a spiritual world, including belief in angels and demons.

ESSENES

They probably originated among the Hasidim, along with the Pharisees, from whom they later separated (see the apocryphal book 1 Maccabees 2:42; 7:13). The Hasidim were a group of zealous Jews who took part with the Maccabees in a revolt against the Syrians c. 165–155 BC. A group of Essenes probably moved to Qumran c. 150 BC, where they copied scrolls and deposited them in nearby caves.

- (1) They strictly observed the purity laws of the Torah.
- (2) They practiced communal ownership of property.
- (3) They had a strong sense of mutual responsibility.
- (4) Daily worship was an important feature along with daily study of their sacred scriptures.
- (5) Solemn oaths of piety and obedience had to be taken.
- (6) Sacrifices were offered on holy days and during their sacred seasons, but not at the temple, which they considered to be corrupt.
- (7) Marriage was avoided by some but was not condemned in principle.
- (8) They attributed to fate everything that happened.

ZEALOTS

They originated during the reign of Herod the Great c. 6 BC. A group of Zealots were among the last defenders against the Romans at Masada in AD 73.

- (1) They opposed payment of taxes to a pagan emperor because they believed that allegiance was due to God alone.
- (2) They were fiercely loyal to Jewish tradition.
- (3) They endorsed the use of violence as long as it accomplished a good end.
- (4) They were opposed to the influence of Greek pagan culture in the Holy Land.

seat. ³So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. ^u

⁵"Everything they do is done for people to see:^v They make their phylacteries^w wide and the tassels on their garments^x long; ⁶they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;^y ⁷they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.^z

⁸"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father,^a and he is in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant.^b ¹²For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.^c

Seven Woes on the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees

¹³"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!^d You shut the

23:4 ^uLk 11:46; Ac 15:10; Gal 6:13
23:5 ^vMt 6:1, 2, 5, 16 ^wEx 13:9; Dt 6:8
^xNu 15:38; Dt 22:12
23:6 ^yLk 11:43; 14:7; 20:46
23:7 ^zver 8; Mk 9:5; 10:51; Jn 1:38, 49
23:9 ^aMal 1:6; Mt 7:11
23:11
^bMt 20:26; Mk 9:35
23:12 ^cLk 14:11
23:13 ^dver 15, 23, 25, 27, 29

^eLk 11:52
23:15 ^fAc 2:11; 6:5; 13:43
^gMt 5:22
23:16 ^hver 24; Mt 15:14
ⁱMt 5:33-35
23:17 ^jEx 30:29
23:19
^kEx 29:37
23:21 ^l1Ki 8:13; Ps 26:8
23:22 ^mPs 114:4; Mt 5:34

door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. ^e [14]^b

¹⁴"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert,^f and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell^g as you are.

¹⁶"Woe to you, blind guides!^h You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.'ⁱ ¹⁷You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?^j ¹⁸You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.'^k ¹⁹You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?^k ²⁰Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells^l in it. ²²And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.^m

^a 5 That is, boxes containing Scripture verses, worn on forehead and arm ^b 14 Some manuscripts include here words similar to Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47.

a prominent seat found in some ancient synagogues. Because such seats are not titled, however, some other scholars take "Moses' seat" here figuratively for those who would seek to take the position of Moses. Rabbis sometimes used the formula, "to sit in so-and-so's seat," to mean, "to be so-and-so's successor"; the rabbis claimed that they continued the work of Moses by expounding the law.

23:5 *They make their phylacteries wide.* Jewish people tried to practice literally the (probably figurative) command of Ex 13:9,16; Dt 6:8; 11:18; thus they made boxes with Scripture verses (*tefillin*, or phylacteries) that they strapped to their left hand and forehead during particular prayers. (The Greek term used here can also mean amulets, but the Scripture boxes seem in view; such boxes have been found by archaeologists.) *tassels ... long.* Jewish sources associate this practice with the Biblical requirement to wear blue and white tassels, or fringes (called *tzitzith*), on the corners of their garments to remind them of God's commandments (Nu 15:38-39; Dt 22:12). (Some later rabbis felt that God would punish more strictly the person who in prayer neglected the white threads more than someone who neglected the blue ones.) The issue here is not wearing phylacteries or tassels (cf. 9:20; 14:36), but seeking to draw honor to oneself rather than God (cf. 6:2).

23:6 *place of honor.* Throughout the Mediterranean world, people at banquets were usually seated according to their social rank; prominent members of the community thus received honor at banquets. Such preferential seating also characterized community assemblies and, in the Jewish community, synagogues. In synagogues the best seats were on the *bema*, the raised platform, where synagogues had them. In some synagogues, many people may have sat on the floor (Jas 2:3); in such synagogues, those who sat on benches around the walls had better seats (other synagogues had additional benches).

23:7,8 *Rabbi.* Social convention stipulated that social inferiors should greet superiors first; later rabbis believed that the superiors included rabbis. In this period, "rabbi" meant, "my master," a title of great honor (though it gradually came to be used with Jewish teachers' names, e.g., Rabbi Tarfon). Later rabbis trained disciples in their own traditions, passed down from their teachers, and in the Law of Moses. Although Jesus' disciples should "make disciples" (28:19), they should make disciples of Jesus and not of themselves.

23:9 *father.* People often addressed respected older men or leaders as "fathers"; the title and role were also applied to many rabbis by their disciples.

23:12 Scripture, followed by Jewish tradition, warned that the day of God's judgment would exalt the lowly and humble the proud (e.g., Isa 2:11-12; 5:15-16; Eze 21:26).

23:13 "Woes" could function as laments or mourning, but prophets often used them as creative ways to pronounce impending judgment (cf. 18:7; Isa 5:18-23; cf. mocking laments in Isa 15:5; 16:11; Jer 48:36; 51:8). Because Jesus speaks here of "shutting" the kingdom, cf. note on 16:19.

23:15 *win a single convert.* Many Jewish people approved of making proselytes, or converts, from Gentiles. We do not know of any concerted missions movement, however; Jesus probably uses the language of hyperbole.

23:16 *blind guides.* See note on 15:14. *oath.* See note on 5:34-35. To avoid the risk of breaking an oath by God's name, people began swearing by other things associated with God. Much gold decorated the temple, including a golden vine, very large in size, located high on the temple wall, to which more gold was added each year (see note on 17:24).

23:17-19 Tradition viewed anything placed on the altar as consecrated to God.

23:22 Heaven is God's throne, according to Isa 66:1.

²³“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenthⁿ of your spices — mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness.^o You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴You blind guides!^p You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

²⁵“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish,^q but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.^r ²⁶Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

²⁷“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs,^s which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. ²⁸In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous

23:23
ⁿLev 27:30
^oMic 6:8;
 Lk 11:42
23:24 ^pver 16
23:25 ^qMk 7:4
^rLk 11:39
23:27
^sLk 11:44;
 Ac 23:3

23:29
^tLk 11:47,48
23:31
^uAc 7:51-52
23:32
^v1Th 2:16
23:33 ^wMt 3:7;
 12:34 ^xMt 5:22
23:34
^y2Ch 36:15,
 16; Lk 11:49
^zMt 10:17
^aMt 10:23
23:35 ^bGe 4:8;
 Heb 11:4

but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

²⁹“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets^t and decorate the graves of the righteous. ³⁰And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ ³¹So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.^u ³²Go ahead, then, and complete^v what your ancestors started!

³³“You snakes! You brood of vipers!^w How will you escape being condemned to hell?^x ³⁴Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify;^y others you will flog in your synagogues^z and pursue from town to town.^a ³⁵And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel^b to the blood of Zechariah son of Ber-

23:23 *tenth of your spices.* The Biblical tithe complemented other OT offerings, such as the firstborn of the flock; in most passages, it consisted of a tenth of one’s agrarian produce (Lev 27:30; Ne 10:37), but sometimes also livestock (Lev 27:32; 2Ch 31:6). This was set aside to support the ministry caste (priests and Levites; Nu 18:21–28) and for a feast every third year at the central place of worship (Dt 14:23,28; 26:12). The grain was stored for distribution (Mal 3:10). Because different passages offered somewhat different details, Pharisees came up with three tithes, paying roughly 23 percent each year. Pharisees were known for their scrupulousness in tithing; if they were not certain that the farmer had already tithed the produce, they would tithe it again to be certain. Because tithes were on food, however, Pharisees in this period debated whether spices such as dill (anise), cumin, and mint counted (later rabbis decided in favor of tithing the first two but did not deem it necessary to tithe the mint). The Shammaite school of Pharisees in Jesus’ day rejected the need to tithe on black cumin. Jesus here speaks of a hyperbolic Pharisee, even more scrupulous than normal! Yet this Pharisee, fixated on details, missed the heart of the law (for earlier summaries of the law’s heart, see Dt 10:12–13; Mic 6:8).

23:24 *gnat ... camel.* The camel was the largest animal in ancient Israel and the gnat proverbially small; Jesus uses graphic hyperbole to make his point. The law forbade drinking from a vessel in which something died (Lev 11:32–33); Pharisaic regulations excluded something as small as a gnat from such consideration, but Jesus’ hyperbolic Pharisee strains out even a gnat, lest it die in his drink. The Aramaic words for *camel* and *gnat* sound almost the same; prophets sometimes used wordplays, witty puns to drive home a point (e.g., the Hebrew of Jer 1:11–12; Mic 1:10–15; see NIV text notes there).

23:25–26 *clean the outside ... clean the inside.* First-century Pharisees debated whether to cleanse the inside or outside of a cup first. Shammaites doubted that it mattered either way, but Hillelites required cleaning the inside first. Jesus appears to agree with the Hillelites here, but unlike the Pharisees he speaks figuratively about the human heart.

23:27 *whitewashed tombs.* Tombs were whitewashed to

warn away Passover pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the festival, lest they incur ritual impurity by touching a tomb. (According to Jewish tradition, if so much as their shadow touched not only a corpse but a tomb, they incurred ritual impurity for seven days.) Here Jesus speaks of whitewash as a beautifying agent to conceal corruption (Eze 13:10–15; 22:28). The Pharisees, who emphasized ritual purity, look good on the outside but whoever approaches them becomes impure.

23:29 *build tombs for the prophets.* In this period many tombs were being built in Jerusalem to honor prophetic figures.

23:31 *you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.* People employed the phrase “descendants of” literally but also figuratively for those who acted like their ancestors; Jesus plays on these two senses here. By identifying their ancestors as those who killed the prophets rather than as the prophets themselves (cf. 5:12), the tomb-builders show where their real allegiance lies.

23:32 *Go ahead ...!* Prophets often ironically invited people to go on sinning — and be judged (1Ki 18:27; Isa 6:9; 29:9; Jer 23:28; 44:25–26; Eze 3:27; Am 4:4–5).

23:33 *brood of vipers.* See note on 3:7. *hell.* Gehinnom (see note on 3:12).

23:34 *flog in your synagogues.* See note on 10:17.

23:35 *Abel to ... Zechariah.* According to a common arrangement of the Scriptures, Abel would have been the first martyr in the OT and Zechariah the last. Abel’s blood cried out for vengeance against his killer (Ge 4:10; contrast Heb 11:4; 12:24). As Zechariah was being murdered, he cried out for vengeance (2Ch 24:22). Jewish tradition recognized that Zechariah’s blood desecrated the sanctuary (on blood desecrating a sanctuary, see note on 24:15). Indeed, in one Jewish tradition, a fountain of blood spurted up from the site of his murder, inviting judgment for generations until the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem. Only then did the people plead with God to forgive them for the blood of Zechariah, and only then did the fountain stop. The saying here may conflate the Zechariah killed in 2 Chronicles with the postexilic prophet Zechariah, son of Berechiah (Zec 1:1,7). Sometimes Jewish traditions conflated figures accidentally, but sometimes they deliberately linked figures to evoke further associations

ekiah,^c whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.^d ³⁶Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.^e

³⁷“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you,^f how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.³⁸ Look, your house is left to you desolate.⁹ ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’^{a”h}

The Destruction of the Temple and Signs of the End Times

24:1-51pp — Mk 13:1-37; Lk 21:5-36

24 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ²“Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another;ⁱ every one will be thrown down.”

³As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives,^j the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

⁴Jesus answered: “Watch out that no

23:35 ^cZec 1:1
^d2Ch 24:21
23:36
^eMt 10:23;
24:34
23:37
^f2Ch 24:21;
Mt 5:12
23:38 ⁹1Ki 9:7;
8; Jer 22:5
23:39
^hPs 118:26;
Mt 21:9
24:2 ⁱLk 19:44
24:3 ^jMt 21:1

24:5 ^kver 11,
23, 24; 1Jn 2:18
24:7 ^lIsa 19:2
^mAc 11:28
24:9 ⁿMt 10:17
^oJn 16:2
24:11 ^pMt 7:15
24:13
^qMt 10:22
24:14 ^rMt 4:23
^sLk 2:1; 4:5;
Ac 11:28; 17:6;
Ro 10:18;
Col 1:6, 23;
Rev 3:10; 16:14
24:15 ^tAc 6:13
^uDa 9:27; 11:31;
12:11

one deceives you. ⁵For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many.^k ⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.^l There will be famines^m and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹“Then you will be handed over to be persecutedⁿ and put to death,^o and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,¹¹ and many false prophets^p will appear and deceive many people. ¹²Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,¹³ but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.^q ¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom^r will be preached in the whole world^s as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

¹⁵“So when you see standing in the holy place^t the abomination that causes desolation,^{bu} spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—

^a 39 Psalm 118:26 ^b 15 Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11

relevant to their point (cf. note on 1:7–11). Matthew sometimes cites the prophet Zechariah (Mt 21:5; 26:31; 27:9–10).

23:36 Guilt for murder invited judgment (Dt 21:8) and could be passed on from generation to generation until avenged (2Sa 21:1,14). *this generation*. Climactic because the ultimate murder, that of God’s own Son, would be committed (cf. 21:35–39).

23:37 *you who kill the prophets*. Jewish tradition acknowledged and even amplified the OT record of persecuted prophets. *as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings*. In the OT and Jewish tradition, God sheltered his people under his wings (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4); Jesus here assumes that divine role.

23:38 *left ... desolate*. Jesus refers here to the temple’s desolation (fulfilled roughly 40 years later, in AD 70) brought about by its desecration. See note on 24:15.

23:39 In Matthew, Jesus speaks of a future blessing when citing Ps 118:26, since the crowds have already offered this blessing in the past (21:9). Jesus thus agrees with the earlier Biblical prophets who offered hope for God’s beloved people (e.g., Hos 14:4–7; Am 9:11–15).

24:1 *its buildings*. See next note. The majority of Jews lived outside of the Holy Land, but the temple tax (see note on 17:24) shows that they also remained loyal to the temple.

24:2 *not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down*. A small minority of Jews denounced the temple as impure and announced judgment on it or the establishment that ran it; some believed that God would send a new temple. More commonly, Jewish people affirmed that the temple was invincible. Jesus’ prophecy includes, as often in his teaching, an element of hyperbole (not something writers would have invented after the temple’s destruction in AD 70). Some of the stones remain (albeit in the retaining wall), not surprising in view of their massive size; one block almost 40 feet (12 meters)

long weighs nearly 400 tons (360 metric tons), and some smaller ones weigh 2–5 tons (1.8–4.5 metric tons).

24:3 *sign of your coming and of the end of the age*. Some Jewish sources (especially in apocalyptic literature) were preoccupied with signs of the end. In the following discourse Jesus addresses both questions (about the temple’s destruction, 24:2–3; and about the sign indicating his coming and the end), but he does not identify which question he is answering at a given time. This fits a prophetic pattern often found in earlier Biblical prophets (e.g., Joel seems to blend a nearer locust plague with an invasion in the later day of the Lord).

24:6–14 Many Jewish thinkers offered lists of sufferings, which they sometimes called the “birth pangs” of the Messiah or of the new world; these sufferings would precede the end of the age. Although these sufferings include those mentioned here (such as apostasy, wickedness, persecution and hardships), they also include some more unusual phenomena such as mutant infants. Jesus, however, will answer the question about the sign of his coming (v. 3) with a single sign at his coming (v. 30). In contrast to many other Jewish thinkers, he identifies the events listed here as merely “the beginning of birth pains” (v. 8) and not yet the end (v. 6), in contrast to one activity—evangelizing all nations—that precedes the end (v. 14). Most events listed here, including earthquakes, many false prophets, and the like, happened at least sometimes even before AD 70 (as well as afterward).

24:15 *abomination that causes desolation*. Some Jewish prophets inside Jerusalem kept prophesying deliverance up until the temple was destroyed; Jesus instead prophesies the truth, which is often less comfortable for us to hear. Historically, when God’s people persisted in disobedience, God allowed the temple to be desecrated (an “abomination”) and ultimately destroyed (“desolation”); the pattern is most obvious in Daniel (Da 8:13; 9:27; 11:31;

¹⁶then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷Let no one on the housetop^v go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. ¹⁹How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!^w ²⁰Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now — and never to be equaled again.^x ²²“If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect^y those days will be shortened. ²³At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it.^z ²⁴For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders^a to deceive, if

24:17
^v 1Sa 9:25;
 Mt 10:27;
 Lk 12:3; Ac 10:9
24:19
^w Lk 23:29
24:21 ^x Da 12:1;
 Joel 2:2
24:22 ^y ver 24,
 31
24:23
^z Lk 17:33; 21:8
24:24
^a 2Th 2:9-11;
 Rev 13:13
24:27
^b Lk 17:24
^c Mt 8:20
24:28
^d Lk 17:37
24:29 ^e Isa 13:10;
 34:4; Eze 32:7;
 Joel 2:10,
 31; Zep 1:15;
 Rev 6:12, 13; 8:12

possible, even the elect. ²⁵See, I have told you ahead of time.

²⁶“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷For as lightning^b that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.^c ²⁸Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.^d

²⁹“Immediately after the distress of those days

“the sun will be darkened,
 and the moon will not give its light;
 the stars will fall from the sky,
 and the heavenly bodies will be
 shaken.’^{ae}

^a 29 Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

12:11). Some references in Daniel sound as though they refer to the desecration that happened in the second century BC under Antiochus Epiphanes (see notes on Da 11:31 and context); according to some ancient calculations, the desecration of Da 9:27 could have happened in the first century; and the context of 12:11 sounds as if it refers to the end time. Jewish prophecy, not often preoccupied with chronology, sometimes blended similar events without regard to the different times in which they might occur (see note on v. 3). Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived through the events of AD 66–70, believed that the “abomination” referred to Jewish nationalists slaughtering priests in the temple (for bloodshed in the sanctuary desecrating it, see note on 23:35). He believed that the “desolation” was the temple’s destruction three and a half years later. At that time, on the site of the temple Roman soldiers worshiped the image of Caesar that they carried on their standards, which Jewish people regarded as idols. Christian scholars debate whether the events of AD 66–70 represent the temple’s final desolation.

24:16 *flee to the mountains.* During invasions, people usually crowded into walled cities for protection, but Jesus warns against that measure in this case. Jerusalem is in the Judean hill country. Large armies could not take advantage of their numbers on narrow mountain paths; here David and his supporters had evaded Saul’s pursuing army, and the Maccabees had launched their guerilla warfare against invaders. Jesus’ own followers, remembering his prophecy and also, according to ancient sources, instructed by their own Christian prophets, fled the city before it was too late.

24:17 *housetop.* Rooftops in this region were flat, and people engaged in various activities on their roofs, such as drying vegetables, chatting with neighbors, praying, and the like. The roof was approached by an outside staircase or ladder, so it would take extra time to enter the house after descending. Despite an element of hyperbole, Jesus is right to emphasize haste. Once Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Jewish revolutionaries, it was difficult for anyone still there to escape the city; some months after that, in AD 68, even those who did escape the city could no longer flee safely to the Romans. Syrian auxiliaries working for Rome, hearing that Judean fugitives swallowed jewels in hopes of maintaining resources after their escape from the city, intercepted the fugitives and sliced them open.

24:18 *get their cloak.* People would rise at dawn, say

some prayers, and start to work in their fields. As the day grew warmer, they would leave their outer garment at the edge of the field. This garment was essential for keeping warm at night (it could double as a blanket), and was so important that it was the one item that a creditor could not seize from a debtor overnight. Yet Jesus warns his hearers to flee without it—life mattered more than even the most necessary of possessions.

24:19 *pregnant women and nursing mothers.* For these women fleeing would be particularly difficult. Mothers also could mourn the loss of small children caused by the hardship (2 Baruch 10:13–15); in fact, Josephus laments that during the siege of Jerusalem, some hungry mothers even ate their children (Josephus, *Wars* 6.208–12).

24:20 *in winter or on the Sabbath.* In Judea, winter was the rainy season, and otherwise dry creek beds could flood with water from the mountains; cold winter rains also buried some roads in mud. The Jordan River also flooded, making it harder to cross; Josephus reports that even in the spring of AD 68 Judean fugitives were trapped by the flooding Jordan and thus slaughtered by their pursuers (Josephus, *Wars* 4.433). Armies normally withdrew from battle during the winter; travel was particularly dangerous in the cold mountains (cf. v. 16). On the Sabbath Jerusalem’s gates would be shut and fellow Judeans, less aware of imminent danger than were the disciples, would resist those wishing to ride animals.

24:21 *great distress.* Da 12:1 spoke of a final tribulation greater than any that preceded it. *never to be equaled again.* Cf. Joel 2:2; may suggest that Matthew expected history to continue even after the temple’s destruction.

24:22 *cut short.* Might mean that the period of tribulation would not last the full number of expected days (cf. Da 12:11–13).

24:26 *out in the wilderness.* Some Jewish people expected an end-time deliverer or deliverance to take place in the wilderness (see note on 3:3).

24:27 *lightning.* Appears in ancient sources for something seen far and wide (Ps 97:4). *coming of the Son of Man.* Evokes Da 7:13–14.

24:28 *carcass . . . vultures.* Greek and Roman depictions of the aftermath of battles usually included vultures picking clean unburied corpses; the same was true in Scripture (Dt 28:25–26; 1Sa 17:44; Ps 79:1–2; Eze 39:17–20).

24:29 Jesus here echoes Isa 13:10 and probably the Greek version of Isa 34:4; cf. similarly Joel 2:10,31. The passages in Isaiah graphically depict judgment on specific

³⁰“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth^a will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven,^f with power and great glory.^b ³¹And he will send his angels⁹ with a loud trumpet call,^h and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

³²“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it^c is near, right at the door.ⁱ ³⁴Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.^j ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.^k

The Day and Hour Unknown

24:37-39pp — Lk 17:26,27
24:45-51pp — Lk 12:42-46

³⁶“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,^d but only the Father.^l ³⁷As it was in the days of Noah,^m so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,ⁿ up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and

24:30 ^fDa 7:13;
Rev 1:7
24:31
⁹Mt 13:41
^hIsa 27:13;
Zec 9:14;
1Co 15:52;
1Th 4:16;
Rev 8:2; 10:7;
11:15
24:33 ⁱJas 5:9
24:34
JMt 16:28;
23:36
24:35 ^kMt 5:18
24:36 ^lAc 1:7
24:37 ^mGe 6:5;
7:6-23
24:38
ⁿMt 22:30

24:40
^oLk 17:34
24:41
P Lk 17:35
24:42
⁹Mt 25:13;
Lk 12:40
24:43 ^lLk 12:39
24:44 ^s1Th 5:6
24:45
^tMt 25:21,23
24:46
^uRev 16:15
24:47
^vMt 25:21,23
24:49
^wLk 21:34

took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.^o ⁴¹Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.^p

⁴²“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.^q ⁴³But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming,^r he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴So you also must be ready,^s because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

⁴⁵“Who then is the faithful and wise servant,^t whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.^u ⁴⁷Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.^v ⁴⁸But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ ⁴⁹and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.^w ⁵⁰The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. ⁵¹He will cut

^a 30 Or *the tribes of the land* ^b 30 See Daniel 7:13-14.
^c 33 Or *he* ^d 36 Some manuscripts do not have *nor the Son*.

empires but Jewish people also saw them as presaging global judgments. People in antiquity expected cosmic signs before catastrophic events such as Jerusalem’s fall; Jewish apocalyptic literature expected them especially before the end.

24:30 *sign.* Some understand this as an ensign or banner (Isa 11:12; 49:22), though the term is used in other texts for heavenly signs (cf., e.g., Rev 12:1; perhaps Ac 2:19–20). *mourn.* Might allude to Zec 12:10. *the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven.* Quotes Da 7:13.

24:31 *he will send his angels.* That the Son of Man sends “his angels” indicates his deity (cf. Zec 14:5). *trumpet call.* One regularly prayed Jewish prayer expected a trumpet when God would deliver his people at the end. Trumpets were used for summons to gather and for military instructions (cf. Isa 27:12–13; 1Co 15:52; 1Th 4:16–17). *from one end of the heavens to the other.* Because people typically viewed the heavens as a dome over the earth, this would include “from the ends of the earth” (as in Mk 13:27).

24:32 *fig tree.* See note on Mk 11:13. See also note on Lk 21:29–30.

24:34 *this generation.* See note on 23:36; the temple was destroyed about 40 years (the rough figure often used as a Biblical generation) after Jesus promised this. The distinction between the specified timing here and the unknown timing of v. 36 may relate to the two distinct questions asked in v. 3.

24:35 *my words will never pass away.* Jesus equates his words with God’s (Isa 40:8; Zec 1:5–6; cf. Mt 5:18).

24:36 *that day or hour.* Jewish teachers disagreed among themselves as to whether God had immutably fixed the day of redemption or whether it would depend on human

cooperation. Some tried to calculate dates; others regarded such calculations as impossible. Jesus affirms that the Father knows the time (cf. Zec 14:7), though no one else did. He notes some prerequisites for the end (vv. 15,34) but also that it would catch people by surprise (vv. 37–44).

24:37 *days of Noah.* Jewish people often viewed the flood as prefiguring the day of judgment. Jesus warns that as the flood caught the people of Noah’s day unprepared (vv. 38–39), so would his coming catch the final generation unprepared (for the lack of signs, see note on vv. 6–14).

24:38 *Grooms married and fathers gave in marriage.*

24:41 *hand mill.* Many Galilean homes shared a common courtyard with other families, and housewives worked together at a common millstone. The implication here is that, despite the closest of associations, one is taken (to judgment, v. 39) but the other is spared.

24:45 *wise servant.* Slaves could be entrusted with great authority; household managers were often high-level slaves.

24:48 *staying away a long time.* A common story line, appearing also in some Jewish parables, was the temptation posed when a ruler, master or husband went on a long journey. In the stories, the person often returned and caught someone unprepared (v. 50).

24:49 *eat and drink with drunkards.* Gluttony and drunkenness were often associated with squandering. A slave exploiting fellow slaves and carousing with the master’s resources would be punished harshly.

24:51 *cut him to pieces.* People regarded dismemberment as a terrible punishment, often inflicted just before or after execution.

him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.^x

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

25 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like^y ten virgins who took their lamps^z and went out to meet the bridegroom.^a ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise.^b ³The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.^c

⁶“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

⁷“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’^d

⁹“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

¹⁰“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet.^e And the door was shut.

¹¹“Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

24:51 ^xMt 8:12
25:1 ^yMt 13:24
^zLk 12:35-38;
 Ac 20:8; Rev 4:5
^aRev 19:7; 21:2
25:2 ^bMt 24:45
25:5 ^c1Th 5:6
25:8 ^dLk 12:35
25:10
^eRev 19:9

25:13
^fMt 24:42,
 44; Mk 13:35;
 Lk 12:40
25:14
^gMt 21:33;
 Lk 19:12
25:15
^hMt 18:24,25
25:19
ⁱMt 18:23

¹²“But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

¹³“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.^f

The Parable of the Bags of Gold

25:14-30Ref — Lk 19:12-27

¹⁴“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey,^g who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,^a each according to his ability.^h Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.ⁱ ²⁰The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in

^a 15 Greek *five talents . . . two talents . . . one talent*; also throughout this parable; a talent was worth about 20 years of a day laborer’s wage.

25:1 *ten virgins.* On the evening of a wedding, the bride and bridesmaids would wait at the bride’s parents’ home; the groom would then come with his entourage to escort the bride and her entourage, with music and dancing, to the site of the wedding. Because the exact timing was unpredictable, given the many preparations (and the bride’s relatives haggling over the value of the gifts given them), the bridesmaids needed to stay ready. This particular groom was delayed more than usual (v. 5), but a groom would normally come after dark to escort the bride to the wedding. Women could be married in their early to mid-teens; the bridesmaids were normally virgins who would want to perform their duties well, as they hoped to find husbands themselves soon.

25:4 *their lamps.* The small lamps of this period could be held in a hand, contained only a limited amount of oil, and emitted only a limited amount of light. More likely in view here are torches, which characterized night weddings throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. In poorer villages the torches might be simple oil-soaked rags wrapped around sticks; some suggest that these sticks would need to be rewrapped every 15 minutes or so.

25:9 *may not be enough.* If the wise were to share their oil, they might all end up with too little, and the wedding procession would be ruined.

25:10 *went in with him to the wedding banquet.* For the wedding ceremony, the group would go to the groom’s home (normally his parents’ home); the couple was expected to consummate the marriage that night, but the wedding banquet would last for several days (often seven). The new couple would normally stay at the home of the groom’s parents, sometimes in a room on top of the roof, until the groom could secure a home of his own.

25:11 *open the door.* The door could be bolted shut, but with visitors coming and going, it would not be bolted for the entirety of the wedding celebration, which might last seven days. Rather, it is bolted against them; the unwise bridesmaids’ negligence has insulted the couple and the other participants in the wedding.

25:12 *I don’t know you.* A form of repudiation, the purpose of this statement is to treat the hearers as strangers. Most of the community would be welcome at the feast; the five foolish virgins, however, were now alienated from their own community. As with the graphic punishment in 24:51, the severe punishment here is meant to seize the hearers’ attention (see 25:13).

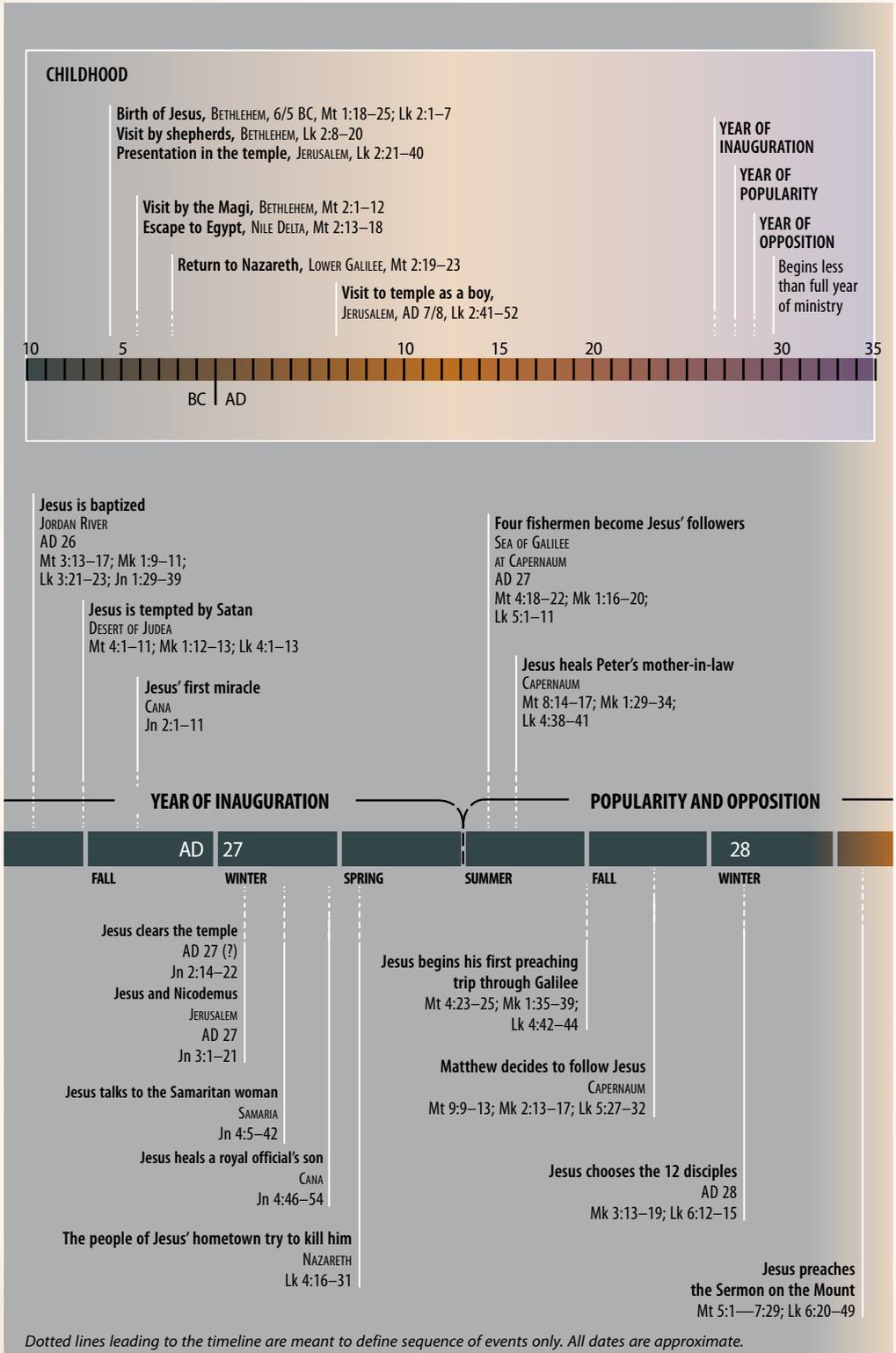
25:14 *entrusted his wealth to them.* See note on 24:48. High-level slaves often served as managers for household estates, so entrusting wealth to them was not unusual. Other Jewish parables have a similar story line.

25:16 *put his money to work.* Moneylending was common and was often done through temples, which normally doubled as banks because deposits were considered safe there. Since few people had capital, those who did could lend money at significant interest. Investors thus could receive five or even ten times their investment (cf. Lk 19:16–18); at the very least, they could double their investment.

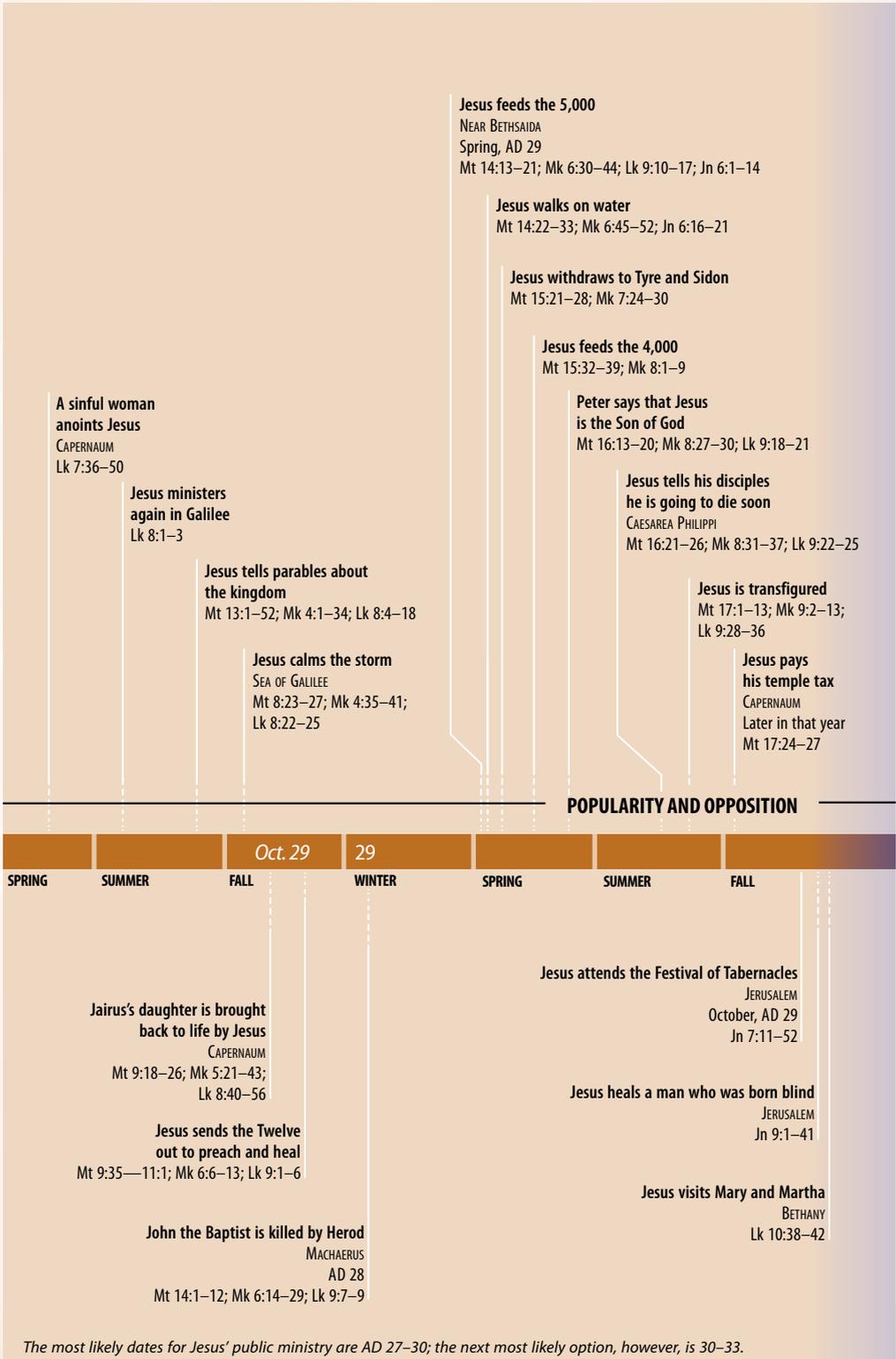
25:18 *hid his master’s money.* People often buried money in a strongbox to keep it safe, but it would have been safe with the bankers and also increased (in contrast to vv. 16–17).

25:21 *put you in charge of many things.* Slaves could be rewarded. Roman law allowed slaves not only to manage estates, but also to earn and hold money and receive bonuses. Some imperial freedmen even wielded more power than many aristocrats.

ONE ARRANGEMENT OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST



ONE ARRANGEMENT OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST (CONT.)



The most likely dates for Jesus' public ministry are AD 27–30; the next most likely option, however, is 30–33.

ONE ARRANGEMENT OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST (CONT.)

Jesus begins his last trip to Jerusalem
AD 30
Lk 17:11

Jesus blesses the little children
ACROSS THE JORDAN
Mt 19:13–15; Mk 10:13–16; Lk 18:15–17

Jesus talks to the rich young man
ACROSS THE JORDAN
Mt 19:16–30; Mk 10:17–31; Lk 18:18–30

Jesus again predicts his death and resurrection
NEAR THE JORDAN
Mt 20:17–19; Mk 10:32–34; Lk 18:31–34

Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus
JERICHO
Mt 20:29–34; Mk 10:46–52; Lk 18:35–43

Jesus talks to Zacchaeus
JERICHO
Lk 19:1–10

Jesus returns to Bethany to visit Mary and Martha
BETHANY
Jn 11:55—12:1

THE LAST WEEK

The “Triumphal” Entry, JERUSALEM, Sunday
Mt 21:1–11; Mk 11:1–10; Lk 19:29–44; Jn 12:12–19

Jesus curses the fig tree, Monday
Mt 21:18–19; Mk 11:12–14

Jesus clears the temple, Monday
Mt 21:12–13; Mk 11:15–18

The authority of Jesus questioned, Tuesday
Mt 21:23–27; Mk 11:27–33; Lk 20:1–8

Jesus teaches in the temple, Tuesday
Mt 21:28—23:39; Mk 12:1–44; Lk 20:9—21:4

Jesus anointed, BETHANY, Tuesday
Mt 26:6–13; Mk 14:3–9; Jn 12:2–11

The plot against Jesus, Wednesday
Mt 26:14–16; Mk 14:10–11; Lk 22:3–6

The Last Supper, Thursday
Mt 26:17–29; Mk 14:12–25; Lk 22:7–20; Jn 13:1–38

Jesus comforts the disciples, Thursday
Jn 14:1—16:33

Gethsemane, Thursday
Mt 26:36–46; Mk 14:32–42; Lk 22:40–46

Jesus’ arrest and trial, Thursday night and Friday
Mt 26:47—27:26; Mk 14:43—15:15;
Lk 22:47—23:25; Jn 18:2—19:16

Jesus’ crucifixion and death, GOLGOTHA, Friday
Mt 27:27–56; Mk 15:16–41;
Lk 23:26–49; Jn 19:17–30

The burial of Jesus, JOSEPH’S TOMB, Friday
Mt 27:57–66; Mk 15:42–47;
Lk 23:50–56; Jn 19:31–42

30

WINTER

31

WINTER

SPRING

SUMMER

AFTER THE RESURRECTION

The empty tomb, JERUSALEM, Sunday
Mt 28:1–10; Mk 16:1–8; Lk 24:1–12; Jn 20:1–10

Mary Magdalene sees Jesus in the garden
JERUSALEM, Sunday
Mt 16:9–11; Jn 20:11–18

Jesus appears to the two going to Emmaus
Sunday
Mk 16:12–13; Lk 24:13–35

Jesus appears to 10 disciples
JERUSALEM, Sunday
Mk 16:14; Lk 24:36–43; Jn 20:19–25

Jesus appears to the 11 disciples
JERUSALEM, One week later
Jn 20:26–31

Jesus talks with some of his disciples
SEA OF GALILEE, One week later
Jn 21:1–25

Jesus ascends to his Father in heaven
MOUNT OF OLIVES, 40 days later
Mt 28:16–20; Mk 16:19–20; Lk 24:44–53

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead
BETHANY
Winter, AD 30
Jn 11:1–44

charge of many things.^j Come and share your master's happiness!

²²“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.^k Come and share your master's happiness!’

²⁴“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸“‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.’ ³⁰And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’^m

The Sheep and the Goats

³¹“When the Son of Man comesⁿ in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.^o ³²All the na-

25:21 ^jIver 23; Mt 24:45, 47; Lk 16:10
25:23 ^kIver 21
25:29
^lMt 13:12; Mk 4:25; Lk 8:18; 19:26
25:30 ^mMt 8:12
25:31
ⁿMt 16:27; Lk 17:30
^oMt 19:28

25:32
^pMal 3:18
^qEze 34:17, 20
25:34 ^rMt 3:2; 5:3, 10, 19; 19:14; Ac 20:32; 1Co 15:50; Gal 5:21; Jas 2:5
^sHeb 4:3; 9:26; Rev 13:8; 17:8
25:35
^tJob 31:32; Isa 58:7; Eze 18:7; Heb 13:2
25:36
^uIsa 58:7; Eze 18:7; Jas 2:15, 16
^vJas 1:27
^w2Ti 1:16
25:40
^xPr 19:17; Mt 10:40, 42; Heb 6:10; 13:2
25:41 ^yMt 7:23
^zIsa 66:24; Mt 3:12; 5:22; Mk 9:43, 48; Lk 3:17; Jude 7
^a2Pe 2:4

tions will be gathered before him, and he will separate^p the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.^q ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom^r prepared for you since the creation of the world.’ ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,^t ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me,^u I was sick and you looked after me,^v I was in prison and you came to visit me.’^w

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’^x

⁴¹“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me,^y you who are cursed, into the eternal fire^z prepared for the devil and his angels.’ ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a

25:24 *you are a hard man.* In a manner that would have shocked ancient audiences, the servant insults the master, essentially blaming his master's harsh character for his own failure to increase his master's investment.

25:31 *sit on his glorious throne.* Some Jewish texts portray God delegating judgment to subordinates (such as Abel), but usually judgment, especially on the cosmic scale depicted in this parable, belongs to God alone. In Da 7:13–14, the Son of Man receives eternal authority over all peoples; coming with angels may allude to God's coming in Zec 14:5 (where the “holy ones” were sometimes understood to be angels).

25:32 *sheep... goats.* Sheep were considered more valuable than goats, were usually raised in greater numbers, and were much more obedient. The OT depicted as shepherds of God's people Moses and David but especially God himself; God's people were depicted as sheep. Some report that sheep and goats were typically separated at night because of the animals' differing preferences.

25:33 *his right.* Ancient culture honored the right above the left.

25:34 In other early Jewish parables, the King (here, Jesus; v. 31) almost always represents God. Jewish texts

often spoke of the righteous “inheriting” the kingdom or the world to come.

25:35 The basic hospitality described here fits expectations for how agents of the kingdom should be treated (10:11,42).

25:36 *sick and you looked after me.* Visiting the sick was a common practice. Those in prison could easily die of malnutrition unless friends or family outside brought food; sometimes guards demanded bribes to convey the goods to prisoners, so a visit to a relative in prison became a potentially costly journey.

25:40 *brothers and sisters of mine.* For the meaning of Jesus' brothers and sisters, see 12:50; 23:8; for its range of meaning, see note on Ac 9:17. Some see the siblings here as the poor; the idea that how one treats the poor is how one treats God has Biblical warrant (Pr 19:17). Others see the siblings here as Jesus' agents who bring the gospel; the idea that how one treats agents of God's message is how one treats God also has Biblical warrant (see notes on 10:40–42). The latter view fits the use of similar language elsewhere in Matthew.

25:41 *the eternal fire.* See note on 3:12.

stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?"

⁴⁵"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'^b

⁴⁶"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."^{c,d}

The Plot Against Jesus

26:2-5pp — Mk 14:1,2; Lk 22:1,2

26 When Jesus had finished saying all these things,^e he said to his disciples, ²"As you know, the Passover^f is two days away — and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled^g in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas,^h and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.ⁱ ⁵"But not during the festival," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people."

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

26:6-13pp — Mk 14:3-9

26:6-13Ref — Lk 7:37,38; Jn 12:1-8

⁶While Jesus was in Bethany^k in the home of Simon the Leper, ⁷a woman came

25:45

^bPr 14:31; 17:5

25:46

^cMt 19:29;

Jn 3:15, 16, 36;

17:2, 3; Ro 2:7;

Gal 6:8; 5:11, 13,

20^d Da 12:2;

Jn 5:29;

Ac 24:15; Ro 2:7,

8; Gal 6:8

26:1 ^eMt 7:28

26:2 ^fJn 11:55;

13:1

26:3 ^gPs 2:2

^hver 57;

Jn 11:47-53;

18:13, 14, 24, 28

26:4 ⁱMt 12:14

26:5 ^jMt 27:24

26:6 ^kMt 21:17

26:11 ^lDt 15:11

26:12

^mJn 19:40

26:14 ⁿver 25,

47; Mt 10:4

26:15

^oEx 21:32;

Zec 11:12

to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

⁸When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked.

⁹"This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

¹⁰Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹The poor you will always have with you,^{al} but you will not always have me. ¹²When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.^m ¹³Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

26:14-16pp — Mk 14:10,11; Lk 22:3-6

¹⁴Then one of the Twelve — the one called Judas Iscariotⁿ — went to the chief priests ¹⁵and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver.^o ¹⁶From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

^a ^l See Deut. 15:11.

26:1 — 27:66 When biographers wrote about a person whose death was significant (e.g., a martyr), they generally devoted significant space to recounting the person's death.

26:3 *chief priests.* Although the OT spoke of a single "chief priest," Jewish writers by this period described all of the chief priestly families as "chief priests," in addition to the leading high priest, *palace of the high priest.* Even had the plans not been for an extrajudicial arrest, making plans in the high priest's home instead of the Sanhedrin's normal meeting place violated ancient protocols for justice. A Roman governor appointed Joseph Caiaphas as high priest, and he was politically savvy enough to remain in office from AD 18 to 36. (He is well documented in Josephus, and some scholars believe that his ossuary has been found.) Josephus, the Pharisees and the Essenes all report the abuse of power in this period at the hands of the aristocratic priests.

26:5 *riot.* Jerusalem's population increased fivefold during Passover, making it difficult to control the crowds; many people died by trampling when riots occurred under such conditions.

26:6 *Bethany.* A village on the Mount of Olives outside of Jerusalem; Jesus had friends there (21:17; Jn 11:1), and Jerusalem was too crowded at this season for everyone to find easy lodging within the city walls.

26:7 *alabaster jar of very expensive perfume.* Natural alabaster (here likely calcite) is translucent, sometimes banded, and can resemble white marble. Soft and easily carved, it was also easily broken. People often stored expensive ointments in alabaster flasks, but because they were sealed to keep the ointments from evaporating, they might need to be broken to release the ointment. As to the expense and the sacrifice, there is a possibility that this could have been her dowry, but it also could have been an inheritance from her father (if there were

no male heirs) or her husband; or she could have been one of the rare women to have her own resources. Such long-necked containers have been found in tombs from this period near Jerusalem; people apparently lavished the ointment on deceased loved ones. This expensive perfume may have been planned for a funeral, either a future one or one canceled because of Jesus' healing ministry. Providing a guest with oil to anoint his head could be simple courtesy, but one could also anoint a king in this way (2Ki 9:6).

26:8 Ancient historians sometimes taught lessons by contrasting the behavior of different individuals. Here the woman (v. 7), disciples (v. 8) and Judas (v. 15) offer contrasting views of what Jesus is worth.

26:9 *money given to the poor.* Some pious Jews took extra consideration for the poor at festivals (cf. Tobit 2:2; in the Mishnah see Pesahim 9:11; 10:1).

26:11 Jesus alludes to Dt 15:11, the context of which requires caring for the poor (Dt 15:1–10). Jesus is not minimizing care for the poor but recognizes that his own honor should come before everything else.

26:12 For the use of flasks of perfume to honor the bodies of the deceased, see note on v. 7.

26:13 *throughout the world.* Other ancient writers used similar hyperbole to speak of the hope or expectation of widespread fame.

26:15 *willing to give me.* Ancient ethics abhorred those who betrayed friendship or other loyalties for money, *thirty pieces of silver.* The price of a slave specified by the law (Ex 21:32, subsequent inflation notwithstanding); it was also the wage paid to the reliable shepherd of God's people in Zec 11:12–13 (recalled in Mt 27:9–10). Each silver coin was worth four drachmas; 30 pieces of silver thus represented more than 100 days' wages for an average worker. Cf. the earlier disciple in 2Ki 5:26–27.

The Last Supper

26:17-19pp — Mk 14:12-16; Lk 22:7-13

26:20-24pp — Mk 14:17-21

26:26-29pp — Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:17-20; 1Co 11:23-25

¹⁷On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread,^p the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

¹⁸He replied, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed time^q is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.’” ¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

²⁰When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹And while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.”^r

²²They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?”

²³Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.^s ²⁴The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him.^t But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

²⁵Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?”^u

26:17

^pEx 12:18-20
26:18 ^qJn 7:6,
8, 30; 12:23;
13:1; 17:1

26:21

^rLk 22:21-23;
Jn 13:21

26:23 ^sPs 41:9;
Jn 13:18

26:24 ^tIsa 53;
Da 9:26;

Mk 9:12;
Lk 24:25-27,
46; Ac 17:2, 3;
26:22, 23

26:25 ^uMt 23:7

26:26

^vMt 14:19;
1Co 10:16

26:28

^wEx 24:6-8;
Heb 9:20
^xMt 20:28;
Mk 1:4

26:29

^yAc 10:41
26:30 ^zMt 21:1;
Mk 14:26

26:31 ^aMt 11:6
^bZec 13:7;
Jn 16:32

26:32 ^cMt 28:7,
10, 16

Jesus answered, “You have said so.”

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it^v and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

²⁷Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸This is my blood of the^a covenant,^w which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.^x ²⁹I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you^y in my Father’s kingdom.”

³⁰When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.^z

Jesus Predicts Peter’s Denial

26:31-35pp — Mk 14:27-31; Lk 22:31-34

³¹Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me,^a for it is written:

“I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be
scattered.”^b

³²But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”^c

³³Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

^a 28 Some manuscripts *the new* ^b 31 Zech. 13:7

26:17 By this period, Passover was counted as the beginning of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The group would need to eat Passover within the city walls (a custom based on Dt 16:7), despite the crowding. Preparing Passover required, not only finding a place, but also procuring a sacrificed lamb in the temple (unless already procured by the host) as well as bitter herbs (cf. Ex 12:8), unleavened bread and fruit. Jesus’ group of disciples gathers for Passover the way a family would.

26:20 *evening.* The Passover meal was always eaten in the evening, after sundown; it had to be finished by midnight. *reclining at the table.* Although Jewish people could sit for other meals, for banquets the men reclined, like Greeks. Men supported themselves on their left elbow, leaving the right hand free to take food from the table.

26:21 *betray.* In antiquity, a disciple’s behavior reflected on the teacher, and a follower’s betrayal would bring shame to a leader.

26:23 *dipped . . . with me.* The person of highest status should dip first; if dipping *with* Jesus means at the same time, the action probably reflects disrespect. Ideally three or four people would recline on each large couch, with bowls of bitter herbs (cf. Nu 9:11) for dipping bread in front of each group. Whether or not such couches were available on this occasion, Judas was undoubtedly reclining close to Jesus (cf. Jn 13:26).

26:24 *woe to that man.* Although some Jewish people focused more on God’s sovereignty and others more on human choice, most accepted both without viewing them as contradictory. *It would be better for him if he had not been born.* Widely used by both Jews and Greeks, it appears in earlier Scripture (Job 3:3–26; Jer 20:14–18).

26:26 See note on Lk 22:19.

26:27 *took a cup.* Jesus would lift the cup as he spoke about it. Tradition suggests that the wine used for Passover was red.

26:28 *my blood of the covenant.* Jesus alludes to Ex 24:8, where the first covenant with Israel was inaugurated by sacrificial blood. Because crucifixion did not require blood (though blood was shed in Jesus’ case), the mention of blood highlights the sacrificial character of the death, as in Exodus. Presumably the covenant here, in contrast with Exodus, is the “new covenant” (Jer 31:31, as in Lk 22:20; 1Co 11:25), a promise celebrated in some other ancient Jewish circles. *poured out for many.* May evoke Isa 53:12 (see note on 20:28). The thought of consuming blood revolted Jewish people (e.g., Lev 17:14), but Jesus is not speaking literally.

26:29 *I will not drink . . . until.* Jewish people often offered vows of abstinence, promising not to partake of a particular food or drink until such-and-such a matter occurred. Because the fourth and final cup of Passover wine was drunk after the closing hymn, which occurs in v. 30, the present cup is probably the third one.

26:30 *sung a hymn.* After the meal, Jewish people would sing the remaining psalms of the Hallel. (The Hallel consisted of Ps 113–118, but they might sing the first several psalms earlier in the evening.) A stairway led down to the Kidron Valley, from which they would then ascend the Mount of Olives.

26:31 In its context Zec 13:7 speaks of false prophets, but the principle of sheep scattering without a shepherd is a wider one (cf. the probable allusion to Eze 34:5 in Mt 9:36), and Matthew may also be thinking of the faithful shepherd in Zec 11:9–13 (to which he alludes in Mt 26:15 [see note there]). The Dead Sea Scrolls also seem to apply Zec 13:7 in a more positive way (see Damascus Document 19:5–9).



Ancient olive trees still grow in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed before his arrest (Mt 26:36).

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³⁴“Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”^d

³⁵But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you,^e I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

Gethsemane

26:36-46pp — Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:40-46

³⁶Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee^f along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow^g to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”^h

³⁹Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cupⁱ be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”^j

⁴⁰Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me^k for one hour?” he

26:34 ^dver 75; Jn 13:38

26:35

^eJn 13:37

26:37 ^fMt 4:21

26:38

^gJn 12:27

^hver 40, 41

26:39

ⁱMt 20:22

^jver 42;

Ps 40:6-8;

Isa 50:5;

Jn 5:30; 6:38

26:40 ^kver 38

26:41 ^lMt 6:13

26:45 ^mver 18

asked Peter. ⁴¹“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.^l The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴²He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

⁴³When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour^m has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Jesus Arrested

26:47-56pp — Mk 14:43-50; Lk 22:47-53

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the

26:39 *this cup.* See note on 20:22,23; cf. 26:27–28.

26:40 *sleeping.* It was customary to stay up late speaking of God’s acts of redemption on the night of Passover. The disciples, who may have often stayed awake longer on other Passover nights, fell asleep on this one. *Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?* People valued vigi-

lance (for night watchmen and the like), especially when danger was near.

26:47 *armed with swords and clubs.* Armed men sent from the local elite were probably the Levite temple guards; Jerusalem’s leaders had no authority over Roman soldiers. Some later Jewish traditions complained that the

people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” ⁴⁹Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!”ⁿ and kissed him.

⁵⁰Jesus replied, “Do what you came for, friend.”^{ao}

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword,^p drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.^q

⁵²“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”^r ⁵³Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he

26:49 ⁿver 25
26:50 ^oMt 20:13; 22:12
26:51
^pLk 22:36, 38
^qJn 18:10
26:52 ^rGe 9:6; Rev 13:10

26:53 ^s2Ki 6:17; Da 7:10; Mt 4:11
26:54 ^tver 24
26:55
^uMk 12:35; Lk 21:37; Jn 7:14, 28; 18:20
26:56 ^vver 24

will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?^s ⁵⁴But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled^t that say it must happen in this way?”

⁵⁵In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching,^u and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.”^v Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

^a 50 Or “Why have you come, friend?”

servants of the high priest in this period used clubs when abusing people.

26:48 *kiss.* See note on Lk 22:47.

26:52 *all who draw the sword will die by the sword.* This statement of Jesus resembles a Jewish proverb; if the resemblance is not coincidence, he may be drawing on

a familiar expression to make his point.

26:53 *twelve legions of angels.* A legion had about 6,000 soldiers. The entire Roman province of Syria (which included Judea) normally had only three legions altogether (Josephus *Antiquities* 17.286).

MATTHEW 26:59 – 68; MARK 14:55 – 64; LUKE 22:66 – 71; JOHN 18:12 – 24



JESUS' TRIAL

Ancient sources show that the inner workings of official councils, both the Sanhedrin and the Roman Senate, often became known; large bodies of people could not keep secrets from being leaked for very long.

Some have challenged the accuracy of the Gospels’ trial narratives based on later rabbinic reports about the Sanhedrin. The rabbinic reports, however, are well over a century later than the Gospel reports, and the Gospel reports fit our other first-century evidence (especially Josephus) concerning how such matters were handled. Moreover, later rabbinic reports offer a Pharisaic perspective on the ideal that should have been followed; the Sanhedrin, however, was dominated by Sadducees who cared little for Pharisaic perspectives. Because this was a special night meeting of the Sanhedrin during the time of a festival, it is likely that many members were unable to attend (if they were even invited).

The members of the Sanhedrin who met to try Jesus violated ethical standards held not only by Pharisees but even by many Gentile moralists of the period. Trials were supposed to be conducted during daylight, in the normal meeting hall (in this case that was near the temple), not in the leading judge’s home. Whereas Pharisees opposed hasty executions after deliberations, the Sadducees were known for harsh and often quick punishments. The most obvious breach of ethics, of course, is the presence of false and mutually contradictory witnesses. Clearly some members of the Sanhedrin present acted with legal integrity, cross-examining the witnesses, but by Pharisaic standards, the case should have been thrown out once the witnesses contradicted one another (Mk 14:59). The high priest’s plan may have been simply to have a preliminary hearing to formulate a charge to bring to Pilate (cf. Mt 27:1; Mk 15:1; Lk 22:66; 23:1), the expected procedure before accusing someone before the governor.

The actions of the Sanhedrin fit what we know of the period. The Roman government usually depended on local elites to charge troublemakers. Local elites were often

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Jesus Before the Sanhedrin

26:57-68pp — Mk 14:53-65; Jn 18:12,13,19-24

⁵⁷Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas^w the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. ⁵⁸But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest.^x He entered and sat down with the guards^y to see the outcome.

⁵⁹The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin^z were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to

26:57 ^wver 3
26:58 ^xJn 18:15
^yJn 7:32, 45, 46
26:59 ^zMt 5:22

26:60
^aPs 27:12;
35:11; Ac 6:13
^bDt 19:15
26:61 ^cJn 2:19
26:63
^dMt 27:12, 14

death. ⁶⁰But they did not find any, though many false witnesses^a came forward.

Finally two^b came forward ⁶¹and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’”^c

⁶²Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” ⁶³But Jesus remained silent.^d

The high priest said to him, “I charge

26:57 *Caiaphas*. See note on v. 3.

26:60 *false witnesses*. False testimony was common in Gentile trials; some Greek rhetorical handbooks even taught people how to provide the most persuasive false witness. Jewish law heavily emphasized careful cross-examination; where witnesses contradicted one another too severely, the case should be thrown out. In a capital case, witnesses found to be false were to be executed (Dt 19:16–21). *two came forward*. This is significant; two

was the minimum number of witnesses allowed for acceptable testimony.

26:61 *rebuild it in three days*. Some Jewish people expected God to provide a new temple. It is clear, however, that the testimony here rests on a misinterpretation of Jesus (see Jn 2:19).

26:63 *I charge you under oath*. This was a regular formula requiring people to testify. *the Messiah*. He would also be the king of the Jews; hence, Jesus’ response to the high

corrupt, and all our other sources from the period (Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Pharisaic memories) agree that the aristocratic priesthood that controlled Jerusalem abused its power against others. A generation later, the chief priests arrested a Jewish prophet for announcing judgment against the temple; they handed him over to a Roman governor, who had him beaten until (Josephus says) his bones showed (Josephus, *Wars* 6.300–305). Their treatment of Jesus fits their usual behavior toward those who challenged their authority. ♦



The Church of St. Peter marks the traditional location of Jesus’ trial.

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you under oath^e by the living God:^f Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”

⁶⁴“You have said so,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One^g and coming on the clouds of heaven.”^{ah}

⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his clothesⁱ and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶What do you think?”

“He is worthy of death,”^j they answered.

⁶⁷Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists.^k Others slapped him ⁶⁸and said, “Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?”^l

Peter Disowns Jesus

26:69-75pp — Mk 14:66-72; Lk 22:55-62; Jn 18:16-18,25-27

⁶⁹Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said.

⁷⁰But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

⁷¹Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

⁷²He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!”

⁷³After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely

26:63 ^eLev 5:1
^fMt 16:16
26:64
^gPs 110:1
^hDa 7:13;
Rev 1:7
26:65
ⁱMk 14:63
26:66
^jLev 24:16;
Jn 19:7
26:67
^kMt 16:21;
27:30
26:68
^lLk 22:63-65

26:75 ^mver 34;
Jn 13:38
27:1 ⁿMt 12:14;
Mk 15:1;
Lk 22:66
27:2 ^oMt 20:19
^pMk 15:1;
Lk 13:1; Ac 3:13;
1Ti 6:13
27:3 ^qMt 10:4
^rMt 26:14, 15
27:4 ^sver 24
27:5 ^tLk 1:9, 21
^uAc 1:18

you are one of them; your accent gives you away.”

⁷⁴Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!”

Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”^m And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Judas Hangs Himself

27 Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed.ⁿ ²So they bound him, led him away and handed him over^o to Pilate the governor.^p

³When Judas, who had betrayed him,^q saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver^r to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴“I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”^s

⁵So Judas threw the money into the temple^t and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.^u

⁶The chief priests picked up the coins and said, “It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.”

⁷So they decided to use the money to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for for-

^a 64 See Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13.

priest’s question would prove useful in a charge of treason (27:11). *Son of God*. A Messianic title.

26:64 *the Son of Man ... coming on the clouds of heaven*. Recalls Da 7:13. *sitting at the right hand*. Recalls Ps 110:1. Jesus used both of these passages earlier (22:44; 24:30). *Mighty One*. Here is literally “power,” sometimes used in Jewish sources as a circumlocution for God.

26:65 *tore his clothes ... blasphemy*. People tore their clothes for mourning, and in Jewish tradition hearing blasphemy was a mandatory cause for mourning in this way. Later rabbis restricted blasphemy technically to cursing with God’s sacred name, but most people used this term more broadly. Caiaphas can construe Jesus’ words as blasphemy only if he implies that Jesus in v. 64 has associated himself with God in a way that diminishes God’s honor.

26:66 According to later tradition, the high priest would ask for the verdict and (much less likely for this period and an informal hearing) members would respond from youngest to eldest.

26:67 The abuse reported here is the gravest violation of legal ethics for a trial.

26:68 They mock Jesus as a false prophet as well as Messiah.

26:72 *I don’t know the man!* Regarding oaths, see notes on 5:33–35. *I don’t know*. A way of repudiating someone (see note on 25:12).

26:73 *accent*. Judeans thought that Galileans did not correctly distinguish their gutturals. Judeans held prejudice against Galileans as comparatively backward; in this case, they would connect Peter with his Galilean teacher.

27:1 *Early in the morning*. Governors, like other members of the Roman elite, met clients in the morning, from sunrise until 11 a.m. Whatever else could have been on the docket, local municipal leaders would be admitted first.

27:2 *Pilate*. He was governor of Judea from AD 26 to 36; he may have remained in power to this point because Sejanus, whom many scholars think was his patron, was close to the emperor, though Pilate’s position would have become tenuous after Sejanus was executed in AD 31. His relationship with the local leaders had involved conflict from the start, from bringing imperial standards into the city to redirecting money from the temple treasury. His slaughter of Samaritans proved too controversial and led to Rome removing him from office in AD 36.

27:4 *betrayed innocent blood*. God avenged innocent blood (Dt 21:8; 2Ki 24:3–4); here many share in the guilt yet try to pass it to others (see v. 24).

27:5 *hanged himself*. The penalty for false witnesses in capital cases was death (Dt 19:16–21). Many people regarded hanging as a dishonorable form of suicide (cf. 2Sa 17:23, note on Ac 16:27). Most Jewish people rejected suicide as immoral under most circumstances. In the usual ancient view, hanging himself within the temple would have desecrated it.

27:6 *blood money*. Irony was common in ancient literature, and Matthew’s audience would certainly understand the irony of elite priests being more concerned with the temple’s purity than with a judicial murder that was currently underway.

27:7 *potter’s field*. Possibly Matthew’s audience knew

eigners.⁸ That is why it has been called the Field of Blood^v to this day.⁹ Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:^w “They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel,¹⁰ and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.”^{ax}

Jesus Before Pilate

27:11–26pp — Mk 15:2–15; Lk 23:2,3,18–25; Jn 18:29 – 19:16

¹¹Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”^y

“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

¹²When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.^z ¹³Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?”^a ¹⁴But Jesus made no reply,^b not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

¹⁵Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner^c chosen by the crowd. ¹⁶At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus^b Barabbas. ¹⁷So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?”^d ¹⁸For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

27:8^v Ac 1:19
27:9^w Mt 1:22
27:10
^xZec 11:12, 13;
Jer 32:6–9
27:11^y Mt 2:2
27:12
^zMt 26:63;
Mk 14:61;
Jn 19:9
27:13
^aMt 26:62
27:14
^bMk 14:61
27:15^c Jn 18:39
27:17^d ver 22;
Mt 1:16

27:19^e Jn 19:13
^fver 24
^gGe 20:6;
Nu 12:6; 1Ki 3:5;
Job 33:14–16;
Mt 1:20; 2:12,
13, 19, 22
27:20^h Ac 3:14
27:22ⁱ Mt 1:16
27:24^j Mt 26:5
^kPs 26:6
^lDt 21:6–8
^mver 4
27:25
ⁿJos 2:19;
Ac 5:28
27:26
^oIsa 53:5;
Jn 19:1

¹⁹While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat,^e his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent^f man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream^g because of him.”

²⁰But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.^h

²¹“Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor.

“Barabbas,” they answered.

²²“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”ⁱ Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!”

²³“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

²⁴When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar^j was starting, he took water and washed his hands^k in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,”^l he said. “It is your responsibility!”^m

²⁵All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”ⁿ

²⁶Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged,^o and handed him over to be crucified.

^a 10 See Zech. 11:12,13; Jer. 19:1–13; 32:6–9. ^b 16 Many manuscripts do not have *Jesus*; also in verse 17.

enough Hebrew to know that the Hebrew term for “potter” (see vv. 7,10) could be read as “treasury” by changing vowels, as ancient rabbis often did to impress a point upon their listeners.

27:9–10 Jewish teachers linked texts based on shared key words or phrases, and sometimes conflated similar texts so that one would read one text in light of the other. By using words from Zechariah but the name of Jeremiah, Matthew may want Biblically literate hearers to link the passages (cf. Jer 32:6–14, which is similar to Zec 11:12–13; perhaps also Jer 19:10–13). Zec 11:13 adds that the money was thrown to the potter “at the house of the LORD,” as Matthew’s audience may have realized.

27:11 *king of the Jews*. For Romans, such a charge meant treason; only the emperor could grant the title “king.” In the provinces, the usual penalty for treason was death by the slow torture of crucifixion.

27:14 *made no reply*. Some accounts of Jewish martyrs included their refusal to respond to their persecutors; cf. also Isa 53:7.

27:15 *governor’s custom ... to release a prisoner*. Customs similar to this one existed in various locations; governors often chose to honor the precedents set by their predecessors, although no law required this practice.

27:17 A governor might not wish to appear too lenient, a weakness that his subjects might then exploit; Roman culture valued firmness. A governor’s concern for order often took precedence over individual matters of justice, especially when the accused were not Roman citizens. Pilate apparently calculates that the crowd will select (cf. v. 15) Jesus, a popular Messianic figure whom Pilate deems harmless, over Barabbas, thus freeing him from the obligation to release the latter.

27:19 *judge’s seat*. This seat was at Herod the Great’s former palace, where Roman governors stayed when they visited Jerusalem. *in a dream*. People took dreams very seriously (see note on 1:20); God had revealed truth to Gentile officials this way (Ge 41:25; Da 2:28).

27:20 *persuaded the crowd*. Ancient literature often reports leaders swaying fickle crowds. Whereas the crowds in Galilee knew Jesus, most of those present on this occasion would have been Judeans who did not know him directly.

27:24 *washed his hands ... I am innocent*. Jerusalemites had forced Pilate to back down previously. Indeed, when Pilate first became governor, under cover of night he brought into Jerusalem the standards that Jewish people regarded as idols. The crowds forced him to back down. Washing hands was a way of disclaiming responsibility for innocent blood (Dt 21:6–7). *It is your responsibility!* Claiming to be compelled by others did not truly relieve a leader of responsibility, however (cf. 27:4; Jer 38:5).

27:25 *His blood is on us and on our children!* Such expressions invoked curses against themselves if they were wrong (cf., e.g., Jer 42:5). Probably the judgment invited here was fulfilled in AD 70 (see note on 23:36).

27:26 *flogged, and handed him over to be crucified*. A governor pronouncing sentence would typically say something like, “You will mount the cross.” Prisoners were normally stripped and publicly flogged before execution. Whereas Jewish law allowed a maximum of 39 lashes with a whip of calf leather, Roman practice allowed floggings until the flogger grew tired. A Roman soldier’s *flagellum* was a leather whip embedded with bone, iron, or metal spikes at the end. The instrument of torture would slice

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

27:27-31pp — Mk 15:16-20

²⁷Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium^p and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,^q ²⁹and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said.^r ³⁰They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.^s ³¹After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.^t

The Crucifixion of Jesus

27:33-44pp — Mk 15:22-32; Lk 23:33-43; Jn 19:17-24

³²As they were going out,^u they met a man from Cyrene,^v named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.^w ³³They came to a place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull").^x ³⁴There

27:27
^pJn 18:28, 33;
 19:9
27:28 ^qJn 19:2
27:29 ^rIsa 53:3;
 Jn 19:2, 3
27:30
^sMt 16:21;
 26:67
27:31 ^tIsa 53:7
27:32
^uHeb 13:12
^vAc 2:10; 6:9;
 11:20; 13:1
^wMk 15:21;
 Lk 23:26
27:33 ^xJn 19:17

27:34 ^yver 48;
 Ps 69:21
27:35 ^zPs 22:18
27:36 ^aver 54
27:38
^bIsa 53:12
27:39 ^cPs 22:7;
 109:25; La 2:15
27:40
^dMt 26:61;
 Jn 2:19 ^ever 42
^fMt 4:3, 6
27:42 ^gJn 1:49;
 12:13 ^hJn 3:15
27:43 ⁱPs 22:8

they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall;^y but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. ³⁵When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.^z ³⁶And sitting down, they kept watch^a over him there. ³⁷Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁸Two rebels were crucified with him,^b one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads^c ⁴⁰and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days,^d save yourself!^e Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"^f ⁴¹In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴²"He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel!"^g Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe^h in him. ⁴³He trusts in God. Let God rescue him! now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'^h ⁴⁴In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

open the flesh, sometimes leaving it in bloody strips or exposing sinews and bones, and occasionally killing the victim before crucifixion.

27:27 *Praetorium.* The governor's residence was in Herod the Great's former palace in the upper city of Jerusalem. Several hundred soldiers comprised the Roman cohort in Jerusalem's Antonia Fortress; the term here could imply that number or a smaller force within it.

27:28 *stripped him.* Naked crucifixion was meant to shame the victim, but other mockery and ridicule commonly accompanied execution. *scarlet.* Color gradations in Greek differed from those in modern English; the range of the term translated "purple" in Mk 15:17 and Jn 19:2 sometimes included "scarlet." Soldiers wore red cloaks, but when faded the cloak could resemble "purple," like the cloaks of Hellenistic princes.

27:29 *crown of thorns.* Hellenistic vassal princes wore garlands; soldiers may have used an available shrub such as acanthus to weave a wreath for Jesus. Imitating Hellenistic garlands, the soldiers may have intended the thorns to point especially outward, but some of the thorns would nevertheless turn inward, scraping the scalp. Scalp wounds bleed particularly profusely. *staff.* Some suggest that the staff was a bamboo cane used for military floggings. *Hail.* Equivalent to the Latin *Ave*; it was a common address to rulers. Most of Rome's soldiers in Jerusalem were Syrian auxiliaries; in many locations, Syrians and Jews often clashed. *king of the Jews.* In ridiculing Jesus in this way, the soldiers are also probably mocking Jewish people more generally.

27:30 *spit on him.* Spit was used to spite, and Jewish people deemed the spittle of Gentiles to be impure.

27:32 *Cyrene.* In North Africa included; its population included many local Libyans, resident Greeks and Jews. *Simon.* Simon was a Greek name very commonly used by Jews (because it resembled the patriarchal name Simeon). His coming to Jerusalem probably suggests that he is Jewish by faith, whatever his ethnic background. *they forced him to carry the cross.* Normally the condemned person was forced to publicly carry the horizontal beam (the *patibulum*) of his own cross out to

the site of his execution. If Jesus were too weak from the beating to undertake this task, however, Rome's soldiers had the authority to draft a bystander to perform labor for them (see note on 5:41).

27:33 *the place of the skull.* The location may have earned this name because so many prisoners died there. A proposed site for the crucifixion dating back to the nineteenth century (Gordon's Calvary), deemed so partly because it was shaped like a skull at that time, is not relevant for first-century topography.

27:34 *wine to drink, mixed with gall.* Wine had pain-killing properties (Pr 31:6-7); many think that myrrh (Mk 15:23) also had such properties, but Matthew emphasizes instead gall. Gall was known for its bitterness and appears in Ps 69:21, a psalm of a righteous sufferer, in a context cited by the Gospels in connection with Jesus' death.

27:35 *crucified him.* Romans crucified people naked; Jewish people regarded nakedness as a special shame. Those hanging on crosses could not chase away flies from their wounds, could not restrain their bodily wastes for the hours or days it took them to finish dying, and could not protect themselves from heat or cold. Some may have died from asphyxiation, but people usually died more quickly from shock (due to blood loss) or dehydration. *divided up his clothes.* Recalls Ps 22:18, but also fits historical practice. Roman execution squads (typically about four men) had rights to whatever clothing or other personal effects remained on the prisoner. *casting lots.* Soldiers used dice and other means to gamble.

27:37 *written charge.* See note on Lk 23:38.

27:39 *shaking their heads.* See Ps 22:7. Romans preferred to crucify offenders in public places, often on major roads, where passersby would see in graphic detail what happens to those who resist Rome.

27:43 Perhaps unwittingly, Jesus' mockers virtually repeat the idea of Ps 22:8—the Biblical words of those mocking a righteous sufferer. Their words here and in v. 40 also evoke a passage in the widely read Jewish work *Wisdom of Solomon* (2:18): mockers charge that if the righteous person genuinely is God's son, God will rescue him. Ironically, they speak inverted truth: in order

The Death of Jesus

27:45–56pp — Mk 15:33–41; Lk 23:44–49; Jn 19:29–30

⁴⁵From noon until three in the afternoon darkness^j came over all the land. ⁴⁶About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli,^a lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).^{b,k}

⁴⁷When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

⁴⁸Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar,^l put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

⁵⁰And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.^m

⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the templeⁿ was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split^o ⁵²and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and^c went into the holy city^p and appeared to many people.

27:45 ^jAm 8:9
27:46 ^kPs 22:1
27:48 ^lver 34;
Ps 69:21
27:50
^mJn 19:30
27:51
ⁿEx 26:31–33;
Heb 9:3,8
^over 54
27:53 ^pMt 4:5

27:54 ^qver 36
^rMt 4:3; 17:5
27:55 ^sLk 8:2,3
27:56
^tMk 15:47;
Lk 24:10;
Jn 19:25
27:60
^uMt 27:66;
28:2; Mk 16:4

⁵⁴When the centurion and those with him who were guarding^q Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”^r

⁵⁵Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.^s ⁵⁶Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph,^d and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.^t

The Burial of Jesus

27:57–61pp — Mk 15:42–47; Lk 23:50–56; Jn 19:38–42

⁵⁷As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. ⁵⁹Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,^u and placed it in his own new tomb^v that he had cut out of

^a 46 Some manuscripts *Eloi, Eloi* ^b 46 Psalm 22:1
^c 53 Or *tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they*
^d 56 Greek *Joses*, a variant of *Joseph*

to save others, Jesus must choose not to save himself (v. 42).

27:45 *darkness.* Often appears as a judgment in the OT (e.g., Ex 10:21–23), including darkness at noon (Am 8:9).

27:46 Jesus quotes Ps 22:1, a prayer of a righteous sufferer that begins by expressing abandonment but goes on to celebrate God’s vindication (Ps 22:22–24). Although Jesus prays in the vernacular Aramaic in Mark (*Eloi*), in Matthew the prayer is in Hebrew (*Eli*), as was customary in Jewish prayers (and the original psalm). The Hebrew *Eli* more readily explains how hearers thought he was calling for “Elijah” (*Eliyahu*; v. 47).

27:47 *He’s calling Elijah.* See note on v. 46. Elijah was expected before the Lord’s coming (Mal 4:5–6), but in rabbinic tradition he also was thought to act like an angel and help rabbis in need.

27:48 *wine vinegar.* Cheaper than normal wine and more readily assuaged thirst than water, it was widely used by the nonelite, including workers and soldiers. *staff.* Most Judean reeds would have worked for the purpose of the staff here (the term most frequently means “reed”). Cf. Ps 69:21, especially in conjunction with gall in v. 34.

27:51 *curtain . . . was torn in two.* In later rabbinic tradition signs accompanied the death of the righteous. The veil torn here is probably the inner one; priests would be offering the afternoon/evening sacrifice at this time (cf. v. 46), so would be present in the sanctuary to witness the event. This act probably implies the departure of God’s presence from the temple, prefiguring its destruction (cf. Eze 9:3; 10:4–18). Some believe that the point also includes new access to the Most Holy Place through Jesus’ sacrifice — that access to God no longer required an intermediary (cf. Heb 6:19–20; 9:3; 10:19–20). *earth shook.* Most people viewed earthquakes as divine activity, often as judgment or as signs warning of it.

27:52 *many holy people . . . were raised to life.* Gentiles could view apparitions of the dead as frightening portents of harm to follow. Jewish people might have viewed the resuscitation of numerous long-dead people as a miraculously prefiguring of the end-time resurrection,

though this is the only occasion on which such an experience is recorded.

27:54 *Son of God.* Gentiles viewed many figures, especially heroes and the emperor, as sons of gods; recognizing Jesus as Jewish, the Gentile execution squad recognizes him as the son of the one true God of Israel.

27:55 *Many women were there.* Women providing financial patronage were not unusual, though the practice could be criticized by a movement’s detractors. That the women followed Jesus, however, may have been viewed by many outsiders as scandalous (see note on Lk 8:2–3). Women were not usually subject to suspicion of the way that men were; nevertheless, that Jesus was followed to the cross and tomb by women would be seen as a courageous contrast to the male disciples who were mostly in hiding.

27:56 The presence of at least two women named Mary here is not surprising; sources show that it was by far the most common name for Jewish women in this era.

27:58 *asked for Jesus’ body.* Romans usually expected those executed for treason to be left for vultures or dogs. Given the sensitivities of all Jews, however (Dt 21:22–23), Pilate would probably grant them the body; it had been, after all, at the urging of the local elite that he had ordered Jesus executed. Yet even Jewish executions normally led to dishonorable burials, initially in a grave for public criminals (but allowing subsequent reinterment in a family tomb). Exceptions could be made, and family members would not be punished for requesting the body. For a member of the elite to request the body, however, was to take a large risk: unless acting specifically at the behest of the Sanhedrin, he could be associated with Jesus’ alleged treason. Moreover, officials sometimes liked to pin such charges on members of the elite so that they could confiscate their property. Joseph thus acts courageously.

27:60 *new tomb.* When the condemned were buried at all, they normally received dishonorable burials (see note on v. 58), but Joseph insists on providing Jesus an honorable burial in the only family tomb quickly available — his

the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

The Guard at the Tomb

⁶²The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³“Sir,” they said, “we

own (cf. 1Ki 13:30–31; Isa 53:12). Many of the tombs in this area belonged to people of wealth; the entrance to such a tomb was often a disk-shaped rock, a yard/meter in diameter, requiring multiple people to move it. Such a stone lay in a groove but could not be moved from inside. The early Christian tradition of the site of the tomb is at least as old as the decade following Jesus’ interment. Tradition is unanimous, and custom required, that Jesus be buried outside the city walls, but the site is *within* the expanded

walls of Jerusalem from the time of AD 41–43; the site is therefore older than that. The tombs on this site (the Catholic site of the Holy Sepulchre) date to the period in question; by the second century, a pagan emperor sought to deliberately desecrate the site. (By contrast, the Garden Tomb favored by some Protestants is a recent historical guess, belongs to the wrong period, and lacks any claim to authenticity.)

27:62 *after Preparation Day.* The Sabbath — normally not

MATTHEW 27



THE LOCATION OF JESUS’ TOMB

According to the New Testament, Jesus was buried in a new tomb hewn out of rock (Mt 27:60; Mk 15:46; Lk 23:53) in a garden near the crucifixion site (Jn 19:41), just outside the city (Jn 19:20; Heb 13:12). In addition, the entrance was low and sealed with a stone (Mt 27:60; Mk 15:46; Jn 20:11), and on the right side it was possible to sit where the body of Jesus had lain (Mk 16:5; Jn 20:12). Based upon the Biblical description and upon other known first-century tombs, the tomb of Jesus can be reconstructed as having had a small forecourt, a low entry passage and a burial chamber with benches, or “couches,” on three sides for the placement of the deceased.

There are two main contenders for the location of Jesus’ tomb in the Old City of Jerusalem: the Garden Tomb, 275 yards (251 meters) north of the Damascus Gate, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Christian Quarter. The Garden Tomb, however, has no authentic ancient tradition associated with it. It was suggested as the site of Jesus’ burial after the renowned British military hero Charles Gordon, while visiting Jerusalem in 1883, suggested that Calvary would have been located on a nearby hill. His identification was based on a fanciful interpretation of ancient Jerusalem as being in the shape of a skeleton, with the skull (i.e., Golgotha) positioned at a hill north of the Damascus Gate. This led to the identification of a tomb on the western side of the hill as Jesus’ burial place, once referred to as Gordon’s Tomb. Modern investigations of the Garden Tomb and others in the vicinity, however, indicate that they were part of a cemetery dating to the divided monarchy period rather than to the first century AD.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre location, on the other hand, has a tradition going back to early Christian times. When the Roman emperor Hadrian rebuilt Jerusalem in AD 130/131, he constructed a temple to Jupiter and Venus over the site of the present Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In AD 325 Constantine ordered the removal of Hadrian’s temple. Local Christian tradition had claimed this to be the site of Jesus’ tomb, and, remarkably, when Hadrian’s temple was cleared away, a tomb area was indeed discovered beneath it. Constantine had a church constructed on the site and built a small structure, or edicule, within the building to enclose the tomb itself. The present Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the continuation of Constantine’s church.

In favor of the authenticity of this location is the fact that there was a continuous Christian presence in Jerusalem from Jesus’ death until Constantine uncovered the tomb. This Christian community doubtless would have venerated the site of Jesus’

continued on next page

remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’^v ⁶⁴So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead.

27:63
^vMt 16:21
27:65 ^wver 66;
 Mt 28:11
27:66 ^xDa 6:17
^yver 60;
 Mt 28:2
^zMt 28:11

This last deception will be worse than the first.”

⁶⁵“Take a guard,”^w Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” ⁶⁶So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal^x on the stone^y and posting the guard.^z

a day that the leaders should be doing business with the governor!

27:66 *putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.* Because Pilate probably would not hand Roman soldiers over to the local elite, he may be granting them permission to station members of their own Levite guards

there. Others suggest that they would not need permission to station their own guards and believe instead that Pilate granted a small detachment of his soldiers. The leaders themselves would not wish to incur uncleanness because of the corpse or remain near the tomb on the Sabbath.

burial, preserving the memory of the location of his tomb. Also, the site of the church was an old quarry during the time of Jesus, although at least part of it had been made into a garden (Jn 19:41). The fact that the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had been a quarry implies that it was outside the walls of the city (it is today inside the Old City). This agrees with the fact that Jesus was crucified outside the walls. Within this area at least four tombs cut into the western rock face have been discovered, only one of which corresponds to the type in which Jesus was buried.

The church was destroyed in 614 and rebuilt in 626. The edicule was destroyed in 1009 by the Egyptian caliph al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah. Contemporary accounts suggest that the southern wall, the burial couch and part of the northern wall survived this destruction. The rebuilt edicule has suffered damage and neglect over the centuries since that time, so that today it is a hodgepodge of reconstructions and repairs. Although absolute certainty is impossible, the evidence points to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as being the actual site of Jesus’ tomb. ♦



Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the location many modern scholars believe is built on the site of Jesus’ tomb.

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Jesus Has Risen

28:1-8pp — Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-10; Jn 20:1-8

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary^a went to look at the tomb.

²There was a violent earthquake,^b for an angel^c of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.^d ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid,^e for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.^f Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.^g There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them.^h “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothersⁱ to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

28:1 ^aMt 27:56
28:2 ^bMt 27:51
^cJn 20:12
28:3 ^dDa 10:6;
Mk 9:3; Jn 20:12
28:5 ^ever 10;
Mt 14:27
28:6 ^fMt 16:21
28:7 ^gver 10,
16; Mt 26:32
28:9
^hJn 20:14-18
28:10 ⁱJn 20:17;
Ro 8:29;
Heb 2:11-13, 17

28:11
^jMt 27:65,66
28:14 ^kMt 27:2
28:16 ^lver 7, 10;
Mt 26:32
28:18
^mDa 7:13,
14; Lk 10:22;
Jn 3:35; 17:2;
1Co 15:27;
Eph 1:20-22;
Php 2:9, 10
28:19
ⁿMk 16:15, 16;
Lk 24:47; Ac 1:8;
14:21 ^oAc 2:38;
8:16; Ro 6:3, 4
28:20 ^pAc 2:42
^qMt 18:20;
Ac 18:10
^rMt 13:39

The Guards' Report

¹¹While the women were on their way, some of the guards^j went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹²When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ ¹⁴If this report gets to the governor,^k we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

The Great Commission

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.^l ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.^m ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,ⁿ baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,^o ²⁰and teaching^p them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you^q always, to the very end of the age.”^r

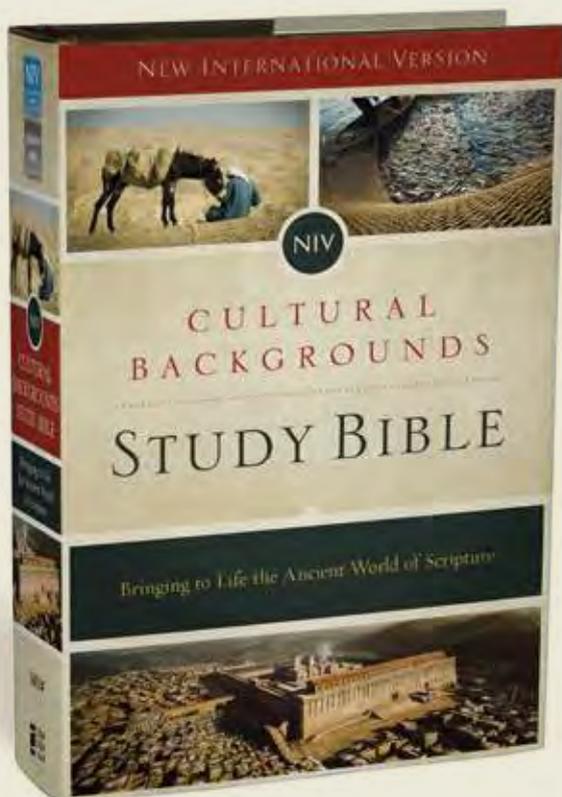
28:1 The resurrection narratives vary in length in the different Gospels; ancient writers liked to make optimal use of the entire length of their scroll, and sometimes simply ran out of room to include more detail. *at dawn*. The Sabbath technically ends at sundown on what we call Saturday night, but the women would not easily and safely find the tomb before first light.
28:2 *earthquake*. See note on 27:51. *rolled back the stone*. See note on 27:60. Humans could not easily sit on such a disk-shaped stone.
28:3 *like lightning*. Glorious angels appear in both Scripture (e.g., Da 10:5–6) and Jewish tradition.
28:4 *became like dead men*. A dramatic experience of the supernatural could sometimes cause one to collapse without strength (Da 10:8–9).
28:7 *tell his disciples*. Both Jewish and Roman law normally regarded a woman’s testimony as of limited value, treating women as unstable (see, e.g., Justinian, *Institutes* 2.10.6; Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.219; in the Mishnah see *Yebamot* 15:1, 8–10; 16:7; *ketubbot* 1:6–9; in the Tosehra see *Yebamot* 14:10). It is to the women, however, that God’s agents first entrust the testimony of Jesus’ resurrection.
28:12–15 *we will satisfy him*. Bribery was illegal but extremely common; the first-century Jewish historian Josephus reports its practice both by Roman governors in Judea and the high priests.
28:13 *stole him away*. There is no reason for Matthew to mention as widely circulated a charge that was not widely circulated, yet the guards’ report is not very plausible. Tomb robbers were not common in Judea, but when they

did strike they looted goods, not bodies. Guards would not sleep through the commotion of someone rolling away the stone, and guards who did sleep on duty faced severe penalties—in a case such as this one, potentially death. Their implausible falsehood contrasts with the report of the women commissioned in vv. 7, 10.
28:18 *All authority*. Jesus’ universal authority (going beyond the earthly authority noted in 9:6) may evoke Da 7:13–14; cf. Isa 9:6–7. His role exceeds that of any human figure in Jewish sources, including David and his royal line.
28:19 *make disciples*. Jewish teachers lectured groups of Jewish disciples, but Jesus here commissions his followers to convert and train disciples from all peoples, climaxing a theme that runs through Matthew’s Gospel (see 1:3–6; 2:1–2; 4:15; 8:5–13; 10:15; 11:21–23; 12:41–42; 15:22–28; 24:14; 27:54). Although many Jewish people welcomed Gentile converts, they lacked an overt program of missionizing them, such as we find here. *baptizing them*. Jewish people used baptism when converting Gentiles, so it provided an easily understood form for expressing conversion. *name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. Jewish people considered the Holy Spirit to be God’s Spirit, thus divine (though not normally personal, as here); they regularly called God “Father” in many prayers; for Jesus to be listed here between the Father and the divine Spirit implies Jesus’ deity.
28:20 *teaching them to obey everything*. Discipleship (v. 19) always included teaching. *with you always*. Jewish people considered only God omnipresent; Jesus thus appears here as divine (see 1:23; 18:20).

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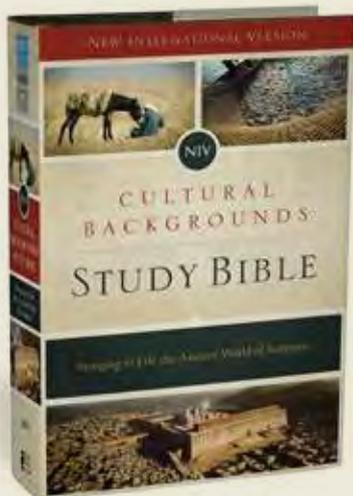
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