NLT STUDY BIBLE
Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105
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All of us at Tyndale House Publishers are pleased to present the NLT Study Bible. It brings together the best of scholarship in both the Bible translation and the study notes and features. We think you will find that the biblical text comes to life in a fresh, new way as a result of this Bible.

The creation of a study Bible represents a huge effort by many people. In this instance, a team of sixty scholars, writers, reviewers, editors, and designers worked together to bring you the study notes, introductions, maps, timelines, profiles, and theme notes in this Bible.

The Bible text used in the NLT Study Bible is the New Living Translation, second edition. The NLT was first published in 1996, and it quickly became one of the most popular English translations. Readers have especially appreciated the clarity of the language. The second edition text was first published in 2004. The NLT combines the best features of its predecessor, The Living Bible, with the world-class scholarship of the ninety scholars who worked on the translation.

The study notes and other features in the NLT Study Bible are designed to help today's readers understand the meaning and significance of the Bible in light of the world in which the text was first written. Our approach as writers and editors has been to help people understand the Bible clearly and accurately. We trust the Holy Spirit to be at work, bringing to people's minds and hearts the applications that he has for them. He does this in millions of different ways every day. As the editors of this study Bible, we hope to provide a context within which the Holy Spirit can work.

The rain and snow come down from the heavens
and stay on the ground to water the earth.
They cause the grain to grow,
producing seed for the farmer
and bread for the hungry.
It is the same with my word.
I send it out, and it always produces fruit.
It will accomplish all I want it to,
and it will prosper everywhere I send it.  
Isaiah 55:10-11

In the pages that follow, we describe the features of the NLT Study Bible and how to make the most use of them. We challenge you to try it. Come, walk through God's word, understand it for yourself, and let it change your life.

Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. 
Joshua 1:8

I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways.  
Psalm 119:15

THE EDITORS
BOOK INTRODUCTIONS
Each book introduction helps readers understand that book as its original readers first understood it in their world. The book introduction discusses the book’s setting, gives a summary of its literary structure, discusses historical issues such as authorship and date of writing, and explains the meaning and message of the book for its readers.

OVERVIEW
The Overview helps readers to find out quickly what this book of the Bible is about and why it is important. It gives a thumbnail sketch of the book and its contents and purpose.

SETTING
What is the story behind each book of the Bible? What was the need for each book in its setting? Every book of the Bible was written by flesh-and-blood people living in a particular time and place in history. They faced real challenges and difficulties. They wrote to other real flesh-and-blood people living at their own time in history. They wrote to address specific problems in their world, to help their readers understand God’s mind regarding the issues and problems that they faced.

The world of the Bible is very different from our world today, but people are the same everywhere. If we understand the setting in which each book of the Bible was written, we will be in a much better position to understand what problems it addressed, what actions it was prompting, and what message it communicates.

THE BOOK OF
GENESIS
Genesis is the book of beginnings—of the universe and of humanity, of sin and its catastrophic effects, and of God’s plan to restore blessing to the world through his chosen people. God began his plan when he called Abraham and made a covenant with him. Genesis traces God’s promised blessings from generation to generation, to the time of bondage and the need for redemption from Egypt. It lays the foundation for God’s subsequent revelation, and most other books of the Bible draw on its contents. Genesis is a source of instruction, comfort, and edification.

SETTING
When Genesis was written, the children of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. They had recently been released from bondage and guided through the desert to meet the Lord at Mount Sinai, where he had established his covenant relationship with them and had given them his law through Moses. Israel was now poised to enter the Promised Land and receive the inheritance that God had promised Abraham.

While enslaved in Egypt, the Israelites had adopted many pagan ideas and customs from their Egyptian masters (e.g., Exod 32:1-4). They were influenced by false concepts of God, the world, and human nature (e.g., Exod 32), and were reduced to being slaves rather than owners and managers of the land. Perhaps they had forgotten the great promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or perhaps they had concluded that the promises would never be fulfilled.

Before entering the Promised Land, the Israelites needed to understand the nature of God, his world, and their place in it more clearly. They needed to embrace their identity as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Genesis provided the needed understanding.

MAP
The book introductions include maps of the setting to show where the events in each book of the Bible took place and how the places mentioned in that book fit into the world. Each map includes a caption that describes the map and how it relates to the book’s setting. Along with a caption, most of these maps include a short index of places mentioned in the book.
SUMMARY

Genesis traces God's work to overcome with blessing the curse that came on humankind because of sin. The book arranges family traditions, genealogies, historical events, and editorial comments into a single, sustained argument. Each section but the first has the heading, "This is the account" (or These are the generations; Hebrew toledoth); each of the toledoth sections explains the history of a line of descent. In each case, a denouement of well-being is followed by an increasing focus on God's plan to bless the world. This plan is the basis for God's covenant with his people, as the blessing develops, the covenant is clarified. By the end of the book, the reader is ready for the fulfillment of the promises in Israel's redemption from bondage (see Exodus).

The first section (1:1–2:3) does not have the toledoth heading, and logically so—it is the account of creation "in the beginning" (1:1). The work of creation is wrapped in God's approval and blessing as he fulfills his plan.

The next section (2:4–4:26) focuses on the creation of human life (2:4–25) and traces what became of God's creation because of Adam's and Eve's sin (3:1–13), the curse on their sin (3:14–24), and the extension of sin to their descendants (4:1–24). Humanity no longer enjoyed God's rest; instead, they experienced guilt and fear. So they fled from God and developed a proud civilization.

Independence from God resulted in the downward drift of human life (5:1–6:8). The genealogy of 5:1–32 begins by recalling that human beings were made in God's image and were blessed by him (5:1–2). As the genealogy is traced, the death of each generation reminds the reader of the curse, with Enoch providing a ray of hope that the curse is not final. In 6:1–8, we learn that God regretted having made humans and decided to judge the earth. Noah, however, received God's favor and provided a source of hope (5:29; 6:8).

The next section (6:9–9:29) brings the curse of judgment through the flood followed by blessing in a new beginning. A renewed creation began, purged of the abominable evil that had invaded and ruined the human race. The world's population expanded into various nations (10:1–11:9) whose people were bent on disobedience. The population of the earth by Shem, Abraham is born

OUTLINE

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<td>A timeline can be found in the margin of nearly all book introductions. The timelines show when the events in each book of the Bible took place and what was going on at the time. We can refer to the timeline while reading the setting and summary for the book, and again while reading the book, to help clarify and reinforce how the events fit into the flow of history.</td>
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* The two dates harmonize with the traditional "early" chronology and a more "late" chronology of the Exodus. All dates are approximate. Please see "Chronology: Abraham to Josiah," p. 118.
Humble in how we interpret Scripture truly is. At the same time, we learn to appreciate the complexity of the Bible. Far from underestimating confidence in Scripture, Genesis gives a brief account of the families that are not Israel’s ancestors before turning to the line of Israel. After briefly reporting what became of Ishmael (25:12-18), Genesis traces in detail what happened to Isaac and his family (25:19–35:29).

True to the pattern of the book, Isaac’s line (Edom) is dealt with briefly (36:1–37:1) before the chosen line of Jacob the heir. The final section (37:2–50:26) concerns Jacob’s family, centering on the life of Joseph. In the land of Canaan, the family became corrupt under Canaanite influence to the point of beginning to merge with them (v. 38). To preserve the line of blessing, God sent the family into Egypt where they could flourish, remain separate (43:12–46:14), and become a great nation. The book closes with the promise of the Lord’s coming to rescue his people from Egypt (50:24-26).

**AUTHORSHIP**
Both Scripture and tradition attribute the Pentateuch (Genesis—Deuteronomy) to Moses. No one was better qualified than Moses to have written this book. Since he was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22), he had the literary skills to collect and edit Israel’s traditions and records and to compose this theological treatise. His unique communion with God gave him the spiritual illumination, understanding, and inspiration needed to guide him. He had good reason to write this work—to provide Israel with the theological and historical understanding, and inspiration needed to guide him. He had good reason to write this work—to provide Israel with the theological and historical foundation for the Exodus and the covenant at Sinai, and to establish the new nation in accord with the promises made to their ancestors.

Most scholars, however, do not accept that Moses wrote Genesis. The prevailing critical view, called the Documentary Hypothesis, is that Genesis was compiled from various sources by different groups of peoples. In such approaches, there is seldom a word about divine revelation or inspiration. For those who understand the Bible as God’s inspired word, such theories often seem unnecessarily complicated and conjectural. Genesis can be understood much more straightforwardly as the product of Moses’ genius under God’s inspiration with later editorial adjustments. (See further “Introduction to the Pentateuch: Authorship,” p. 12).

**COMPOSITION**
Biblical scholars of all stripes have always acknowledged that various sources were used in writing Genesis and other historical texts in the Bible (such as Kings and Luke). Moses used collections of family records, oral traditions, ancient accounts of primeval events, and genealogies to write Genesis. Those sources could have been incorporated as received, or the author may have changed their style and wording, stitching them together with additional material for the particular purpose of tracing the foundations of Israelite faith.

Genesis is therefore a unique work. Theology, history, and tradition come together to instruct God’s people and prepare them for blessing.

**MEANING AND MESSAGE**
Israel’s most important questions were answered by the Genesis narratives. Life and death, the possession of the land of Canaan, and how Israel ended up in Egypt are explained as God’s providential working in history. Israel was part of God’s plan in this world. His plan had
Genesis also includes passages and expressions that are obviously later editorial glosses. Some sections (such as the list of Edomite kings, 36:31–43) could have been added during the early days of the monarchy. There is no conflict in saying that Genesis was authored by Moses and augmented by subsequent editors whose work was guided by the Holy Spirit. Given these considerations, conservative scholars find it plausible that the biblical material accurately records actual events.

**LITERAL CHARACTER**

Genesis includes various types of literature. Several suggestions have been made as to the nature of the materials.

**Myth** Mythological literature explains the origins of things symbolically through the deeds of gods and supernatural creatures. For ancient peoples, myths were beliefs that explained life and reality. Whole systems of ritual activities were developed to ensure that the forces of fertility, life, and death would continue year by year. Some of these rituals gave rise to cult prostitution (see 38:15, 21–22).

It would be very difficult to classify the material in Genesis as myth. Israel had one God, not a multitude. The nation of Israel had a beginning, a history, and a future hope. They saw God, rather than gods and other supernatural creatures, as the primary actor in the world. Their worship was not cosmic, magical, or superstitious but a remnant of their own rescue from Egypt and a celebration of God’s factual intervention in history and their hope in his promises. If Genesis uses elements of mythological language, it is to display a deliberate contrast with pagan concepts and to show that the Lord God is sovereign over such ideas. For example, the ancients worshiped the sun as a god, but in Genesis the sun serves the Creator’s wishes (1:14–18). The book of Genesis is a cemetery for lifeless myths and dead gods. Genesis is not myth.

**Etiology** A number of scholars describe the Genesis narratives as etiological stories that explain the causes of factual reality or traditional beliefs. The implication is that such stories were made up for explanatory purposes and do not describe historical events. For example, if one says that the story of Cain and Abel was made up to explain why shepherds and farmers do not get along, the account loses its integrity as factual history. Etiological elements certainly occur in Genesis, because the book gives the foundation and rationale for almost everything that Israel would later do. For example, the creation account of Gen 2 ends with the explanation, “This explains why a man leaves his father and mother . . . .” The event as it happened explains why marriage was conducted the way it was, but to say that a story explains something is quite different from saying that the story was fabricated to explain it. The stories of Genesis are not fictional tales invented to explain later customs and beliefs.

**History** Many scholars object to regarding Genesis as history, for two basic reasons: (1) Genesis explains events as caused by God, and the inclusion of the supernatural is regarded as proof that the material is theological reflection and thus not historically reliable; and (2) the events in Genesis cannot be validated from outside sources; no other records have demonstrated that Abraham existed or that any of his family history occurred.

**Further Reading**

- **VICTOR P. HAMILTON**
  - The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17, p. 46

**Epigraphs**

Sometimes other authors say insightful things about a book of the Bible, or they make a poignant observation about something that a given book discusses. The editors have gathered some of the best quotations they could find about each book and put them in the margins of the book introductions, to stimulate thinking and to promote meaningful interaction with each book of the Bible.

**Further Reading**

Where can we learn more about each book of the Bible? The NLT Study Bible has plenty of resources for a lifetime journey of reading, studying, and discovering the riches of Scripture. Some readers, however, will want to go even further. At the end of each book introduction, the editors have recommended some of the resources that have helped them the most in studying and understanding that particular book of the Bible. They’ve chosen materials that are available in the general market—no seminary required! Nearly all of these books are as close as a visit to a local or online Christian retailer.

**Section Introductions**

For each major section of the Bible, the section introduction gives an overview of the books in that section and discusses issues that affect the interpretation of those books. (Not shown)

**Chronology Articles**

For each major period of biblical history, the chronology article provides a historical overview and discusses key issues regarding historical context. Each article includes a timeline of events during that period of history. (Not shown)
son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and of Amasa son of Jether, com-
mander of the army of Judah. 5May their blood be on Joab and his descendants for-
ever, and may the Loxx grant peace forever to David, his descendants, his dynasty, and his throne. 6So Beniah son of Jehoitzar returned to the sacred tent and killed Joab, and he was buried at his home in the wilderness. 7Then the king appointed Beniah to com-
mand the army in place of Joab, and he installed Zadok the priest to take the place of Abiathar.

The king then sent for Shimei and told him, “Build a house here in Jerusalem and live there. But don’t go outside the city to go anywhere else. 3On the day you die, you will surely die, and your blood will be on your own head.” 4Shimei replied, “Your sentence is fair; I will do whatever my lord the king com-
mands.” So Shimei lived in Jerusalem for a long time.

PARALLEL PASSAGES
The NLT text indicates parallels with passages in other books. For example, the Gospel of Matthew has many parallels in Mark, Luke, and John. Similarly, the books of 2 Samuel through 2 Kings have many parallels to the books of 1–2 Chronicles. The parallel references are useful for making comparisons between different versions of the same events and gaining a deeper, fuller understanding of what was happening.

RUNNING OUTLINES
The NLT text of each book includes a running outline to show how the sections of that book fit together. The numbered top level of the outline matches the short outline in the book introduction. The second-
and third-level headings describe the book’s structure in greater detail, down to the level of individual passages. These outlines follow the literary structure of the book, so they show what the author of the book thought about how the book was put together.

THEME NOTES
How does the NLT Study Bible explain the themes of the Bible? Theme notes develop the main themes and topics that arise in each book. They are placed along-
side particularly relevant passages but go beyond the passage at hand and extend to other books of the Bible. References for further study are included in the margin.

The topics in the theme notes have been chosen based on the major themes that occur in Scripture. They provide the first steps in developing a biblical theology without attempting to formulate
a specific doctrinal system (such as reformed, charismatic, or Baptist). Because of this, the theme notes are designed to make us think and will stretch us to consider the teaching of Scripture more fully, whatever our doctrinal background.
cross-reference systems

Some cross-reference systems are based on connections between individual words, without regard to whether there is any connection in meaning between the two verses or passages. With the NLT Study Bible, the cross-references relate to the meaning of the whole verse or passage, so the cross-references are always directly applicable.

To compare specific ideas within a verse, the study notes at the bottom of the page often include cross-references for individual words and phrases, along with a brief explanation of the nature of the connection.

In the cross-reference system, parallel lines (||) show that a particular cross-reference is a parallel passage that describes the same events or says much the same thing.

An asterisk (*) is used to indicate where the NT quotes the OT.

word study system

The NLT Study Bible includes a word study system in the cross-reference column. Because the NLT is a dynamic translation, a particular word in Greek or Hebrew is not always translated the same way, but is translated in a manner that is appropriate for the context. This makes word studies richer and more productive, because the range of meaning for a particular Greek or Hebrew word becomes very clear, and it is easier to avoid common misunderstandings about what the word means.

There are word studies for 100 Hebrew words and 100 Greek words. For each word, the editors have included enough occurrences to illustrate the range of meanings for that word. Each occurrence is indicated in the NLT text with a superscript letter (a, b, c, etc.). The same superscript letter occurs in the cross-reference column under that verse. After the superscript letter the Hebrew or Greek word is given, followed by a reference number that matches the glossary at the back and many widely available study tools, such as Strong’s Concordance. On the next line is a chain-reference link to the next highlighted occurrence of the word. The word study system thus opens up a whole world of Greek and Hebrew word study.
The King’s

19:15-23 Lot’s warning words were not taken seriously because of his hypocrisy. It seemed that there would not be even one righteous person left in the city. The Lord thus spared Lot and his family, who had escaped to the oaks of Bethel.

Lot was saved because he put his trust in the Lord and obeyed his warnings. God had warned Abraham in Genesis 13:10-13 that Sodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed. Lot had been warned by the Lord and had left Sodom. Lot did not believe in the Lord, but he trusted in his own reason and judgment. He was a believing heart and the Lord rescued him (2 Pet 2:7-8).

Lot’s faith saved him, as did Abraham’s faith. Both were saved by faith in God’s promises. Abraham trusted in God’s word that he would be the father of nations, while Lot trusted in his own judgment and reasoning. Both were saved by faith, but one trusted in God, the other in his own abilities. Lot’s faith was not sufficient for salvation, but Abraham’s was.

Lot escaped judgment by God’s grace, but his heart was still in Sodom. Israel would forever remember Lot as lingering, halting, and being dragged by safety in Sodom.

Lot and his family were saved because of their faith in God’s promises. God had warned Abraham that Sodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed, and Lot had left Sodom. Lot did not believe in God, but he trusted in his own judgment and reasoning. Both were saved by faith, but one trusted in God, the other in his own abilities. Lot’s faith was not sufficient for salvation, but Abraham’s was.

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6:14 Large boat: Traditionally referred to as an ark, this was a large rectangular hanger designed for survival, not for navigation. The term boat is used again only for the basket in which the baby Moses was floated on the Nile (Exod 2:3, 5). It represents God as the author of an unexplainable plan. It is not clear what kind of wood was used. It was possible as a canoe, such as a reed boat.

6:15 The ark’s dimensions: Hebrews used the same cubic meters as we do, with no sail or rudder. God also brought the animals to Noah (8:20).

6:17 Earth over with a flood: Some say that the flood might only have covered the ancient Near East as it was known to Noah’s time. However, the flood’s stated purpose—to destroy every living thing that breathed (see also Gen 6:7, 11-31, 14, 16-21)—and its effect of resetting creation (see notes on 9:19-20; 11:1-12) suggest that the Flood covered the earth.

6:19 The ancient Near East was understood as the region where the Semitic languages flourished, especially among the nations of the Fertile Crescent—Mesopotamia, Aramaea, Canaan, and beyond. The region’s cultural centers included Sumer, Babylonia, Assyria, and Ur.

11:10-19 It is not clear why the family of Abram was so well-known. There are several possible explanations:

- Abram’s serfdom in Egypt and later residence in Canaan (13:1-7)
- Abram’s privileges in Egypt (13:16-17)
- Abram’s journey to Canaan (13:18-22)

11:19-20 Abram’s promise that he would be a blessing to all the families of the earth has been an enduring theme in the Bible. It is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ (Gal 3:8-9).

12:3 A king comes: The title “king” is used of the Israelite monarchs from David to Solomon. The character and actions of these kings are recorded in the Bible, but their reigns are often marred by corruption and rebellion.

12:15 The early divided kingdom: The history of the divided kingdom of Israel (931-586 BC) is marked by the reigns of the ten northern tributaries. These kingdoms, known as the Ten Tribes, were eventually conquered by Assyria, and their people were carried into captivity.

13:18 An enduring dynasty: Jeroboam had a great opportunity. God promised that he would be faithful and obedient to the Lord, and his kingdom would be strong and lasting. However, he decayed.

13:22 Solomon’s rule: Solomon’s reign was marked by his wealth and power, as well as his wisdom and wisdom. He was also responsible for the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

13:28 Solomon’s death: Solomon died in 922 BC, leaving a legacy of prosperity and power. However, his successors faced many challenges, including the threat of foreign invasion.

14:28 Rehoboam’s death: Rehoboam’s reign was marked by his stubbornness and stubbornness. He rejected the advice of the elders and the prophets, leading to his defeat by Jeroboam II.

15:18 The northern kingdom: The northern kingdom of Israel was established by Jeroboam II and was characterized by its monarchy and religious practices.

15:24 The destruction of the northern kingdom: The northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC, marking the end of the prophetic period.

17:7 Noah and the ark: Noah was instructed by God to build an ark and fill it with animals and his family. The ark saved his family and the world from the flood.

19:11 The Flood: The Flood was a catastrophic event that destroyed the earth and its inhabitants. It was a judgment from God, implemented through the power of the water.

21:8 The flood: The flood was a catastrophic event that destroyed the earth and its inhabitants. It was a judgment from God, implemented through the power of the water.

22:16 The ark’s door: The door of the ark was sealed to prevent the animals from escaping during the flood. It was used as a symbol of God’s faithfulness and protection.

23:15 The ark’s opening: The ark’s opening was used to release the animals after the flood. It was a symbol of the covenant between God and his people.

24:19 Pharaoh’s vessels: Pharaoh’s vessels were used to fill the ark with animals before the flood. They were seen as a sign of the power of the Lord.

25:17 The ark’s location: The ark was placed on the mountains of Ararat, where it was preserved during the flood. It was a symbol of God’s salvation and protection.

26:13 The ark’s journey: The ark’s journey through the desert was a symbol of God’s protection and guidance.

27:17 The ark’s stay: The ark’s stay in Canaan was a symbol of God’s presence and protection.

28:17 The ark’s destruction: The ark was destroyed by fire and water, symbolizing the end of the flood and the beginning of a new age.

30:2 Noah did everything as the Lord commanded: This example of obedience to God is a reminder of the importance of following God’s commands and living a life of faith.

32:20 Noah was 600 years old when the flood covered the earth. He went on board the boat and escaped the flood—he and his wife and his sons and their wives with them.

ILLUSTRATIONS
Illustrations help visualize objects that might be difficult to imagine without a picture. For example, the illustration of Noah’s Ark on p. 33 shows just how big that floating storage box was and how much it was able to hold.

TIMELINES
Timelines show when in history various events took place and how they relate to other events in the Bible and in the surrounding world. The Bible is a record of history, and it is fascinating and stimulating to see just how the events of the Bible fit into recorded history as known from the surrounding cultures.

DIAGRAMS
Diagrams organize information visually in order to show relationships. For example, the genealogy of Terah, Abraham’s father, on p. 43 helps sort out the relationships among many of the people who play a role in the Bible.
HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE WITH THE NLT STUDY BIBLE

Devoting yourself to understanding the text of the Bible is one of the greatest things that you can do. In the Bible, you can read about the things that God has done and said in the past. You can hear the stories of people who lived in a very different world from our own, yet whose lives were in so many ways just like ours. Most importantly, through the Bible you can hear God speak, and you can walk in fellowship with him.

The Bible, though, is a complex and very foreign book. It is true that some parts of it are not hard to understand. But other parts are, frankly, almost inscrutable, even when read in a clear, contemporary English translation like the NLT. Many people have set out to read and understand the Bible, only to put it aside in confusion and frustration. How can we “hear God speak” when his words seem so hard to understand?

The NLT Study Bible has been created to address this difficulty. The Bible is complex and foreign, but it is not an unscalable mountain or an impassable desert. It is, in fact, a well-traveled road. Having a guide can make the journey an interesting, enjoyable, and deeply rewarding experience. The NLT Study Bible has been designed to be your guide on the journey.

MAKING USE OF THE NLT STUDY BIBLE

Read the Bible Text. No feature of the NLT Study Bible is more important than Scripture, the text of the Bible itself. Read the Bible text as the record of God’s dealings with specific people in the past. The Bible is not simply a set of theological propositions or moral instructions, although it does include them. Instead, it is primarily the record of God revealing himself and his purposes to people, and forming loving and faithful relationships with them. As you read, seek to understand the significance of what he was doing for them and saying to them. God does not change (1 Sam 15:29; Jas 1:17), so who he was in relation to the people of the past is who he is to you and me today, and he will be the same God in the future and for all eternity (Heb 13:8). Read the Bible text with the purpose of knowing God himself.

Read Each Book of the Bible as a Whole. It is best to study a book in its entirety, rather than picking and choosing individual verses. Each book is a unified whole, and each verse is a part of that whole. On your first reading, try to read the entire book in one sitting; for larger books, break it into chunks; you can use the outline in each book’s introduction as a guide in dividing up your reading. During this reading, try to focus exclusively on the Bible text. We recommend that you leave the notes and other features for later. As you read, write down questions and thoughts that come to mind, and then keep going.

Read the Book Introductions, Section Introductions, and Chronology Articles. Each book of Scripture is situated in both literary and historical contexts that have important implications for understanding the book and individual passages. The NLT Study Bible
provides articles that will help you understand these contexts, and reading them will prepare you to engage the text with understanding. Our recommendation is that you begin by reading the Introductions to the Old and New Testaments (beginning on pp. 3 and 1557). Then read the introduction for the section of the Bible that you are studying and the book introduction for the book you are studying. Take time to understand what these introductions say—they were written by people who have devoted many years to understanding Scripture and helping others on the journey. Then refer back to these articles from time to time while you read the Bible text.

Read Slowly. After reading through the text of a Bible book quickly and reading the introductions that impact that book, you are ready to begin reading the Bible text and study materials together. We recommend that you take this part of your journey slowly. Give yourself time to read, understand, and ponder the words in the Bible text and the study materials—the notes, articles, and visual aids—that appear alongside it. Our recommendation is that you read and meditate on perhaps one chapter per day, or about one and one-half pages of Bible text and study materials. If you do so five days per week for fifty-two weeks each year, you will finish going through the NLT Study Bible one time in five years (the “Reading Plan” on p. 2209 will guide you at this pace). It sounds like a long time, but it will go quickly, and you will have the pleasure of many enjoyable discoveries along the way. Most importantly, you will be giving yourself time to breathe in God’s words and breathe out your response to him in prayer.

Follow the Outline. Notice the outline headings in the text. Consider how each passage fits in the overall structure of the book.

Make Use of the Study Helps. The many study helps (see the “Features Guide,” pp. A8–A15) are designed to help explain what the Bible meant to its first readers, and what it therefore means to us who read it today. Make use of the study helps to grasp the meaning and significance of what the Bible text says. When you read the Bible in this way, you can begin to hear God’s voice speaking to you, just as he spoke to the people who first heard and read these words.

Keep a Journal. As you travel through the pages of Scripture, keep a journal of your discoveries, insights, epiphanies, questions, prayers, and perplexities. In past centuries, readers often kept a journal called a commonplace book containing their notes about the things they had read and discovered. More recently, many people have found it useful to keep a daily journal of their Bible reading, reflections, and prayers. You can use your Bible study journal to write questions as they come to mind, interesting things that you learn, your own thoughts about the passage, what you think God might be saying to you, and your prayers to God about what you have studied.

Mark the Bible Text and Study Materials. It can be helpful to highlight or mark the parts of the Bible text and study materials that answer your questions or speak to you in some way. Some ways of marking the text include underlining, circling, or highlighting words or phrases; putting brackets in the margins or around pieces of text; writing one to three words in the margin to prompt memory about a topic; and writing cross-references to other places in the NLT Study Bible or to your Bible journal (perhaps by date).

Develop a Sense of History. As you read the Bible, seek to develop a historical understanding of how the Bible fits together in time and space. We as people are designed to
enjoy and remember good stories. The Bible tells a great story, but sometimes we don’t see how the parts of the story fit together. The NLT Study Bible includes a large number of timelines, maps, and explanations to help you do so. When we understand how it all fits together in one great story, it is possible to see connections and developments that could not be seen before.

Use the Reference Helps in the Back. The reference helps in the back of the NLT Study Bible will enable you to quickly find the key places where a particular person, place, or topic is covered. As you carefully read the notes and features that the index points to, also read the Bible text itself.

Go Further. Please do not treat the NLT Study Bible study notes and other features as the full and final word on any topic or passage. The Bible text itself is complete—you are holding a full and complete copy of God’s revealed word. But the notes and other features are limited and incomplete. We who have prepared this Bible have packed in as much as we could in the 2200 pages from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New Testament. But it is only a very small fraction of what could be said. Therefore, treat the NLT Study Bible notes and features as a very helpful but incomplete guide on your journey. For those who wish to go further with some aspect of study, there are many other resources available. To help point you in the right direction, each book and section introduction includes a list of “Further Reading” materials.

Go Ahead. Finally, don’t hold back; jump in! Begin using the NLT Study Bible for your daily study, and don’t worry about trying to do everything that we have suggested here. You can take small, manageable steps. The most important thing is that you begin your journey on the road of reading, studying, and understanding the Bible. After a while, come back and read this guide again; you might find something else here that will help you along the way.

As you use the NLT Study Bible, you will discover even more ways to grow in your understanding of God’s word. We invite you to visit us and tell us about your experiences at www.NLTStudyBible.com, or send us an e-mail at NLTStudyBible@tyndale.com.

Come, . . . let us walk in the light of the LORD! Isaiah 2:5
Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path. Psalm 119:105

THE EDITORS
How do the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob relate to history? What was going on in the world at the time of David and Solomon? How do the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah fit together? What was happening during the time between the OT and the NT? How do the events in the life of Jesus and the early church correlate with other things that were happening in the Roman world?

**CREATION TO ABRAHAM**

Many of the events of Genesis 1–11 predate writing, so it is difficult to assign precise dates to these early events. We can, however, observe a close correlation between the biblical account and what is known from other historical sources. After the Flood, which Noah and his family survived, humanity spread out across the known world, and the ancient civilizations began. By the time of Abraham,
Egypt was well established, while Sumerian civilization in Mesopotamia was coming to a close.

**ABRAHAM TO JOSHUA**

We know that Abraham lived around 2000 BC, but we are not completely certain about the dates for his life. This uncertainty results from our uncertainty about the date of Israel’s exodus from Egypt. Two dates for the Exodus are accepted as possibilities by biblical scholars, 1446 or 1270 BC. The dates for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are simply calculated from the date for the Exodus on the basis of information given in the biblical text. Although there is uncertainty, it is also quite clear that the things Scripture says about these people and their lives fit well with what we know about conditions in Canaan and Egypt during this period of history. For more information, see “Chronology of Abraham to Joshua,” pp. 118–121.

**THE TIME OF THE JUDGES**

After Joshua led Israel’s conquest of Canaan and the people of Israel began to settle in the land, a period of growing anarchy ensued. Periodic chaos and oppression were punctuated by rescue through the inspired leadership of the judges. For more information, see “Chronology of the Time of the Judges,” pp. 414–415.
ISRAEL’S MONARCHY

The time of the judges came to a decisive end with the ministry of Samuel and the reigns of King Saul (about 1050–1011 BC) and King David (1011–971 BC). The dates for events from this time forward are much more precise, because we can correlate biblical information with the records of other ancient nations like the Assyrians and Babylonians, and with known astronomical phenomena such as solar eclipses. After the division of Israel into the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah), the chronology becomes very complex, and good timelines are essential for understanding how the reigns of the kings fit together. For more information, see “Chronology of Israel’s Monarchy,” pp. 562–565. Detailed timelines are also included throughout the books of 1 & 2 Kings.

### 1050~50 BC

(90 years/inch)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENTS IN OT BOOKS:</th>
<th>1 SAMUEL</th>
<th>2 SAMUEL</th>
<th>1 CHRONICLES</th>
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<td>ROMAN KINGDOM</td>
<td>The city of Rome is founded (700s BC)</td>
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<td>Kingdom of Israel (931–722 BC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saul to David</td>
<td>Kingdom of Judah (931–586 BC)</td>
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<td>Temple is built (967–960 BC)</td>
<td>Samaria is destroyed by Assyria, end of the kingdom of Israel (722 BC)</td>
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<td>Dynasty 21 (1069–945 BC)</td>
<td>Dynasty 25 / Cushite (780–656 BC)</td>
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Shishak invades Judah (926 BC)
ISRAEL’S EXILE AND RETURN

The records of Israel’s history are much more sparse during the period of the Exile than beforehand. Instead of a comprehensive, orderly account, as with Israel’s monarchy, we have scattered accounts in books such as 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Esther.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king in Babylon for much of the time of Israel’s exile. After his death (562 BC), it was less than twenty-five years until Babylon was conquered by Cyrus the Great (539 BC). Cyrus issued a decree allowing Jewish people to return to Judea, and many did. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah narrate some of the events of the postexilic period in Judea, including the rebuilding of the Temple and the wall of Jerusalem. For more information about this period, see “Historical Background of Israel’s Exile and Return,” pp. 782–785.
THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

From the end of the OT to the beginning of the NT there was a period of about 400 years. It was not, however, an empty period or a lull in history. To the contrary, great changes took place. The Persian empire was replaced by Greek dominance, beginning with the conquests of Alexander the Great (332–323 BC). Greek culture began spreading inexorably throughout the Mediterranean world. Rome, too, grew in power and influence, until the Romans became the dominant power in the Mediterranean world in the first century BC. For more information, see “Historical Background of the Intertestamental Period,” pp. 1552–1554.

THE LIFE OF JESUS

Jesus of Nazareth was born in Judea during the height of Greco-Roman culture and Roman power. Jesus lived a relatively short life in a tumultuous backwater of the Roman empire, and he died the shameful death of a criminal. But then he rose bodily from the dead, demonstrated to his followers that he was alive, and ascended to heaven. For more information, see “Introduction to the Four Gospels,” pp. 1561–1563, and “Chronology of the Life of Jesus,” pp. 1564–1566.
THE APOSTOLIC AGE
After Jesus rose from the dead, his followers quickly began proclaiming the news, and the movement of those who believed the message spread around the Roman world during the first century AD. The book of Acts and the letters of Paul and the other apostles record events in the Christian community during this period. For more information about the chronology of this time, see “Chronology of the Apostolic Age,” pp. 1818–1819.

THE TIME AFTER THE APOSTLES
By the end of the first century, all of the apostles of Jesus had died, but the church continued growing. Those early, postapostolic Christians saw themselves and their communities as being in continuity with the apostles. They maintained the faith that the apostles had given them while experiencing periodic, harsh persecution from their neighbors and from the Roman government. For more information, see “Introduction to the Time after the Apostles,” pp. 2201–2205.
Where did Abraham live, travel, and obey God’s instruction to sacrifice his son (Gen 12–22)? Why did Josiah confront Pharaoh Neco and lose his life (2 Kgs 23:29-30; 2 Chr 35:20-27; Jer 46)? When Jesus was making his final trip to Jerusalem, why did he go through Samaria (John 4:4)? How did Paul follow up with the churches he established during his first missionary
journey (Acts 13–14, 16)? The answers to questions such as these can be understood more readily through the study of the geography of the Bible.

THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND THE NEAR EAST
The events in the Bible took place in the lands around the eastern MEDITERRANEAN Sea and in the Near East—the area from EGYPT through CANAAN and ARAM, to MESOPOTAMIA and PERSIA. The ancient Near East is the setting for the earliest events of recorded history, and it is the world in which the nation of Israel was formed and grew. Abraham journeyed from HARAN in upper Mesopotamia to Canaan (Gen 12). His descendants then moved to Egypt (Gen 46) and spent hundreds of years there before returning to Canaan and establishing the nation of Israel (Exod—Josh).
Almost 1,000 years later, after living in the land of Israel (see below), the descendants of Abraham returned to Mesopotamia as exiles (2 Kgs 17, 24–25). The Jewish people later returned to Jerusalem and Judea and reestablished their community (Ezra—Nehemiah). After Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Christian community that began in Jerusalem spread as Paul and the other apostles took the Good News throughout the known world (Acts 2–28).

ISRAEL AND ITS NEIGHBORS
Many of the key events in the history of God’s people took place in and around Canaan, which came to be called the land of Israel (from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south). Not only did much of Abraham’s life take place in this land, but the nation of Israel lived here (Joshua—Nehemiah). Israel’s neighbors included other descendants of Abraham—namely, the people of Edom, Moab, and Ammon (see Gen 19, 25). In addition, the people of Aram lived to the northeast, the people of Philistia to the west, and the people of Phoenicia to the north along the coast in and around Tyre and Sidon.

After the Exile, many Jews returned and reestablished the Jewish community in Jerusalem and Judea (Ezra—Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah). Later, Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, grew up in Nazareth of Galilee, and died in Jerusalem (Matthew—John). He arose from the dead there, and the church had its beginning there (Acts). Even as the Good News about Jesus was spreading throughout the Mediterranean world, Jerusalem and Judea continued to play a role in the life of the Christian community until the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (e.g., Acts 15).

UNDERSTANDING the geography of these and the other events of the Bible can provide a much clearer picture of what was happening and what it means. For this reason, many maps are included throughout the interior of the NLT Study Bible. Most books of the Bible include a map in the book’s introduction. All of the maps and many of the places on them are listed in the Subject Index, pp. 2227–2368.
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Many thanks to all who have had a hand in the creation of this study Bible, and most of all to the Lord of heaven and earth, who gave us his word and spirit so generously.
THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW LIVING TRANSLATION, was first published in 1996. It quickly became one of the most popular Bible translations in the English-speaking world. While the NLT’s influence was rapidly growing, the Bible Translation Committee determined that an additional investment in scholarly review and text refinement could make it even better. So shortly after its initial publication, the committee began an eight-year process with the purpose of increasing the level of the NLT’s precision without sacrificing its easy-to-understand quality. This second-generation text was completed in 2004, with minor changes subsequently introduced in 2007.

The goal of any Bible translation is to convey the meaning and content of the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts as accurately as possible to contemporary readers. The challenge for our translators was to create a text that would communicate as clearly and powerfully to today’s readers as the original texts did to readers and listeners in the ancient biblical world. The resulting translation is easy to read and understand, while also accurately communicating the meaning and content of the original biblical texts. The NLT is a general-purpose text especially good for study, devotional reading, and reading aloud in worship services.

We believe that the New Living Translation—which combines the latest biblical scholarship with a clear, dynamic writing style—will communicate God’s word powerfully to all who read it. We publish it with the prayer that God will use it to speak his timeless truth to the church and the world in a fresh, new way.

THE PUBLISHERS, October 2007
Translation Philosophy and Methodology

English Bible translations tend to be governed by one of two general translation theories. The first theory has been called "formal-equivalence," "literal," or "word-for-word" translation. According to this theory, the translator attempts to render each word of the original language into English and seeks to preserve the original syntax and sentence structure as much as possible in translation. The second theory has been called "dynamic-equivalence," "functional-equivalence," or "thought-for-thought" translation. The goal of this translation theory is to produce in English the closest natural equivalent of the message expressed by the original-language text, both in meaning and in style.

Both of these translation theories have their strengths. A formal-equivalence translation preserves aspects of the original text—including ancient idioms, term consistency, and original-language syntax—that are valuable for scholars and professional study. It allows a reader to trace formal elements of the original-language text through the English translation. A dynamic-equivalence translation, on the other hand, focuses on translating the message of the original-language text. It ensures that the meaning of the text is readily apparent to the contemporary reader. This allows the message to come through with immediacy, without requiring the reader to struggle with foreign idioms and awkward syntax. It also facilitates serious study of the text’s message and clarity in both devotional and public reading.

The pure application of either of these translation philosophies would create translations at opposite ends of the translation spectrum. But in reality, all translations contain a mixture of these two philosophies. A purely formal-equivalence translation would be unintelligible in English, and a purely dynamic-equivalence translation would risk being unfaithful to the original. That is why translations shaped by dynamic-equivalence theory are usually quite literal when the original text is relatively clear, and the translations shaped by formal-equivalence theory are sometimes quite dynamic when the original text is obscure.

The translators of the New Living Translation set out to render the message of the original texts of Scripture into clear, contemporary English. As they did so, they kept the concerns of both formal-equivalence and dynamic-equivalence in mind. On the one hand, they translated as simply and literally as possible when that approach yielded an accurate, clear, and natural English text. Many words and phrases were rendered literally and consistently into English, preserving essential literal and rhetorical devices, ancient metaphors, and word choices that give structure to the text and provide echoes of meaning from one passage to the next.

On the other hand, the translators rendered the message more dynamically when the literal rendering was hard to understand, was misleading, or yielded archaic or foreign wording. They clarified difficult metaphors and terms to aid in the reader’s understanding. The translators first struggled with the meaning of the words and phrases in the ancient context; then they rendered the message into clear, natural English. Their goal was to be both faithful to the ancient texts and eminently readable. The result is a translation that is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful.

Translation Process and Team

To produce an accurate translation of the Bible into contemporary English, the translation team needed the skills necessary to enter into the thought patterns of the ancient authors and then to render their ideas, connotations, and effects into clear, contemporary English. To begin this process, qualified biblical scholars were needed to interpret the meaning of the original text and to check it against our base English translation. In order to guard against personal and theological biases, the scholars needed to represent a diverse group of evangelicals who would employ the best exegetical tools. Then to work alongside the scholars, skilled English stylists were needed to shape the text into clear, contemporary English.

With these concerns in mind, the Bible Translation Committee recruited teams of scholars that represented a broad spectrum of denominations, theological perspectives, and backgrounds within the worldwide evangelical community. (These scholars are listed at the end of this introduction.) Each book of the Bible was assigned to three different scholars with proven expertise in the book or group of books to be reviewed. Each of these scholars made a thorough review of a base translation and submitted suggested revisions to the appropriate Senior Translator. The Senior Translator then reviewed and summarized these suggestions and proposed a first-draft revision of the base text. This draft served as the basis for several additional phases of exegetical and
stylistic committee review. Then the Bible Translation Committee jointly reviewed and approved every verse of the final translation.

Throughout the translation and editing process, the Senior Translators and their scholarly teams were given a chance to review the editing done by the team of stylists. This ensured that exegetical errors would not be introduced late in the process and that the entire Bible Translation Committee was happy with the final result. By choosing a team of qualified scholars and trained stylists and by setting up a process that allowed their interaction throughout the process, the New Living Translation has been refined to preserve the essential formal elements of the original biblical texts, while also creating a clear, understandable English text.

The New Living Translation was first published in 1996. Shortly after its initial publication, the Bible Translation Committee began a process of further committee review and translation refinement. The purpose of this continued revision was to increase the level of precision without sacrificing the text’s easy-to-understand quality. This second-edition text was completed in 2004, and an additional update with minor changes was subsequently introduced in 2007. This printing of the New Living Translation reflects the updated 2007 text.

Written to Be Read Aloud

It is evident in Scripture that the biblical documents were written to be read aloud, often in public worship (see Nehemiah 8; Luke 4:16-20; 1 Timothy 4:13; Revelation 1:3). It is still the case today that more people will hear the Bible read aloud in church than are likely to read it for themselves. Therefore, a new translation must communicate with clarity and power when it is read publicly. Clarity was a primary goal for the NLT translators, not only to facilitate private reading and understanding, but also to ensure that it would be excellent for public reading and make an immediate and powerful impact on any listener.

The Texts behind the New Living Translation

The Old Testament translators used the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible as represented in Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (1977), with its extensive system of textual notes; this is an update of Rudolf Kittel’s Biblia Hebraica (Stuttgart, 1937). The translators also further compared the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint and other Greek manuscripts, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and any other versions or manuscripts that shed light on the meaning of difficult passages.

The New Testament translators used the two standard editions of the Greek New Testament: the Greek New Testament, published by the United Bible Societies (UBS, fourth revised edition, 1993), and Novum Testamentum Graece, edited by Nestle and Aland (NA, twenty-seventh edition, 1993). These two editions, which have the same text but differ in punctuation and textual notes, represent, for the most part, the best in modern textual scholarship. However, in cases where strong textual or other scholarly evidence supported the decision, the translators sometimes chose to differ from the UBS and NA Greek texts and followed variant readings found in other ancient witnesses. Significant textual variants of this sort are always noted in the textual notes of the New Living Translation.

Translation Issues

The translators have made a conscious effort to provide a text that can be easily understood by the typical reader of modern English. To this end, we sought to use only vocabulary and language structures in common use today. We avoided using language likely to become quickly dated or that reflects only a narrow subdiale of English, with the goal of making the New Living Translation as broadly useful and timeless as possible.

But our concern for readability goes beyond the concerns of vocabulary and sentence structure. We are also concerned about historical and cultural barriers to understanding the Bible, and we have sought to translate terms shrouded in history and culture in ways that can be immediately understood. To this end:

- We have converted ancient weights and measures (for example, “ephah” [a unit of dry volume] or “cubit” [a unit of length]) to modern English (American) equivalents, since the ancient measures are not generally meaningful to today’s readers. Then in the textual footnotes we offer the literal Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek measures, along with modern metric equivalents.

- Instead of translating ancient currency values literally, we have expressed them in common terms that communicate the message. For example, in the Old Testament, “ten shekels of silver” becomes “ten pieces of silver” to convey the intended message.

In the New Testament, we have often translated the “denarius” as “the daily wage” to facilitate understanding. Then a footnote offers: “Greek a denarius, the payment for a full day’s wage.” In general, we give a clear English rendering and then state the literal Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek in a textual footnote.

- Since the names of Hebrew months are unknown to most contemporary readers, and since the Hebrew lunar calendar fluctuates from year to year in relation to the solar calendar used today, we have looked for clear ways to communicate the time of year the Hebrew months (such as Abib) refer to. When an expanded or interpretive rendering is given in the text, a textual note gives the literal rendering. Where it is possible to define a specific ancient date in terms of our modern calendar, we use modern dates in the text. A textual footnote then gives the literal Hebrew date and states the rationale for our rendering. For example, Ezra 6:15 pinpoints the date when the postexilic Temple was completed in Jerusalem: “the third day of the month Adar.” This was during the sixth year of King Darius’s reign (that is, 515 B.C.). We have translated that date as March 12, with a footnote giving the Hebrew and identifying the year as 515 B.C.

- Since ancient references to the time of day differ from our modern methods of denoting time, we have used renderings that are instantly understandable to the
modern reader. Accordingly, we have rendered specific times of day by using approximate equivalents in terms of our common “o’clock” system. On occasion, translations such as “at dawn the next morning” or “as the sun was setting” have been used when the biblical reference is more general.

• When the meaning of a proper name (or a wordplay inherent in a proper name) is relevant to the message of the text, its meaning is often illuminated with a textual footnote. For example, in Exodus 2:10 the text reads: “The princess named him Moses, for she explained, ‘I lifted him out of the water.’ ” The accompanying footnote reads: “Moses sounds like a Hebrew term that means ‘to lift out.’ ”

Sometimes, when the actual meaning of a name is clear, that meaning is included in parentheses within the text itself. For example, the text at Genesis 16:11 reads: “You are to name him Ishmael (which means ‘God hears’), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress.” Since the original hearers and readers would have instantly understood the meaning of the name “Ishmael,” we have provided modern readers with the same information so they can experience the text in a similar way.

• Many words and phrases carry a great deal of cultural meaning that was obvious to the original readers but needs explanation in our own culture. For example, the phrase “they beat their breasts” (Luke 23:48) in ancient times meant that people were very upset, often in mourning. In our translation we chose to translate this phrase dynamically for clarity: “They went home in deep sorrow.” Then we included a footnote with the literal Greek, which reads: “Greek went home beating their breasts.” In other similar cases, however, we have sometimes chosen to illuminate the existing literal expression to make it immediately understandable. For example, here we might have expanded the literal Greek phrase to read: “They went home beating their breasts in sorrow.” If we had done this, we would not have included a textual footnote, since the literal Greek clearly appears in translation.

• Metaphorical language is sometimes difficult for contemporary readers to understand, so at times we have chosen to translate or illuminate the meaning of a metaphor. For example, the ancient poet writes, “Your neck is like the tower of David” (Song of Songs 4:4). We have rendered it “Your neck is as beautiful as the tower of David” to clarify the intended positive meaning of the simile. Another example comes in Ecclesiastes 12:3, which can be literally rendered: “Remember him . . . when the grinding women cease because they are few, and the women who look through the windows see dimly.” We have rendered it: “Remember him before your teeth—your few remaining servants—stop grinding; and before your eyes—the women looking through the windows—see dimly.” We clarified such metaphors only when we believed a typical reader might be confused by the literal text.

• When the content of the original language text is poetic in character, we have rendered it in English poetic form. We sought to break lines in ways that clarify and highlight the relationships between phrases of the text. Hebrew poetry often uses parallelism, a literary form where a second phrase (or in some instances a third or fourth) echoes the initial phrase in some way. In Hebrew parallelism, the subsequent parallel phrases continue, while also furthering and sharpening, the thought expressed in the initial line or phrase. Whenever possible, we sought to represent these parallel phrases in natural poetic English. The Greek term hoi loudaios is literally translated “the Jews” in many English translations. In the Gospel of John, however, this term doesn’t always refer to the Jewish people generally. In some contexts, it refers more particularly to the Jewish religious leaders. We have attempted to capture the meaning in these different contexts by using terms such as “the people” (with a footnoted Greek the Jewish people) or “the religious leaders,” where appropriate.

• One challenge we faced was how to translate accurately the ancient biblical text that was originally written in a context where male-oriented terms were used to refer to humanity generally. We needed to respect the nature of the ancient context while also trying to make the translation clear to a modern audience that tends to read male-oriented language as applying only to males. Often the original text, though using masculine nouns and pronouns, clearly intends that the message be applied to both men and women. A typical example is found in the New Testament letters, where the believers are called “brothers” (adelphoi). Yet it is clear from the content of these letters that they were addressed to all the believers—male and female. Thus, we have usually translated this Greek word as “brothers and sisters” in order to represent the historical situation more accurately.

We have also been sensitive to passages where the text applies generally to human beings or to the human condition. In some instances we have used plural pronouns (they, them) in place of the masculine singular (he, him). For example, a traditional rendering of Proverbs 22:6 is: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” We have rendered it: “Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.” At times, we have also replaced third person pronouns with the second person to ensure clarity. A traditional rendering of Proverbs 26:27 is: “He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.” We have rendered it: “If you set a trap for others, you will get caught in it yourself. If you roll a boulder down on others, it will crush you instead.”

We should emphasize, however, that all masculine nouns and pronouns used to represent God (for example, “Father”) have been maintained without
exception. All decisions of this kind have been driven by the concern to reflect accurately the intended meaning of the original texts of Scripture.

**Lexical Consistency in Terminology**

For the sake of clarity, we have translated certain original-language terms consistently, especially within synoptic passages and for commonly repeated rhetorical phrases, and within certain word categories such as divine names and non-theological technical terminology (e.g., liturgical, legal, cultural, zoological, and botanical terms). For theological terms, we have allowed a greater semantic range of acceptable English words or phrases for a single Hebrew or Greek word. We have avoided some theological terms that are not readily understood by many modern readers. For example, we avoided using words such as “justification” and “sanctification,” which are carryovers from Latin translations. In place of these words, we have provided renderings such as “made right with God” and “made holy.”

**The Spelling of Proper Names**

Many individuals in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, are known by more than one name (e.g., Uzziah/Azariah). For the sake of clarity, we have tried to use a single spelling for any one individual, footnoting the literal spelling whenever we differ from it. This is especially helpful in delineating the kings of Israel and Judah. King Joash/Jehoash of Israel has been consistently called Jehoash, while King Joash/Jehoash of Judah is called Joash. A similar distinction has been used to distinguish between Joram/Jehoram of Israel and Joram/Jehoram of Judah. All such decisions were made with the goal of clarifying the text for the reader. When the ancient biblical writers clearly had a theological purpose in their choice of a variant name (e.g., Esh-baal/Ishbosheth), the different names have been maintained with an explanatory footnote.

For the names Jacob and Israel, which are used interchangeably for both the individual patriarch and the nation, we generally render it “Israel” when it refers to the nation and “Jacob” when it refers to the individual. When our rendering of the name differs from the underlying Hebrew text, we provide a textual footnote, which includes this explanation: “The names ‘Jacob’ and ‘Israel’ are often interchanged throughout the Old Testament, referring sometimes to the individual patriarch and sometimes to the nation.”

**The Rendering of Divine Names**

All appearances of ‘el, ‘elohim, or ‘eloh, ‘el, ‘elohim, have been translated “God,” except where the context demands the translation “god(s).” We have generally rendered the tetragrammaton (YHWH) consistently as “the LORD,” utilizing a form with small capitals that is common among English translations. This will distinguish it from the name ‘adonai, which we render “Lord.” When ‘adonai and YHWH appear together, we have rendered it “Sovereign Lord.” This also distinguishes ‘adonai YHWH from cases where YHWH appears with ‘elohim, which is rendered “LORD God.” When YHWH (the short form of YHWH) and YHWH appear together, we have rendered it “LORD God.” When YHWH appears with the term tseba‘oth, we have rendered it “LORD of Heaven’s Armies” to translate the meaning of the name. In a few cases, we have utilized the transliteration, Yahweh, when the personal character of the name is being invoked in contrast to another divine name or the name of some other god (for example, see Exodus 3:15; 6:2-3).

In the New Testament, the Greek word christos has been translated as “Messiah” when the context assumes a Jewish audience. When a Gentile audience can be assumed, christos has been translated as “Christ.” The Greek word kuriōs is consistently translated “Lord,” except that it is translated “LORD” wherever the New Testament text explicitly quotes from the Old Testament, and the text there has it in small capitals.

**Textual Footnotes**

The New Living Translation provides several kinds of textual footnotes, all included within the study notes in this edition:

- When for the sake of clarity the NLT renders a difficult or potentially confusing phrase dynamically, we generally give the literal rendering in a textual footnote. This allows the reader to see the literal source of our dynamic rendering and how our translation relates to other more literal translations. These notes are prefaced with “literally.” For example, in Acts 2:42 we translated the literal “breaking of bread” (from the Greek) as “the Lord’s Supper” to clarify that this verse refers to the ceremonial practice of the church rather than just an ordinary meal. Then we attached a footnote to “the Lord’s Supper,” which reads: “Literally the breaking of bread.”

- Textual footnotes are also used to show alternative renderings, prefaced with the word “or.” These normally occur for passages where an aspect of the meaning is debated. On occasion, we also provide notes on words or phrases that represent a departure from long-standing tradition. These notes are prefaced with “Traditionally rendered.” For example, the footnote to the translation “serious skin disease” at Leviticus 13:2 says: “Traditionally rendered leprosy. The Hebrew word used throughout this passage is used to describe various skin diseases.”

- When our translators follow a textual variant that differs significantly from our standard Hebrew or Greek texts (listed earlier), we document that difference with a footnote. We also footnote cases when the NLT excludes a passage that is included in the Greek text known as the Textus Receptus (and familiar to readers through its translation in the King James Version). In such cases, we offer a translation of the excluded text in a footnote, even though it is generally recognized as a later addition to the Greek text and not part of the original Greek New Testament.

- All Old Testament passages that are quoted in the New Testament are identified by a textual footnote at the New Testament location. When the New Testament clearly quotes from the Greek
translation of the Old Testament, and when it differs significantly in wording from the Hebrew text, we also place a textual footnote at the Old Testament location. This note includes a rendering of the Greek version, along with a cross-reference to the New Testament passage(s) where it is cited (for example, see notes on Psalms 8:2; 53:3; Proverbs 3:12).

- Some textual footnotes provide cultural and historical information on places, things, and people in the Bible that are probably obscure to modern readers. Such notes should aid the reader in understanding the message of the text. For example, in Acts 12:1, “King Herod” is named in this translation as “King Herod Agrippa” and is identified in a footnote as being “the nephew of Herod Antipas and a grandson of Herod the Great.”

- When the meaning of a proper name (or a wordplay inherent in a proper name) is relevant to the meaning of the text, it is either illuminated with a textual footnote or included within parentheses in the text itself. For example, the footnote concerning the name “Eve” at Genesis 3:20 reads: “Eve sounds like a Hebrew term that means ‘to give life.’ This wordplay in the Hebrew illuminates the meaning of the text, which goes on to say that Eve “would be the mother of all who live.”

Cross-References

There are a number of different cross-referencing tools that appear in New Living Translation Bibles, and they offer different levels of help in this regard. All straight-text Bibles include the standard set of textual footnotes that include cross-references connecting New Testament texts to their related Old Testament sources. (See more on this above.)

Many NLT Bibles include an additional short cross-reference system that sets key cross-references at the end of paragraphs and then marks the associated verses with a cross symbol. This space-efficient system, while not being obtrusive, offers many important key connections between passages. Larger study editions include a full-column cross-reference system. This system allows space for a more comprehensive listing of cross-references.

As we submit this translation for publication, we recognize that any translation of the Scriptures is subject to limitations and imperfections. Anyone who has attempted to communicate the richness of God’s Word into another language will realize it is impossible to make a perfect translation. Recognizing these limitations, we sought God’s guidance and wisdom throughout this project. Now we pray that he will accept our efforts and use this translation for the benefit of the church and of all people.

We pray that the New Living Translation will overcome some of the barriers of history, culture, and language that have kept people from reading and understanding God’s Word. We hope that readers unfamiliar with the Bible will find the words clear and easy to understand and that readers well versed in the Scriptures will gain a fresh perspective. We pray that readers will gain insight and wisdom for living, but most of all that they will meet the God of the Bible and be forever changed by knowing him.

THE BIBLE TRANSLATION COMMITTEE, October 2007
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# TABLE OF ANCIENT WEIGHTS, MEASURES, AND COINS

## WEIGHTS

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## LENGTHS

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## CAPACITIES

### Dry Measures

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## COINS

### Roman

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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1 day’s wages (for a laborer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as</td>
<td>1/16 denarius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quadrans</td>
<td>1/64 denarius</td>
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### Greek

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<tr>
<td>stater</td>
<td>4 drachmas</td>
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### Jewish

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<tr>
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<td>1/2 quadrans</td>
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The Old Testament is God's word to his people through the ages. It describes the creation of the world and humanity, the origin of sin, and the beginning of God's plan of redemption. Through it we gain a much clearer understanding of who God is, what he is doing, and how we should live.

The Old Testament stimulates our imaginations and arouses our emotions. It is made up of gripping stories of real events, stirring poems, and bracing exhortations. It teaches us God's plan, reveals God's will, and helps us make decisions. Reading the Old Testament is like looking into a mirror, for it reveals our soul. It plants a seed that grows, ultimately transforming our character.

Jesus emphasized the importance of understanding the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27), and Paul was speaking primarily of the Old Testament when he wrote, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives" (2 Tim 3:16). The Old Testament provides us with a profound knowledge of God, ourselves, and the world.

## Setting
Israel's geography encompasses rugged wadis (seasonally dry river beds), agriculturally rich valleys, rolling hills, arid wilderness, and sandy coasts. The Bible describes Israel as a fertile land, one "flowing with milk and honey" (Exod 3:8, 17; Num 13:27). But a lack of rainfall can trigger devastating famines.

The land of Israel was previously called Canaan. Before the people of Israel occupied the land, Canaan was composed of a number of loosely allied city-states, each with its own king. The Canaanite people remained a political threat until the time of King David, who decisively defeated both the Canaanites and the Philistines. The Canaanite worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, however, continued to plague Israel.

Compared to the superpowers of the day (Assyria, Babylon, the Hittites, Egypt, and Persia), Israel was a small but strategically significant nation, located along the main route between Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Various nations controlled Mesopotamia throughout the OT: Assyria to the north, Babylon to the south, and Persia to the east. All three of these powers constantly tried to expand their borders.

Egypt was also a superpower during much of the OT period. The Nile River defined ancient Egypt and was the source of its wealth. During the time between Joseph and the Exodus, Egypt oppressed and enslaved the people of Israel as they grew from a family of seventy individuals to a great nation. Egypt continued to play a role in the story of Israel. Toward the end of Israel's kingdom period, the last desperate kings hoped that Egypt would save Judah from the Babylonians. Egypt turned out to be "a reed that splinters beneath your weight and pierces your hand" (2 Kgs 18:21).

Directly north of Israel was Aram (Syria), with Damascus as its chief city. Israel experienced frequent conflicts with Aram, beginning during the time of David.

Toward the end of the OT period, the Persian empire gained power. Persia occupied the region just east of Mesopotamia. Persia's rise to power began in the mid-500s BC and included the defeat of Babylon in 539 BC. Judea became a province in the Persian empire and remained so until Alexander the Great defeated Persia in 331 BC.

## The Old Testament Story
The Bible begins with the account of creation (Gen 1–2). God created the heavens, the earth, and the first humans, and he pronounced it all "very good." God provided Eden, a wonderful place for human beings to live. Adam and Eve enjoyed a harmonious and fulfilling relationship with God and with each other.

All this changed quickly. Genesis 3 introduces the serpent, who injected discord into this harmonious world. The serpent taught Eve and Adam to distrust God, and they chose to rebel against God in the belief that they knew better than God. This sin placed a barrier between God and humans and brought death to all humanity. God's holy presence became deadly to Adam and Eve, and God ejected them from Eden. Even in the midst of judgment for their sin, however, God remained involved, working for their redemption.

After Eden, the OT describes a split between those who chose to follow God and those who rejected him: for example, Abel and Seth versus Cain, righteous Noah versus his wicked generation, Isaac versus Ishmael, and Jacob versus Esau and Laban.

A crucial transitional point came when God offered great promises to Abraham. He called Abraham to leave Ur (around 2100/1900 BC) and "go to the land that I will show you" (Gen 12:1). Unlike Adam and Eve, Abraham trusted God and responded obediently to him. As a result, God began carrying out his redemptive plan for humanity through Abraham and his descendants. Thus, Abraham became the father of a great nation, with many descendants and much land. Genesis 12—Joshua 24 describes how God multiplied the descendants of Abraham and ultimately brought them into possession of the Promised Land of Canaan.

God desired that Abraham's descendants, the nation of Israel, would obey God and prosper in the land he gave them and that the surrounding nations would turn to the true God. However, like Adam and Eve in Eden before them, the
Israelites were not satisfied with all that God gave them, instead turning to false gods to find happiness. The rest of the OT continues the story of Israel’s persistent sin and God’s unwavering commitment to them. Although God consistently judged their sin, he also remained patiently involved with his people.

Following Israel’s settlement in Canaan, the period of the judges was marked by political fragmentation and spiritual confusion. God then allowed the people to choose a king to rule them. The monarchy began with the anointing of Saul (around 1050 BC), and it reached a high point with David (1011–971 BC) and the early part of Solomon’s reign (971–931 BC). Due to Solomon’s sin, however, God divided Israel into two parts, the northern and southern kingdoms, after Solomon’s death in 931 BC.

From the beginning of the divided monarchy (931 BC) to the end of the OT period (about 400 BC), the prophets called the people of Israel and Judah to return to God, but most trusted the surrounding nations and their false gods. The northern kingdom of Israel, with its capital Samaria, lasted until 722 BC, when Assyria conquered it and deported its people. The southern kingdom of Judah, with its capital Jerusalem, lasted until the Babylonians defeated it in 586 BC, destroying the Temple and taking many of the people of Judah into exile.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile of the Israelites did not end Israel’s story. Even as the prophets had proclaimed devastating judgment on God’s people, they also announced a future hope for the remnant. The Exile lasted until 539 BC, when Persia defeated Babylon and allowed the Jews to return to Judah to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. By 515 BC, the Jews had rebuilt a smaller, second Temple (see Ezra 6:15). Ezra arrived in 458 BC and reestablished God’s law in Judah. In 445 BC, Nehemiah became governor of Judah and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. During the period after the Exile, many people of Judea finally worshiped the Lord, the God of Israel, exclusively. They also came to recognize the true significance of the OT records: God had been giving them a written revelation of his will, his purposes, and his acts in Israel’s history.

The prophecy of Malachi, written a little before 400 BC, closes the OT story. The OT does not end with a strong sense of closure, but with anticipation of even greater things to come. The return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple was a “down payment” of God’s redemption for his people. However, the prophets understood that these events were not the ultimate realization of hope.

THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The text of the OT was written over a period of approximately 1,000 years, beginning with Moses and extending to the Persian period following the Jews’ return to Judah from exile. God used Moses and many others—judges like Samuel, kings like David and Solomon, prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, priests like Ezra, and other people whose names we don’t even know—to write parts of Israel’s history and literature.

The Order of the Hebrew Bible

The order of books in the Hebrew Bible differs from the order of the books in English Bibles (see charts, below and at right). The Hebrew Bible is divided into three parts: Instruction (Torah), Prophets (Nebi’im) and Writings (Ketubim). Jesus referred to these divisions as “the law of Moses,” “the prophets,” and “the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). Jewish readers of the Hebrew Bible sometimes refer to their Scripture by taking the first letters of these three parts and forming the word “Tanak.”

The Hebrew Bible combines into twenty-four books the same material that is presented as thirty-nine books in the English OT. In the Hebrew Bible, the first five books constitute the Torah. This section, also called the Pentateuch, is unchanged in English Bibles. The second section, the Prophets (Nebi’im), has two parts. The Former Prophets, called the historical books in English Bibles, are followed in the Hebrew Bible by the Latter Prophets. The third section, the Writings (Ketubim), contains miscellaneous books, including the books of poetry and wisdom.

In later Judaism, the “Five Scrolls” (Megilloth) were read at the important feasts and arranged in order of their observance in the holiday calendar (see chart, “Israel’s Festivals,” p. 235): Ruth was read at the Festival of Pentecost, Song of Songs at Passover, Ecclesiastes at the Festival of Shelters, Lamentations at the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem (the 9th of Ab), and Esther at Purim.

The Order of the English OT

English Bibles follow the order of the Greek translation of the OT (the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Instruction (Torah)</th>
<th>2. Prophets (Nebi’im)</th>
<th>3. Writings (Ketubim)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis</td>
<td>Former Prophets</td>
<td>Psalms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus</td>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Job</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leviticus</td>
<td>Judges</td>
<td>Proverbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Samuel (1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>Five Scrolls (Megilloth):</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deuteronomy</td>
<td>Kings (1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latter Prophets</td>
<td>Song of Songs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>Ecclesiastes</td>
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<td>Jeremiah</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ezekiel</td>
<td>Esther</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Twelve:</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
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<td>Hosea</td>
<td>Ezra–Nehemiah</td>
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<td>Joel</td>
<td>Chronicles (1 &amp; 2)</td>
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<td>Amos</td>
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<td>Obadiah</td>
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<td>Zechariah</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malachi</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Hebrew OT

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4
Seventh-Century BC), which groups books according to genre and places the books within each genre in chronological order. The Greek and English OT begins with the Pentateuch. Next come the historical narratives; then the poetical books, arranged in chronological order according to their setting or traditional date of composition; and finally the prophets, in two parts. The major (largest) prophets appear in chronological order. They are followed by the twelve minor (shorter) prophets, which also follow a general chronological arrangement.

**INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Christians sometimes find the OT difficult to read and understand, with content that seems strange and distant. What is the connection between Christianity and animal sacrifices, religious circumcision, strange dietary laws, the curses of the Psalms, and the history of ancient Israel? To understand the OT better, we must realize that it is an ancient book, with the oldest parts written some 3,500 years ago. It also comes from a culture, the ancient Near East, vastly different from ours. Most importantly, the books were written before the coming of Christ.

The following principles can help readers as they study the OT.

**Read Each Passage in Context**

With the Bible, as with all good literature, gaining a grasp of the whole helps us appreciate and understand the parts. We should not treat a biblical book as a collection of isolated sayings. Rather, the books contain connected stories, instructions, and poems. The meaning of the individual verses can be discovered only in the flow of the whole literary piece, which occurs by reading large blocks at a time. While this principle does not stop us from turning to the middle of a biblical book to read a few verses, we should also seek to develop an understanding of the message of the whole book. In other words, we should exercise great caution not to distort God’s message when we read small pieces of Scripture. The book introductions in the NLT Study Bible help with this process by providing an overview of each book’s contents and message.

**Identify the Genre of the Book and Passage**

Contemporary readers are familiar with a variety of genres such as biographies, textbooks, and newspaper editorials. The content of the OT can also be grouped into genres. The genres in the OT include history (e.g., Samuel), treaty/covenant (e.g., Exod 19–24), sermon (e.g., Deuteronomy), poetry and prayers (e.g., Psalms), wisdom (e.g., Proverbs), prophecy (e.g., Jeremiah), and apocalyptic (e.g., Dan 7–12). Different genres should trigger different reading strategies. Just as we approach a biography differently than we approach a novel, we should try to understand how to approach the different genres of the OT. The book and section introductions in the NLT Study Bible offer help in understanding OT genres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pentateuch</th>
<th>Historical Books</th>
<th>Poetry and Wisdom</th>
<th>Prophets</th>
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<td>Exodus</td>
<td>Judges</td>
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<td>Jeremiah</td>
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<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Proverbs</td>
<td>Lamentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>1 Samuel</td>
<td>Ecclesiastes</td>
<td>Ezekiel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deuteronomy</td>
<td>2 Samuel</td>
<td>Song of Songs</td>
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<td>1 Kings</td>
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<td>Malachi</td>
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**MEANING AND MESSAGE**

Scripture describes God’s nature and explains his acts in history. By reading the OT, God’s people learn about who God is by observing and participating in what he does.

**God’s Nature, Character, and Acts**

God’s special name in the OT is Yahweh. The name comes from the Hebrew word meaning “to be.” God told Moses that his name means, “I Am Who I Am” (Exod 3:14). In other words, God defines the English OT
himself. Nothing else defines him, but he defines everything. In most English translations, including the NLt, this name for God is usually translated “the LORD” (capitalized).

Most often, the OT describes God by picturing him in relationship. God relates to people as savior, king, shepherd, warrior, husband, and in many other roles. God also reveals who he is by what he does: for example, dividing the Red Sea, causing the walls of Jericho to fall, establishing David as king, allowing the Babylonian army to defeat Jerusalem, and restoring his people to the land after the Exile.

The primary message of the OT is that God saves his people and judges those who resist him. He reveals who he is by what he does: for example, dividing the Red Sea, causing the walls of Jericho to fall, establishing David as king, allowing the Babylonian army to defeat Jerusalem, and restoring his people to the land after the Exile.

There Is One God

The OT launches a sustained attack on the prevailing worldview of the ancient Near East, which was that the heavens and the earth, infused with deities, constitute the sum total of reality. The implications of this false worldview, which continues in much of the world today, are many and far-reaching:

- Because the heavens and the earth contain many diverse parts, many gods exist.
- Because the gods are the cosmos, we can manipulate the gods by manipulating the cosmos.
- Because humans are obsessed with sex, the gods are also.
- Because the universe exists without purpose, the gods have no purpose except survival through the acquisition of power—and so humans must pursue power as well.
- Because the gods are selfish and unmerciful, humans must seek their favor by appeasing their appetites.
- Because there are many gods, humans must seek the protection of their own gods against other people’s gods.

The OT asserts the very opposite of these beliefs and all others that grow out of a pagan worldview:

- The universe is unified as the creation of the one true God.
- He alone is God, in no way comparable to other so-called gods, and he has a completely separate existence from the cosmos.
- God cannot be manipulated through the cosmos because he is not the cosmos.
- God created the world as a universe with his own unified purposes. Human beings have meaning by fulfilling God’s purposes for them.
- Human beings are designed not to appease capricious and power-hungry gods but to worship and obey a loving Creator.
- Ultimate security and peace come from trusting and worshiping the Creator.

God’s Covenants with His People

The concept of covenant is central to the message of the OT. From Genesis onward, the covenant becomes the most persistent metaphor for God’s relationship with his people (see “God’s Covenant Relationships” at Gen 12:1-9, p. 44). A covenant is a relationship that gives promises and imposes obligations. OT covenants were similar to treaties between two nations, where a Great King would enter into a relationship with a vassal nation (see Deuteronomy Introduction, “Literary Form,” p. 314). The term covenant describes the relationships God established with humanity and all creation through Noah (Gen 9:1-17), with Abraham and his descendants (Gen 15:1-21), with Israel through Moses (Exod 19:3–24:11), and with David and his offspring (2 Sam 7:8-16). God’s relationship with Adam also had the character of a covenant, complete with commands, promises, and warnings. Each of God’s covenants builds on the previous ones; new covenants do not replace the old.

Through his covenants, God established special relationships between himself and his people. In the covenants, God made promises, stated obligations, and threatened judgment if his people did not obey him. When they disobeyed, God sent his prophets to warn his disobedient people, urging them to turn from breaking his law and return to faithful obedience. The curses stipulated in the covenant provide the basis for God’s judgment (see Deut 28), which he ultimately brought: Jerusalem was destroyed and most of the Israelites were sent into exile.

Yet God was not finished with his people: He brought some of them back from exile. They had been humbled and were more obedient—they finally stopped worshipping other gods and worshiped the Lord alone. God also promised to make a new covenant with them (Jer 31:31-34). In the context of this new covenant, God would “forgive their wickedness” and “never again remember their sins” (Jer 31:34), causing all Israel finally to know and obey him.

The establishment of the new covenant came with the Messiah. Jesus Christ, God’s promised Savior and King, fulfilled the old covenant (Matt 5:17-20) and initiated the new covenant, a relationship with all who trust in him (John 3:16; Acts 2:38-39) based on his own sacrifice (Luke 22:20). Those who participate in this relationship inherit eternal fellowship with God and all his people (John 3:36; 5:24; Rom 5:21; 1 Jn 2:24-25).

Further Reading

BILL T. ARNOLD AND BRYAN E. BEYER
CRAIG BARTHOLOMEW AND MICHAEL GOHEEN
The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story (2004)
RAYMOND B. DILLARD AND TREMPER LONGMAN III
In the past two hundred years, archaeology has experienced a huge information explosion in terms of both artifacts and texts from the ancient Near East. Every item must be placed into a large historical context, and, where relevant, must cautiously be placed in a proper relationship to biblical materials. Properly identified and interpreted, archaeological materials may illustrate, illuminate, demonstrate, confirm, or challenge the biblical text. These same artifacts and texts cannot be used at a theological level to “prove” the spiritual, religious, or theological claims of the biblical text. It is obviously impossible for a spade or a trowel to prove or disprove the spiritual revelations and assertions of Scripture. But these materials may confirm and make plausible certain historical perspectives and claims of those texts. It is fair to say that archaeology validates Hebrew history and explains many formerly obscure terms and traditions in both the OT and NT. It thus provides an authentic background for the prophecies culminating in Jesus Christ.

**The Development of Biblical Archaeology**

Modern archaeology in the Middle East began when Napoleon took with him into Egypt (1798) a team of specialists to record the ancient wonders of Egypt. They happened to find the Rosetta Stone (1799), which provided the unexpected key to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics (1819, 1822). The floodgates opened to a heightened interest in the wonders of the ancient Near East and to the light they might shed on the Bible—the ancient Near East’s greatest religious, literary, and historical artifact. In 1845, Akkadian (the language of old Babylon) was deciphered using the Behistun Inscription (518 BC), which, like the Rosetta Stone, was inscribed in three languages. The deciphering of several other languages soon followed.

After that, the archaeology of the ancient Near East prospered and drew worldwide attention. Archaeologists, scholars, and treasure hunters were amazed at the creation and flood stories, legal documents, ancient civilizations and languages, religious and theological systems, sacrificial rituals, tabernacles, temples, palaces, wisdom literature, covenants and covenantal forms and rituals, war stories, birth stories, king lists, pagan prophetic parallels, and much more.

In the beginning, it was treasure hunters who made many of the significant finds, and their methods were often haphazard and caused destruction of important archaeological sites. The scientific study of ancient tells (strata of dirt and cultural debris compacted together into mounds over the millennia) began in Palestine in 1890, when Flinders Petrie adopted methods used to excavate Troy, systematically unearthing and studying the various strata (layers of occupation) of a city. This approach to archaeology in Palestine flourished as appropriate techniques, tools, and record-keeping developed. Today, a combination of methods is employed, including “surface surveys” and aerial photography used to get information about whole regions.

**The Contribution of Biblical Archaeology**

Various ancient Near Eastern texts and artifacts have helped scholars paint—both with a broad brush and in some cases with detail—a cultural and historical backdrop of OT eras across the centuries. Ancient texts and artifacts help us see the OT in its larger context and better understand its history, its literary qualities, and even its theological perspectives.

In principle, archaeologists have no particular interest in “proving the truth” of the Scriptures. And in fact, it is sometimes difficult to reconcile interpretations of archaeological data and the evidence of Scripture. Such conflicts are few in number, however, and tend to diminish noticeably as new information is forthcoming. The huge cache of ancient Near Eastern material makes the historical reliability of the OT arguably firm.

These archaeological source materials show the people of Israel as fellow participants in the ancient Near East of their day. It is possible to see the men and women of Scripture as real persons, as true children of their age, grappling with life’s problems. And from time to time they catch a vision of God as all powerful and all holy, as guiding the destinies of individuals and nations, and as bringing about his purposes in history. Ancient texts and artifacts show that Israel shared in the social structures and worldviews of the surrounding cultures. But these texts and artifacts also show striking contrasts between the people of Israel and the world in which they lived—for Israel claimed a relationship with the Lord, the one true God, and did not worship many gods as neighboring nations did. The people of Israel’s faith in and experience of the Lord make them unique in the ancient world, a uniqueness that comes into vibrant, colorful relief through the texts and artifacts of the ancient Near East.

**Primary Sources**


Ancient Texts and Artifacts Relating to the Old Testament. The Old Testament was written in a complex era of history, and many parallels to the OT have been found in ancient artifacts and documents. This chart lists many of these items with their original date and a description. The “Sources” column lists English translations of the texts of these artifacts; the abbreviations are listed under “Primary Sources,” above. The final column lists OT passages that parallel these sources in some manner: in some cases, the ancient source is similar to its OT parallels or provides cultural background; in other cases, the ancient source corroborates specific OT details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>OT Parallels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memphite Creation</td>
<td>2700 BC</td>
<td>Egyptian creation account</td>
<td>RANE 63–65; OTP 3–6</td>
<td>Gen 1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Famine Stela</td>
<td>2700 BC</td>
<td>Egyptian monumental texts with seven years of famine as a motif</td>
<td>COS 1.53</td>
<td>Gen 12, 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumerian Proverbs</td>
<td>2600–2000 BC</td>
<td>Examples of Sumerian proverbs</td>
<td>COS 1.174–175</td>
<td>Proverbs, Ecclesiastes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ebla Archives</td>
<td>2500 BC (about)</td>
<td>A huge cache of Sumerian texts that depict the pre-patriarchal world</td>
<td>OTP 240–243</td>
<td>Background of Genesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions of Ptah Hotep</td>
<td>2500 BC (about)</td>
<td>One of Egypt’s great wise men teaches his son how to succeed in life and vocation</td>
<td>OTP 283–288; RANE 182–184</td>
<td>Prov 2, 6, 23, 25–26; Ecclesiastes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ra and the Serpent</td>
<td>2400 BC</td>
<td>Egyptian story that pictures the sun and a serpent in opposition</td>
<td>OTP 28–31</td>
<td>Gen 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gudea Cylinders</td>
<td>2000s BC</td>
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INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTATEUCH

Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy!
I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.
I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin.
But I do not excuse the guilty.

Exodus 34:6b-7a

The Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, tells the story of how sin entered God's perfect world and how God responded. It introduces Abraham and his descendants as agents of blessing in a world under the curse of sin and death. This collection, Israel's foundational documents, thus offers a sobering yet inspiring picture of God's relationship with humankind.

SETTING
To help them remain true to God, the Israelites who had left Egypt needed a written record of their own history and mission. The Pentateuch recounts the story of God's grace to Israel. God rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, called them to a special covenant relationship with himself, revealed his will to them, and took care of them as they traveled through the wilderness. Finally, they stood on the verge of entering the land of Canaan, which God had promised to their ancestors.

SUMMARY
The Pentateuch begins with the book of Genesis, which recounts God's grace in the beginnings of human history and in the lives of Israel's ancestors. God created humankind in his image and authorized humans to govern the world in his place (cp. Ps 8). When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, he did not destroy them immediately, but their sin put them and their descendants under the curse of death. Eventually God judged humanity, but mercifully spared righteous Noah and his family. While the curse of sin and death continued to hang over the human race, God called Abraham and his family and established an eternal covenant with them that included a series of generous promises: innumerable descendants, permanent title to the land of Canaan, rule over the land, and blessing to all the nations of the earth. Often, Abraham's descendants proved themselves faithless and unworthy of the privilege. But God kept his commitment to save and bless the human race.

As the book of Exodus opens, the favored family had been enslaved by the Egyptians, and seventy individuals had grown into the nation of Israel. Then God rescued the Israelites from Egypt (Exod 1–18) so that he could establish them as his covenant people, a holy nation (Exod 19:4-6). God's revelation of himself at Sinai (Exod 19–40) is the pivotal event in the Pentateuch.

In the book of Leviticus, God revealed to his people how to maintain a relationship with him, the means of forgiveness for their sin, and how they should live.

Numbers describes Israel's journey from Sinai to the plains of Moab. God accompanied and provided for his people on their journey, despite their repeated rebellion.

Finally, Deuteronomy records Moses' final pastoral addresses to the community of Israel. Moses detailed the significance of God's covenant and urged the Israelites to stay true to their Redeemer. If the people were to enjoy the blessings of the covenant, they needed to be faithful to God. So Moses challenged them to devote themselves anew to God and God alone as they prepared to cross the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land.

AUTHORSHIP
Jewish and Christian tradition recognize Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, and many scholars continue to believe that Moses wrote much of the Pentateuch and that the entire document bears his stamp and authority.

Yet this view is not universal. Critical scholars since the mid-1800s have argued that the Pentateuch was written no earlier than the 600s BC and is the product of a complex literary evolution. The prevailing critical view, the Documentary Hypothesis, is that Genesis—Deuteronomy were...
compiled from various sources by different groups of people. This hypothesis uses the different names for God, repeated stories, and theological emphases to propose that the Pentateuch comes from four sources: J (“Jahwist,” from “Yahweh”), E (“Elohist,” from “Elohim”), D (“Deuteronomic,” from Deuteronomy), and P (“Priestly”). It is thought that these sources were written and collected between 850 BC and 445 BC, gradually being combined and edited until around Ezra’s time (400s BC). This theory has prevailed in the scholarly world since Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) made it popular.

However, advances in literary studies are again pointing back to Moses as the primary author of the Pentateuch. Critical scholars do not agree on the underlying sources for many passages, and additional sources have been invented to cover passages that do not fit the theory. The theory also fails to satisfactorily explain the emergence of Israel’s monotheism in a totally polytheistic world. It assumes that the biblical writers borrowed most of their religious ideas from pagan predecessors. According to the biblical records, however, everything the Israelites borrowed from their neighbors was polytheistic and idolatrous. Israel’s monotheism could not have been borrowed.

Archaeological discoveries have also called into question many of the criteria used in the Documentary Hypothesis. For instance, other writings from the ancient world confirm the use of different names for God, repeated stories, and ideas that were supposedly too advanced for ancient Israel, and the stories about the patriarchs fit their surrounding culture. These discoveries give background to the texts and contradict the assumptions of the Documentary Hypothesis. Archaeological finds continue to erode the rationale for dating the writing or editing of these books to later eras.

In recent years, with increased awareness of archaeology, critical scholars have begun to study the literary forms in the ancient Near East and in the Bible. Form criticism proposed that there was an oral tradition that lay behind the later written texts; by comparing these proposed oral forms, we could understand both the meaning and the function of the text. Other approaches have focused on tracing how the traditions developed, how the traditions were used in religious settings, or how the literary genres functioned.

Such theories often seem unnecessarily complicated and conjectural. Evidence in the Pentateuch itself suggests that Moses did keep records of some of Israel’s experiences during the wilderness wanderings (Exod 17:14; 24:4; 7; 34:27; Num 33:1-2; Deut 31:9, 11). Many features in specific accounts point to a date of composition in the late Bronze Age (1500s–1200s BC, the era of the Exodus). The OT frequently credits Moses with writing the Pentateuch or portions of it (e.g., Josh 1:8; 8:31-32; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 14:6; Ezra 6:18; Neh 13:1; Dan 9:11-13; Mal 4:4), and the New Testament strongly connects the Torah with Moses (Matt 19:8; John 5:46-47; 7:19; Acts 3:22; Rom 10:5).

Do these facts confirm that Moses wrote the Pentateuch as we have it? Not necessarily. Several difficult factors remain. First, following the custom of literary works in the ancient Near East, the Pentateuch nowhere names its author. Second, Moses could not have recorded the account of his own death (Deut 34). Further, he would not have known of a place in northern Israel called Dan (Gen 14:14; cp. Josh 19:47; Judg 18:28-29), and he would not have referred to the conquest of Canaan as a past event (Deut 2:12). Thus, the text itself shows signs that it was updated for completeness (e.g., the death of Moses) or clarification for a later audience (e.g., Gen 14:14; 36:1; Deut 2:10-12). Some suggest that the reason the grammar and syntax of Deuteronomy resemble that of Jeremiah, who lived more than 500 years after Moses, is that later scribes updated the language. Such changes would be similar to updating translations of the Bible by replacing old expressions (“Behold”) with contemporary ones (“Look”).

We can conclude that Moses probably wrote down the speeches he delivered (Deut 31:9-13) and either wrote or arranged for the transcription of the revelation he received on Mount Sinai. It is plausible that he authorized others to write the stories and genealogies of the patriarchs that previously had been passed on orally. Just as the pieces of the Tabernacle were constructed and woven by skilled craftsmen and then finally assembled by Moses (Exod 35–40), so literary craftsmen might have composed bits and pieces that make up the Pentateuch and submitted them to Moses, who ultimately approved them. We can only speculate when these pieces were finally edited in their present form, although the narrative frame of Deuteronomy suggests it occurred sometime after the death of Moses. But by the time David organized Temple worship, the content of the Pentateuch as we know it was apparently fixed.

Genesis and the other books of the Pentateuch can thus be understood as the product of Moses’ genius under God’s inspiration, with later editorial adjustments. Later writers—including the New Testament authors—spoke of “the Torah of Moses,” or “The Book of the Torah of Moses,” or, as Jesus himself said, “Moses . . . wrote about me” (John 5:45-46). Moses might not have been the only author or editor of the Pentateuch, but the Pentateuch fundamentally and substantially comes from Moses, and the Israelites accepted it as bearing the full force of his authority.

HISTORICAL RELIABILITY
A number of critical scholars view the early chapters of Genesis as mythological representations of cosmic and human origins, like similar Babylonian accounts, rather than historical presentations of what actually happened. Recently, this same kind of skepticism has characterized views toward the patriarchs, as well as toward Moses and the Exodus. These scholars note that archaeological discoveries do not specifically identify any of the characters or the events in the Pentateuch. However, the issue is not quite so simple. When it comes to archaeological proof, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Discoveries during the past century enable us to reconstruct patterns of life and an outline of ancient Near Eastern history in which the events described in the Pentateuch are quite at home.

LITERARY GENRES
We often call the first five books of the Bible the Pentateuch (“five
The New Testament refers to these books as “the law of Moses” (Luke 24:44). This designation comes from the early Greek translators of the Old Testament, who almost always rendered the Hebrew term הָלָה ( הָלָה) even though the Hebrew word הָלָה actually means “instruction.” It is misleading to refer to the Pentateuch as “the law,” because large portions are not law at all. It is, however, fitting to call the whole collection הָלָה (“instruction”). The Torah includes inspired narrative (Genesis; Exodus 1–20; 32–40; Lev 8–10; Numbers); poems and hymns (Gen 49; Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32; 33); genealogies (Gen 5, 10, 11, 36); covenant documents (Exodus 19–24; Deuteronomy); civil, ceremonial, and moral laws (Exodus 21–23); sermons (Deuteronomy); and prayers (Exodus 32; Numbers 14).

**INTERPRETATION**

Several principles guide us as we read and interpret the Pentateuch:

1. These texts were originally read aloud, and the reading involved large sections at a time. Chapter and verse divisions were not part of the original and can detract from our understanding. Each verse and paragraph should be read within its larger context.

2. The Pentateuch was written more than 3,000 years ago. It used ancient literary standards and addressed ancient issues. For example, although Exodus 1–2 affects how Christians today respond to theories of evolution, the passage was written to address ancient rather than modern concerns.

3. The differences among genres of text require that we interpret them differently. Therefore, as we read the narratives and delight in the human interest elements, we should recognize that God is the ultimate hero in all the stories. Similarly, as we read the laws of Exodus and Leviticus, we should try to establish the theological significance that these regulations had for OT Israel and reflect on how their message applies to us today.

4. The Pentateuch records only the beginning and the early chapters of the larger story of divine revelation that ultimately culminates in Jesus Christ. The seeds of promise for a Messiah are found in God’s promise to crush the head of the serpent through the offspring of the woman (Gen 3:15); in the offspring of Abraham (Gen 22:17); in the descendants of Judah (Gen 49:10), who received eternal title to the scepter of Israel; and in the star that the pagan prophet Balaam saw on the distant horizon (Numbers 24:17). These seeds bore fruit later in the biblical record.

**MEANING AND MESSAGE**

The Pentateuch provided ancient Israel with an awesome picture of God, an image that separated him from the false gods of other nations. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the only God—no other god exists (Deuteronomy 4:32-40). Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is a God of grace; he deals patiently with sinners, saving them and calling them to covenant relationship with himself, revealing his name and his will to them, providing for their needs, and walking with them in fellowship and love.

In the account of creation, the Pentateuch reveals important lessons about the universe. God created the world by speaking it into being. He created a perfect world, characterized by light and life and order. But the devastating effects of sin replaced light with darkness, life with death, and peace and order with confusion and pain. Yet God promised ultimate victory, guaranteeing that the head of the serpent who introduced sin to humankind would be crushed.

The Pentateuch introduces us to God’s covenant relationships with human beings. All of God’s covenants are gracious. He invites his human partners into a special relationship and calls on them to respond with holy living because of the special role they play in his plan of redemption. By grace, God drew Noah into covenant relationship by saving him from the Flood. By grace, God called Abraham out of the pagan city of Ur in Babylonia to establish a covenant relationship. By grace, God called Israel to be his people, and at Mount Sinai God confirmed for the nation his covenant with Abraham.

Although the covenants all originated in God’s gracious heart, they still called for an obedient response from the human partners. However, God never wanted this obedience to be driven by a mere sense of duty or quid pro quo. Instead, the text of the Pentateuch reveals a consistent pattern of conduct for the Lord’s people to follow in loving obedience and grateful response to God’s saving work. Because God chose Israel to be his people and bound himself to them in covenant relationship, he desired that they express their faithfulness to him.

Despite the unified message of Scripture that people have never been saved by keeping the law (see Genesis 15:6; Deuteronomy 7:7-8; Psalms 40:5; Isaiah 1:10-20; Romans 4:1-17; Galatians 3:6-7), many people erroneously think that people in the Old Testament were saved by keeping the law. However, grace has always preceded law. God rescued Israel from their slavery in Egypt before he gave them the law. While God required the Israelites to obey the law in order to receive blessing and to fulfill the plan God had for them, the motivation for their obedience should have been gratitude that God had saved Israel and revealed his will to them.

In short, the Pentateuch contains the Torah—the instruction—that God gave Israel at its founding. Priests were to teach it and model it (Deuteronomy 33:10; 2 Chronicles 15:3; 19:8; Malachi 2:6, 9; Ephesians 7:10; Jeremiah 18:18; Ezekiel 7:26). Psalmists praised it (e.g., Psalms 19:7-14; 119), prophets appealed to it (Isaiah 1:10; 5:24; 8:20; 30:9; 51:7), faithful kings ruled by it (1 Kings 2:2-4; 2 Kings 14:6; 22:11; 23:25), righteous citizens lived by it (Psalm 1), and unfaithful Israel was judged by it (Deuteronomy 28:15-68; 2 Chronicles 36:11-21). Only Jesus Christ kept it and completely fulfilled it (Matthew 3:15).

**FURTHER READING**

VICTOR HAMILTON
Handbook on the Pentateuch (2005)

G. HERBERT LIVINGSTON
The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment (1974)
Genesis is the book of beginnings—of the universe and of humanity, of sin and its catastrophic effects, and of God’s plan to restore blessing to the world through his chosen people. God began his plan when he called Abraham and made a covenant with him. Genesis traces God’s promised blessings from generation to generation, to the time of bondage and the need for redemption from Egypt. It lays the foundation for God’s subsequent revelation, and most other books of the Bible draw on its contents. Genesis is a source of instruction, comfort, and edification.

SETTING
When Genesis was written, the children of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. They had recently been released from bondage and guided through the desert to meet the Lord at Mount Sinai, where he had established his covenant relationship with them and had given them his law through Moses. Israel was now poised to enter the Promised Land and receive the inheritance that God had promised Abraham.

While enslaved in Egypt, the Israelites had adopted many pagan ideas and customs from their Egyptian masters (e.g., Exod 32:1-4). They were influenced by false concepts of God, the world, and human nature (e.g., Exod 32), and were reduced to being slaves rather than owners and managers of the land. Perhaps they had forgotten the great promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or perhaps they had concluded that the promises would never be fulfilled.

Before entering the Promised Land, the Israelites needed to understand the nature of God, his world, and their place in it more clearly. They needed to embrace their identity as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Genesis provided the needed understanding.
SUMMARY

Genesis traces God’s work to overcome with blessing the curse that came on humankind because of sin. The book arranges family traditions, genealogies, historical events, and editorial comments into a single, sustained argument. Every section but the first has the heading, “This is the account” (or These are the generations; Hebrew toledoth); each of the toledoth sections explains the history of a line of descent. In each case, a deterioration of well-being is followed by an increasing focus on God’s plan to bless the world. This plan is the basis for God’s covenant with his people; as the blessing develops, the covenant is clarified. By the end of the book, the reader is ready for the fulfillment of the promises in Israel’s redemption from bondage (see Exodus).

The first section (1:1–2:3) does not have the toledoth heading, and logically so—it is the account of creation “in the beginning” (1:1). The work of creation is wrapped in God’s approval and blessing as he fulfills his plan.

The next section (2:4–4:26) focuses on the creation of human life (2:4–25) and traces what became of God’s creation because of Adam’s and Eve’s sin (3:1–13), the curse on their sin (3:14–24), and the extension of sin to their descendants (4:1–24). Humanity no longer enjoyed God’s rest; instead, they experienced guilt and fear. So they fled from God and developed a proud civilization.

Independence from God resulted in the downward drift of human life (5:1–6:8). The genealogy of 5:1-32 begins by recalling that human beings were made in God’s image and were blessed by him (5:1-2). As the genealogy is traced, the death of each generation reminds the reader of the curse, with Enoch providing a ray of hope that the curse is not final. In 6:1-8, we learn that God regretted having made humans and decided to judge the earth. Noah, however, received God’s favor and provided a source of hope (5:29; 6:8).

The next section (6:9–9:29) brings the curse of judgment through the flood followed by blessing in a new beginning. A renewed creation began, purged of the abominable evil that had invaded and ruined the human race.

The world’s population expanded into various nations (10:1–11:9) whose people were bent on disobedience. The population of the earth by Shem,
Ham, and Japheth seemed fruitful (10:1-32), but the nations were divided by languages and boundaries (10:5, 20, 31). Because of their rebellion, God dispersed them to prevent greater wickedness (11:1-9).

After the chaos of the scattered nations, 11:10-26 brings the focus to Abram, through whom God chose to bring blessing to all. The rest of the book (11:27–50:26) tells of God’s blessing Abram and his descendants. God first made a covenant with Abram (11:27–25:11), promising him a great nation, land, and name. As time went on, God made the specific terms of the covenant clearer, and Abram’s faith grew deeper.

In each generation, Genesis gives a brief account of the families that are not Israel’s ancestors before turning to the line of Israel. After briefly reporting what became of Ishmael (25:12-18), Genesis traces in detail what happened to Isaac and his family (25:19–35:29).

True to the pattern of the book, Esau’s line (Edom) is dealt with briefly (36:1–37:1) before the chosen line of Jacob the heir. The final section (37:2–50:26) concerns Jacob’s family, centering on the life of Joseph. In the land of Canaan, the family became corrupt under Canaanite influence to the point of beginning to merge with them (ch 38). To preserve the line of blessing, God sent the family into Egypt where they could flourish, remain separate (43:32; 46:34), and become a great nation. The book closes with the promise of the Lord’s coming to rescue his people from Egypt (50:24-26).

AUTHORSHIP

Both Scripture and tradition attribute the Pentateuch (Genesis—Deuteronomy) to Moses. No one was better qualified than Moses to have written this book. Since he was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22), he had the literary skills to collect and edit Israel’s traditions and records and to compose this theological treatise. His unique communion with God gave him the spiritual illumination, understanding, and inspiration needed to guide him. He had good reason to write this work—to provide Israel with the theological and historical foundation for the Exodus and the covenant at Sinai, and to establish the new nation in accord with the promises made to their ancestors.

Most scholars, however, do not accept that Moses wrote Genesis. The prevailing critical view, called the Documentary Hypothesis, is that Genesis was compiled from various sources by different groups of people. In such approaches, there is seldom a word about divine revelation or inspiration. For those who understand the Bible as God’s inspired word, such theories often seem unnecessarily complicated and conjectural. Genesis can be understood much more straightforwardly as the product of Moses’ genius under God’s inspiration with later editorial adjustments. (See further “Introduction to the Pentateuch: Authorship,” p. 12).

COMPOSITION

Biblical scholars of all stripes have always acknowledged that various sources were used in writing Genesis and other historical texts in the Bible (such as Kings and Luke). Moses used collections of family records, oral traditions, ancient accounts of primeval events, and genealogies to write Genesis. Those sources could have been incorporated as received, or the author may have changed their style and wording, stitching them together with additional material for the particular purpose of tracing the foundations of Israelite faith.
Genesis also includes passages and expressions that are obviously later editorial glosses. Some sections (such as the list of Edomite kings, 36:31-43) could have been added during the early days of the monarchy. There is no conflict in saying that Genesis was authored by Moses and augmented by subsequent editors whose work was guided by the Holy Spirit. Given these considerations, conservative scholars find it plausible that the biblical material accurately records actual events.

**LITERARY CHARACTER**

Genesis includes various types of literature. Several suggestions have been made as to the nature of the materials.

**Myth.** Mythological literature explains the origins of things symbolically through the deeds of gods and supernatural creatures. For ancient peoples, myths were beliefs that explained life and reality. Whole systems of ritual activities were developed to ensure that the forces of fertility, life, and death would continue year by year. Some of these rituals gave rise to cult prostitution (see 38:15, 21-22).

It would be very difficult to classify the material in Genesis as myth. Israel had one God, not a multitude. The nation of Israel had a beginning, a history, and a future hope. They saw God, rather than gods and other supernatural creatures, as the primary actor in the world. Their worship was not cosmic, magical, or superstitious, but a reenactment of their own rescue from Egypt and a celebration of God’s factual intervention in history and their hope in his promises.

If Genesis uses elements of mythological language, it is to display a deliberate contrast with pagan concepts and to show that the Lord God is sovereign over such ideas. For example, the ancients worshiped the sun as a god, but in Genesis the sun serves the Creator’s wishes (1:14-18). The book of Genesis is a cemetery for lifeless myths and dead gods. Genesis is not myth.

**Etiology.** A number of scholars describe the Genesis narratives as etiologies, stories that explain the causes of factual reality or traditional beliefs. The implication is that such stories were made up for explanatory purposes and do not describe historical events. For example, if one says that the story of Cain and Abel was made up to explain why shepherds and farmers do not get along, the account loses its integrity as factual history.

Etiological elements certainly occur in Genesis, because the book gives the foundation and rationale for almost everything that Israel would later do. For example, the creation account of Gen 2 ends with the explanation, “This explains why a man leaves his father and mother. . . .” The event as it happened explains why marriage was conducted the way it was, but to say that a story explains something is quite different from saying that the story was fabricated to explain it. The stories of Genesis are not fictional tales invented to explain later customs and beliefs.

**History.** Many scholars object to regarding Genesis as history, for two basic reasons: (1) Genesis explains events as caused by God, and the inclusion of the supernatural is regarded as proof that the material is theological reflection and thus not historically reliable; and (2) the events in Genesis cannot be validated from outside sources; no other records have demonstrated that Abraham existed or that any of his family history occurred.

**Genesis is not interested in parading Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as examples of morality. Therefore, it does not moralize on them. [Genesis] is bringing together the promises of God to the patriarchs and the faithfulness of God in keeping those promises.**

Victor P. Hamilton
The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17, p. 46
Modern philosophies of history exclude the supernatural as an explanation of historical events, but there is no reason to do so arbitrarily. If God exists and is able to act, then he might very well be the ultimate cause of all historical events and the immediate cause of specific historical events. The Israelites were not as distrustful of supernatural events as are modern critics; they experienced such events frequently as God acted among them to fulfill the promises recorded in Genesis.

It is true that no direct evidence of the patriarchs or the events in Genesis has been found, but archaeology confirms the plausibility of Genesis by showing that the historical situation in that era (Middle Bronze I, 2000–1800 BC) corresponds closely to what Genesis portrays. It is unlikely that this would be so if Genesis were not an accurate record of the facts. When all the archaeological and historical data are assembled around the events, they fit perfectly within the setting, and the details of the narratives make perfectly good sense.

Theological Interpretation. Genesis was not intended as a chronicle of the lives of the patriarchs, a history for history’s sake, or a complete biography. It is clearly a theological interpretation of selected records of the nation’s ancestors, but this does not destroy its historicity. Interpretations of an event can differ, but the offering of interpretations is a good witness to the actuality of the events. The author retold the events in his own way, but he did not invent them.

Tradition. What was thus committed to writing is tradition in the reverent care of literary genius. Scholars prefer words such as “traditions” or even “sagas” to describe these narratives. Doing so only makes the claim that the stories preserve the memory of the people of Israel; it makes no claim that the events themselves are historical. The biblical understanding, however, is that these stories were recorded under divine inspiration and are therefore historically true and reliable.

In all probability, Abram brought the primeval accounts and the family genealogies from Mesopotamia, and stories about the family were added to these collections. Joseph could easily have preserved all the traditions, both written and oral, in Egypt with his own records. Moses could then have compiled the works substantially in their present form while adding his editorial comments. Since he worked under God’s inspiration and guidance, the narratives record exactly what God wanted written and correspond precisely to reality.

Instructional Literature. Since Genesis is the first book of the Pentateuch (the “Torah” or Law), it may be best to classify it as “Torah Literature” (Hebrew torah, “instruction, law”). Genesis is instructional literature that lays the foundation for the Law. It is theological interpretation of the historical traditions standing behind the covenant at Sinai. In the way it is written, one may discern that Moses was preparing his readers to receive God’s law and the fulfillment of the promises made to their forefathers. Genesis is therefore a unique work. Theology, history, and tradition come together to instruct God’s people and prepare them for blessing.

MEANING AND MESSAGE
Israel’s most important questions were answered by the Genesis narratives. Life and death, the possession of the land of Canaan, and how Israel ended up in Egypt are explained as God’s providential working in history. Israel was part of God’s plan in this world. His plan had
a starting point at creation and will have an end point in the future
when the promises are completely fulfilled.

Israel, the Chosen People. The central theme of Genesis is that God
made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. He promised to
make them his own people, heirs of the land of Canaan, and a blessing
to the world. Genesis gave Israel the theological and historical basis for
its existence as God’s chosen people.

Israel could trace its ancestry to the patriarch Abraham and its des-
tiny to God’s promises (12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-8). Because the promise
of a great nation was crucial, much of Genesis is devoted to family con-
cerns of the patriarchs and their wives, their sons and heirs, and their
birthrights and blessings. The record shows how God preserved and
protected the chosen line through the patriarchs. Israel thus knew that
they had become the great nation promised to Abraham. Their future
was certainly not in slavery to the Egyptians, but in Canaan, where they
would live as a free nation and as the people of the living God, and
where they could mediate God’s blessings to the people of the world.

Blessing and Curse. The entire message of Genesis turns on the motifs
of blessing and cursing. The promised blessing would give the patri-
archs innumerable descendants and give the descendants the land of
promise; the blessing would make them famous in the earth, enable
them to flourish and prosper, and appoint them to bring others into the
covenant blessings. The curse, meanwhile, would alienate, deprive, and
disinherit people from the blessings. The effects of the curse are felt by
the whole race as death and pain and as God’s judgment on the world.

These motifs continue throughout the Bible. Prophets and priests
spoke of even greater blessings in the future and an even greater curse
for those who refuse God’s gift of salvation and its blessings. The Bible
reminds God’s people not to fear human beings, but to fear God, who
has the power to bless and to curse.

Good and Evil. In Genesis, that which is good is blessed by God: It
produces, enhances, preserves, and harmonizes with life. That which is
evil is cursed: It causes pain, diverts from what is good, and impedes
or destroys life. Genesis traces the perpetual struggle between good
and evil that characterizes our fallen human race. God will bring about
the greater good, build the faith of his people, and ultimately triumph
over all evil (cp. Rom 8:28).

God’s Plan. Genesis begins with the presupposition that God exists
and that he has revealed himself in word and deed to Israel’s ancestors.
It does not argue for the existence of God; it simply begins with God
and shows how everything falls into place when the sovereign God
works out his plan to establish Israel as the means of restoring blessing
to the whole world.

God’s Rule. Genesis is the fitting introduction to the founding of theoc-
arcy, the rule of God over all creation that was to be established through
his chosen people. Genesis lays down the initial revelation of God’s sov-
ereignty. He is the Lord of the universe who will move heaven and earth
to bring about his plan. He desires to bless people, but he will not toler-
ate rebellion and unbelief. His promises are great, and he is fully able
to bring them to fruition. To participate in his plan has always required
faith, for without faith it is impossible to please him (Heb 11:6).

FURTHER READING

VICTOR P. HAMILTON
The Book of Genesis (1990)
DEREK KIDNER
Genesis (1967)
KENNETH A. MATHEWS
Genesis (1996)
ALLEN P. ROSS
Creation and Blessing (1988)
Genesis in Cornerstone Biblical
GORDON WENHAM
Genesis 16–50 (1994)
1. CREATION (1:1–2:3)  
In the Beginning (1:1-2)

1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

Day One: Light, Darkness
3. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. 5. God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

Six Days of Creation (1:3-31)

Day Two: Sky, Waters
6. Then God said, “Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.” 7. And that is what happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. 8. God called the space “sky.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

Day Three: Land, Sea, Vegetation
9. Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened. 10. God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.”

The Creation (1:1–2:3)

The creation account in Genesis is foundational to the message of the entire Bible, not just of Genesis or the Pentateuch. Understanding the early chapters of Genesis is thus crucial to forming a biblical worldview.

This part of Genesis deals with fundamental questions: Who created the world, and for what purpose? Why is the world in its present condition? Genesis answers these questions, dispelling the idolatry that Israel had acquired from their pagan masters in Egypt. In the Promised Land, they would also be surrounded by people who believed in many false gods and worshiped created things rather than the Creator. Genesis taught Israel that the one true God created and has absolute authority over all things; he alone is worthy of worship.

Every worldview attempts to explain where the world came from, what is wrong with the world, and how it can be set right again. The creation account in Genesis teaches that as God made the world, it was “very good” (1:31). Through creation, God turned disorder into restful order and emptiness into the fullness of abundant life. In this environment, humans enjoyed unbroken fellowship with their Creator until their rebellion severed that fellowship and implanted evil in human hearts (ch 3; see chs 4–6). The world’s evil does not come from some defect in creation; God put the world under a curse because of human rebellion.

Since that first rebellion, humans have been alienated from the Creator and no longer recognize his presence and authority. This alienation results in shame, fractured relationships with God and other humans, estrangement from the rest of creation, and death (3:7–19). Since that time, God has been working purposefully in history to restore humans to fellowship with him, which he is doing through Jesus Christ. Restored humans are a new creation (Gal 6:15); through Jesus, eternal life is open to all and God will one day renew all things (see Isa 65:17–25; Rom 8:19–22). The whole cosmos will be made new (Rev 21:1).

1:1–2:3 These verses introduce the Pentateuch (Genesis—Deuteronomy) and teach Israel that the world was created, ordered, and populated by the one true God and not by the gods of surrounding nations. • God blessed three specific things: animal life (1:22-25), human life (1:27), and the Sabbath day (2:3). This trilogy of blessings highlights the Creator’s plan: Humankind was made in God’s image to enjoy sovereign dominion over the creatures of the earth and to participate in God’s Sabbath rest.

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (or In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, . . . or When God began to create the heavens and the earth, . . .): This statement summarizes the entire creation account (1:3–2:3). Already a key question—Who created the world?—is answered (see also Prov 8:22-31; John 1:1-3). Although the modern naturalistic mindset rejects this question and that of creation’s purpose, Genesis affirms God’s role and purpose in creation.

• The common name for God (Hebrew 'elohim) emphasizes his grand supremacy. The word 'elohim is plural, but the verbs used with it are usually singular, reflecting the consistent scriptural proclamation of a single, all-powerful God. • created (Hebrew bara’): In the OT, God is always the agent of creation expressed by this verb. It describes the making of something fresh and new—notably the cosmos (1:1, 21; 2:3), humankind (1:27), the Israelite nation (Isa 43:1), and the future new creation (Isa 65:17). • The heavens and the earth are the entire ordered cosmos.

1:2 This verse gives the background for the summary in 1:1 and the detailed description in 1:3–2:3. God’s creative utterances bring order to the chaotic state of the universe. • formless . . . empty (Hebrew tohu . . . bohu): This terse idiom means something like “wild and waste.” It sets a stark contrast to the final ordered state of the heavens and the earth (1:1). • deep waters
And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened. The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

Day Four: Sun, Moon, Stars
Then God said, “Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years. Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth.” And that is what happened. God made two great lights—the larger one to govern the day, and the smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

Day Five: Birds, Fish
Then God said, “Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind.” So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and

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**The Structure of the Creation Account**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formless</th>
<th>CHAOS</th>
<th>Empty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DAY 1 (1:3-5)</td>
<td>HEAVENS</td>
<td>DAY 4 (1:14-19)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Light, Dark</td>
<td>Sun, Moon, Stars</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAY 2 (1:6-8)</td>
<td>WATER &amp; SKY</td>
<td>DAY 5 (1:20-23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water, Sky</td>
<td>Birds, Fish</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAY 3 (1:9-13)</td>
<td>EARTH</td>
<td>DAY 6 (1:24-31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea, Land</td>
<td>Animals, Humans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formed</td>
<td>COSMOS</td>
<td>Filled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAY 7 (2:2-3)</td>
<td>Rest</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

[Hebrew tehom]: Some scholars say this alludes to the Mesopotamian goddess Tiamat (representing chaos), but Genesis views tehom as inhospitable chaos, not as a deity or goddess that God engaged in cosmic battle. *the Spirit of God*: God directly superintended the creation process.

**1:3-13** In the first three days, God formed the chaos into a habitable world.

**1:3 Then God said**: Nothing in Gen 1 is created apart from God’s powerful word (cp. Ps 33:6, 9). *“Let there be . . . ,” and there was*: God’s command enacted his will to create the world. God is not a part of creation or limited by it; he is the supreme ruler over everything (cp. Neh 9:6).

**1:4** Light is antithetical to chaotic darkness [1:2]; the light is declared good but the darkness is not (cp. John 1:5). God is the source of this light (cp. 1:14-19), God separated the light, as he did water (cp. 1:6-8), by his creative word. Light is associated with life and blessing (Job 38:19-20; Ps 19:1-6; 97:11; 104:19-20; Isa 60:19-20) and sets a boundary on the darkness that would destroy cosmic order. Darkness often typifies terror, death, and evil (see 15:12; Job 18:6, 18; Ps 88:12; Eph 5:11-12; 1 Jn 1:5).

**1:5 God called (or named)**: To name something is to exercise authority over it (see also 2:19-20). *day*: The Hebrew yom can refer to daylight (1:5a), to a 24-hour period (1:5b), or to an unspecified time period (2:4b; “When,” literally *in the day*, cp. Exod 20:8-11). *evening . . . morning*: The Hebrew day began at sundown, just as the first day began with darkness and brought the first morning light.

**1:6-8** The creation account describes the appearance of things from a human perspective. The sky is viewed as a shiny dome that is a buffer between two collections of water (cp. Job 37:18; Ezek 1:22). In the ancient Near East, the cosmos was understood as a three-tier system, with rain originating from the outermost tier (see 7:11-12 and note).

**1:9-10 Let the waters . . . flow together**: Other ancient cultures viewed the sea as a hostile force. Genesis shows God as further restraining chaos (see note on 1:2) by prescribing specific boundaries for the sea. The flood—an act of God’s judgment (6:7)—undid these boundaries and returned the earth to chaos (7:1-24).

**1:14-31** On days 4–6, God filled the domains that had been formed during days 1–3 (1:13-13).

**1:14 Let them . . . mark the seasons, days, and years**: The movement of the heavenly bodies defined Israel’s liturgical calendar, whose roots in creation gave a sacred timing to Israel’s festivals and celebrations (see Exod 23:15; Lev 23:4).

**1:16** In the surrounding pagan cultures, the two great lights were worshiped as deities, but in Genesis they serve God and humanity (see Ps 136:7-9; Jer 31:35). The sun and moon are not named; they are simply called *the larger one and the smaller one*. Not including their names may have reminded Israel that they were not gods. *govern*: Cp. 1:26, 28; Ps 136:9. *the stars*: The starry heavens testify to God’s creative power as they proclaim his glory (Ps 19:1; 148:3). They do not predict the future, as Israel’s neighbors believed (see Jer 10:2).

**1:21** Contrary to the pagan idea that the great sea creatures were co-eternal with God, Genesis states that God created them and is sovereign over them. The Hebrew word tanninim ("creatures") elsewhere refers to crocodiles (Ezek 29:3), powerful monsters (Jer 51:34), or the sea creature, Leviathan (Isa 27:1; cp. Job 41:1-34).
swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 Then God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”

23 And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

Day Six: Animals, Humankind

24 Then God said, “Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals.” And that is what happened. 25 God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

27 So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

28 Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

29 Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. 30 And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened. 31 Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

Sabbath Rest (2:1-3)

2 So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. 2 On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. 3 And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

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1:22 God blessed them: God’s blessing commissions and enables the fulfillment of what God has spoken (see “Blessing” at 48:8-20, p. 113). - Let the fish . . . let the birds: These directives define the blessing. The fish and birds are fertile by God’s command, not by pagan ritual, as some of Israel’s neighbors thought.

1:26 Let us make is more personal than the remote “Let there be” (e.g., 1:3, 6). - The plural us has inspired several explanations: (1) the Trinity; (2) the plural to denote majesty; (3) a plural to show deliberation with the self; and (4) God speaking with his heavenly court of angels. The concept of the Trinity—one true God who exists eternally in three distinct persons—was revealed at a later stage in redemptive history, making it unlikely that the human author intended that here. Hebrew scholars generally dismiss the plural of majesty view because the grammar does not clearly support it (the plural of majesty has not been demonstrated to be communicated purely through a plural verb). The plural of self-deliberation also lacks evidence; the only clear examples refer to Israel as a corporate unity (e.g., 2 Sam 24:14). God’s speaking to the heavenly court, however, is well-attested in the OT (see 3:22; 11:7; 1 Kgs 22:19-22; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; 38:7; Ps 89:5-6; Isa 6:1-8; Dan 10:12-13).

1:27 The first poetry of Genesis reflectively celebrates God’s climactic feat in creating humankind. - human beings: Or man; Hebrew reads ha’adam. - The descriptors in our image and like us are virtually synonymous in Hebrew. Humans enjoy a unique relationship with God. - They will reign: Humans represent the Creator as his ambassadors, vice-regents, and administrators on earth.

1:28 God blessed them: See note on 1:22; see also 17:16; 48:16; Deut 7:13. - said: God’s message to humankind is direct and intimate; we are stewards of his delegated authority. - Reign: As God’s vice-regents, humans are entrusted with the care and management of the world God created (see also 9:2; Ps 8:5-8).

1:29-30 These verses highlight the extent (throughout the earth) and variety (every seed-bearing plant . . . all the fruit trees) of God’s provision for humans, animals, and birds.

1:31 The Creator declares his work good seven times in ch 1; following the creation of human beings, God declares it all very good.

2:1-3 Humankind is the high point of God’s creative acts (1:26-31), while day 7 is the climax of the creation week. When God rested (or ceased), he endorsed all of creation—there was nothing more to do! This seven-day framework structured Israel’s week, with the seventh day as the precedent for their weekly Sabbath. The Sabbath was intended to celebrate God’s finished work; the seventh day would be set apart as holy and dedicated to the Creator, who also rested (see Exod 20:8-11; 31:12-17; cp. Matt 12:1-8; Rom 14:5-6; Col 2:16-17; Heb 4:1-11).

2:3 The first six days of creation involved separation (light from darkness, day from night, water from dry land). The last act of creation separated what is ordinary from what is holy, thus laying the foundation for Israel’s worship. It also anticipated a coming age of rest (Heb 4:1-11; 12:2; 13:14). - The absence of the usual “morning and evening” reflects the Creator’s willingness to enter into unending fellowship with humankind.
2:5  Gen 1:11
2:7  Gen 3:19

2:4–26 This account (see note on 2:4) of the heavens and the earth is not a second creation account; rather, it is a theological and historical expansion on 1:1–2:3. The focus is now on what the heavens and the earth.

Creation of Man and Woman (2:4b–25)

Creation of the Man

When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the Lord God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil.

Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land. Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.

Human Sexuality (1:27–28)

When God created the first human beings in his own image, he created them as sexual beings, male and female (1:27). Through their sexuality, they were to fill and govern the world (1:28) and provide intimate companionship for one another in marriage (2:18-25). Male and female sexuality is central to what it means to be human.

Sexual intimacy united the first man and woman as one being, an effect that sexual intimacy continues to have. Since biblical sexuality is not just physical but has the total person in view, it validates sexual relations only as part of the partners’ mutual commitment to each other’s ultimate good. The Bible speaks of engaging in sexual intercourse as literally “knowing” another person intimately (see note on 4:1). Since creation, the purpose of sexuality has been to join people in an intimate union of marriage—a permanent and loving heterosexual commitment—that God blesses and calls “very good” (1:27-28, 31). The sexual relationship cements the marriage bond in an intimacy that continues even when reproduction is no longer possible.

Although sexuality was created before sin, it did not emerge unscathed from human rebellion. Sexuality is a powerful force that is easily corrupted if not carefully channeled (see Lev 18; 1 Thes 4:3-8). Sexual intimacy apart from marital commitment perverts the order that God intended for creation. Incest, for example, violates sexual boundaries (see Lev 18:7-14), collapses families structures (see 19:30-38), and fragments the community. Whereas perverted sexuality tears the community down (see 38:1-30; 39:7-9; Judg 19:1-20:48) and exalts the individual (see 2 Sam 13:11-14), biblical sexuality builds up the sexual partners and the community.

Our sexual identity has been damaged through our fall into sin (ch 3), but God has redeemed it through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor 6:12-20; Eph 5:31-33). He restores sexual wholeness in those who trust his work in their lives by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:9-11, 15-20; 1 Thes 4:1-5). Those who commit their sexuality to Christ can testify to God’s love for his people (Eph 5:25-33).

2:4 This is the account (literally These are the generations): This or a similar phrase is repeated throughout Genesis, creating an internal outline for the book. In other occurrences, it introduces the genealogy or story of a key personality (5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2). Some have argued that the first half of 2:4 belongs with 1:1–2:3, but it is more likely the introduction to the account that follows.

2:5 cultivate: Work does not result from sin; it was part of the original structure of creation and is directly tied to human identity and purpose (1:28; 2:15).

2:6 springs (Or mist, as traditionally rendered): The word refers to subterranean springs that rose to the surface of the ground.

2:7 In 1:1–2:3, creation happens at a distance, by divine command (‘Let there be . . . and that is what happened’). In this account, the creative act is much more intimate (see also 2:8-9, 21-22). * from the dust of the ground: In Hebrew, ‘adamah (‘ground’) forms a wordplay with ‘adam (‘man’). The earth remains the definitive reference point for humans, who in death return to dust (3:17-19; 4:11; Job 4:19; 10:8-9; Isa 29:16). * breathed . . . into man’s nostrils: God’s breath is not imparted to other animals; only humans are formed in God’s image (1:27) and enjoy dialogue with their Creator (2:16-17; 3:8-13). They alone have spiritual awareness and moral conscience (see Job 32:8).
Creation of the Garden

Genesis 2:8

Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. The Lord God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flowed from the land of Eden, watering the garden and then dividing into four branches. The first branch, called the Pishon, flowed around the entire land of Havilah, where gold is found. The gold of that land is exceptionally pure; aromatic resin and onyx stone are also found there. The second branch, called the Gihon, flowed around the entire land of Cush. The third branch, called the Tigris, flowed east of the land of Asshur. The fourth branch is called the Euphrates.

The First Command

Genesis 2:15

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.

Biblical Marriage (2:18-25)

At the first wedding, God the Father gave the bride away to the groom and witnessed the couple’s interaction in his sanctuary-garden (2:18-25). Married love is thus a binding covenant commitment before God. Breaching that covenant (e.g., through adultery) is a crime against persons and against God, who is a divine witness to and guarantor of the marriage covenant (see Mal 2:10-16; cp. Gen 39:6-9; Jer 3:1; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Heb 13:4). Although marriage is exclusive, it is not private. It is legally declared in public, with community recognition, witnesses, and accountability (see Lev 20:10-12; Deut 22:22; Jer 29:20-23).

Marriage is also a metaphor of the Lord’s relationship with his people, first with Israel (see Exod 19:3-6; 20:2-6; 34:14; Isa 54:5; Ezek 16:1-63; Hos 2:19-20), and then with the church (see 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:21-33). A marriage points to something greater than itself—God’s people (Christ’s “bride”) await the return of Christ (the “groom”). Married Christians are called to live in unity and dignity as they anticipate the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-9). Christ will live forever with his faithful people in glory (Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9).

2:8-14 Analogous to the sacred time marked out on the seventh day of creation (2:2-3), the sacred space of the garden in Eden was separate from the surrounding world. It functioned as a garden-temple or sanctuary because the Lord manifested his presence there in a special way.

2:8 Eden was the general location in which the garden was placed, not the garden itself. The term could mean “plain,” “delight,” or “fertility.” The description that follows favors the idea of fertility. In the east: The exact location of Eden is left to speculation, but it was east of Canaan, Israel’s later home.

God placed the man in the garden for divine fellowship and physical blessing (see also 2:15 and note).

2:9 Beauty and bounty characterized humanity’s original environment (cp. 13:10). The tree of life represented God’s presence and provision. The one who ate of it would have everlasting life (3:22), which made it a rich image for later Israelite and Christian reflection (Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19). The candlestick in Israel’s Tabernacle may have been a stylized representation of it (Exod 25:31-35).

Eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil enabled humanity’s capacity for wisdom (3:6) and moral discernment (3:5, 22; cp. Deut 1:39, “innocent”). Eating from it represented a human grasp for autonomy and wisdom that were God’s alone (cp. Prov 30:1-4). Humans side-stepped God’s revelation as the means of moral discernment, flaunting their independence rather than submitting to God’s will (cp. Prov 1:7). Choosing human wisdom over God’s instruction brings death and destruction (see Ps 19:7-9; Ezek 28:6, 15-17).

2:10-14 This detailed description portrays the eastern region around Eden as a mountain with rivers flowing out to the world. Eden’s beauty and fertility enriched the whole earth.

2:10 The river that was watering the garden was a material blessing (bringing agricultural fertility) and a symbol of God’s presence (cp. Ps 46:4; Ezek 47:1-12; Zech 14:8; Rev 22:1-2). Dividing into four branches (literally heads): The common understanding is that one river had its source in Eden, flowed down through the garden, and then split into the four rivers named.

2:11 The Pishon and the Gihon (2:13) cannot be identified with certainty. If the land of Havilah was in southeast Arabia or on the African coast, as some biblical data suggest (see 10:7, 25:18; 1 Sam 15:7), then the Pishon was possibly the Nile River. Josephus thought that Havilah and the Pishon were in India (Antiquities 1.1.3). Two other proposals suggest: (1) rivers in the mountains of eastern Turkey where the Tigris and Euphrates (2:14) also flow, and (2) the marshy delta near the Persian Gulf. Current geographical conditions make any theory impossible to prove conclusively.

2:12 The magnificence and fertility of the garden are pictured as spreading to the surrounding regions through the rivers flowing out from it. The four rivers possibly imply that the garden’s bounty flowed out to the four corners of the earth. Gold and onyx were later used for decorating the Tabernacle, the Temple (Exod 25:3-9; 1 Chr 29:2), and the priests’ clothing (Exod 28:9-14, 20). Resin was used in sacred incense (Exod 30:34).

2:13 Gihon: Though unknown, proposals have included the Nile (as in the Greek version of Jer 2:18; Josephus, Antiquities 1.1.3), the Jordan, or, according to Jewish tradition, a river that formerly ran through the Kidron Valley (1 Kgs 1:33; 2 Chr 33:14). Although Cush is the name of ancient Ethiopia, Mesopotamian regions associated with Babylon seem to be the immediate setting (see 10:8); Cush is possibly the land of the Kassites, a dynasty ruling in Babylonia.

2:14 Tigris . . . Euphrates: These well-known rivers flow from the mountains of eastern Turkey.
Genesis 2:25

2:16 Gen 3:1-3
2:17 Gen 3:1-16-17 Deut 30:15, 19-20 Rom 6:23 Jas 1:15
2:18 Gen 3:12 Prov 18:22
2:19 Gen 1:20-25
2:22 1 Cor 11:8-9 1 Tim 2:11
2:23 Gen 29:14 Eph 5:28-30
2:24 *Matt 19:5 *1 Cor 6:16 Eph 5:31
2:25 Gen 3:7, 10-11

16 But the Lord God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat it fruit, you are sure to die.”

Creation of the Woman

18 Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” 19 So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. 20 He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

The Location of Eden (2:8-14). Eden might have been located in the mountains of Ararat or near the Persian Gulf (see notes on 2:8-14). Possibilities for the four rivers (2:10-14) exist in either location (see note on 2:11). Eden represented God’s presence on earth that was withdrawn at the Fall and reintroduced at Sinai (see Exod 3:1-6; 24:9-18; 40:34-38).

2:15 to tend and watch over: The garden required maintenance and oversight. Tending the Garden was humanity’s dignifying work. These roles in God’s garden-sanctuary were later applied to God’s Tabernacle (see Lev 8:35; Num 3:5-10; 4:46-49).

2:17 except (literally but you must not eat): This prohibition is given in the same legal format as Israel’s Ten Commandments (see Exod 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-21). The Lord built law and obedience into the fabric of his covenant relationship with humanity. * the knowledge of good and evil: See note on 2:9.

* you are sure to die: The consequences of disobedience would be immediate spiritual death (loss of relationship with God) and eventual physical death (see 3:22-23; Eccl 12:6-7).

2:18 It is not good: This is God’s first negative assessment of an otherwise excellent creation (1:31). The Lord God is portrayed as a father who obtains a bride for his son (cp. 24:1-67). * The answer to the man’s need is a helper who is just right for him: She is his perfect complement, made in the same image of God (1:26-27), given the same commission (1:28; 2:15), and obligated by the same prohibition (2:17). The man cannot fulfill his created purpose alone.

2:19-20 to see what he would call them: Following God’s example (1:5, 8, 10), the man chose a name for each of the creatures. In so doing, he was exercising his reign over creation (1:26, 28).

2:19 the man: Or Adam, and so throughout the chapter.

2:21 took out one of the man’s ribs (or took a part of the man’s side): Cp. 2:23; Eph 5:28.

2:23 Adam recognized the woman as a “helper just right for him” (2:20). His celebration of her in poetry and song observed his unity with her, not their distinctions (cp. 29:14). * Adam declares that “She will be called ‘woman’” (Hebrew *’ishah) because she was taken from ‘man’ (Hebrew *’ish). He understood the nature of their connection (see Eph 5:28-29). Adam had earlier assessed the animals without finding the characteristics he needed in a partner. How different this evaluation is!

2:24 Marriage between a man and a woman is not just a human social construct but is rooted in the created order. * a man leaves . . . and is joined: Marriage entails a shift of loyalty from parents to spouse. * the two are united into one: Marriage and its commitments make it the most fundamental covenant relationship observed among humans. Marriage is a powerful image of Israel’s covenant with God (Hos 2:14-23) and of Christ’s relationship to the church (Eph 5:22-32). Marriage is designed as an inseparable, exclusive relationship between a man and a woman. The family unit creates is the basic building block of human society.

2:25 both naked: Prior to the Fall (ch 3), nakedness reflected innocence and trust. After the Fall, it denoted vulnerability and shame (see 9:22-23; Lev 18:1-23; Isa 47:3). Shame is more than embarrassment; it connotes exploitation and humiliation (see Deut 28:48; Isa 58:7; Jas 2:15-16).
The Ruin of God’s Creation (3:1-24)

Temptation to Sin

3 The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

“Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied.

“It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”

“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

Man and Woman Rebel against the Creator

6 The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

God Interrogates the Man and Woman

8 When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees.

9 Then the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

10 He replied, “I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.”

11 “Who told you that you were naked?” the Lord God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”

12 The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”

13 Then the Lord God asked the woman, “What have you done?”

3:1-24 The rebellion of the man and the woman shattered their unity and harmony with earth, animals, each other, and God.

3:1 Genesis describes the deceiver as a serpent, one of the animals God created (see also 3:14 and note). He is later identified as Satan, the great enemy of God’s people (Rev 12:9; 20:2). His manipulative language and his disguise as a serpent, the shrewdest of all creatures, show him as a master deceiver. Satan has various methods for opposing God’s people (see 1 Chr 21:1; Zech 3:1-2); deception remains among his key strategies (cp. 2 Cor 11:3, 14). The Hebrew term for shrewd (‘arum) can be positive (“prudent,” Prov 14:8) or negative (“cunning,” as here; Job 5:12). It forms a wordplay with “naked” (‘arummim) in 2:25. Adam and Eve were naked and vulnerable; the serpent was shrewd and cunning. Probably the serpent asked the woman because the prohibition was given to Adam prior to Eve’s creation (see 2:16-17). Adam was probably aware of the serpent’s cunning, having assessed and named all the animals before Eve was created (2:19-20, 23). Did God really say? The deceiver began by twisting God’s language to cast doubt on God’s goodness. God’s original prohibition applied to only one tree (2:16-17), not to all (any) of them.

3:2-3 The woman attempted to set the record straight; in the process, she belittled the privileges God had given her and her husband in several ways: (1) She reduced God’s “freely eat” (2:16) to may eat; (2) she downplayed God’s emphasis on the availability of fruit from every tree but one (2:17); (3) she added not touching to God’s prohibition against eating (2:17); and (4) she softened the certainty of death (2:17).

3:4-5 You won’t die! This is the exact negation of God’s clear and emphatic words: “you are sure to die” (2:17). The serpent capitalizes on the woman’s uncertainty by baldly denying the penalty and quickly diverting her attention to the supposed prize—to be like God, knowing both good and evil. The deceiver falsely implies that this would be an uncomplicated good for them. The term rendered God is Elohim; it can also mean “divine beings” (i.e., God and the angels; e.g., Ps 29:1; 89:7).

3:6 She saw . . . she wanted: The woman made two grave errors. (1) She assumed the right to decide what was and was not good, though God alone has this right; and (2) she coveted God’s wisdom (see Deut 5:21). her husband . . . with her: Although Scripture is clear about the woman’s central role in the Fall (cp. 1 Tim 2:14), the man was clearly present and culpable as well. He comes to center stage in the verses that follow and in biblical theology. The consequence of his sin for the entire human race was immense. The Good News is that in Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, God has made salvation universally available (Rom 5:12-21).

3:7 Shame is opposite to the naked innocence Adam and Eve enjoyed prior to their rebellion (2:25). Their relationship with one another and with God was fractured. sewed fig leaves together: These covered their physical bodies, but not their shame. They could not mend their broken relationships (see also 3:21 and note).

3:8 When the cool evening breezes were blowing: The Hebrew has traditionally been interpreted as referring to the cool part of the day, most likely the evening. Others think that the language refers to a powerful manifestation of God’s presence (a theophany; see Exod 19:16-25; 1 Sam 7:10) as a storm. If this view is correct, the man and the woman were hiding from the sound of the Lord appearing in judgment (see 2 Sam 5:24; Ps 29). the man: Or Adam, and so throughout the chapter. God put trees in the garden as an environment for humanity to enjoy fellowship with God. Now the man and woman used them to evade the divine presence.

3:9-10 Where are you? The true intent of this rhetorical question is revealed in the man’s answer (3:10). The real question was, why are you hiding? (cp. 4:9-10). I was afraid because I was naked: Modesty was not the issue. The shame brought on by rebellion drove Adam and his wife to hide. Possibly they also feared punishment (see note on 3:8).

3:12 It was the woman you gave me: Rather than confessing, the man became evasive. He blamed the woman for giving him the fruit and God for giving him the woman.

3:13 What have you done? is another rhetorical question that is really an extrapolation of horror (cp. 4:10). The serpent deceived me: As the man implicated the woman (3:12), the woman accused the serpent. The serpent did play...
The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”

**God Indicts and Convicts**

14 Then the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild. You will crawl on your belly, groveling in the dust as long as you live.

15 And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

16 Then he said to the woman, “I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.”

17 And to the man he said,

**ADAM** (2:4–3:24)

Adam was the first man, the father of the human race. God created the first couple in his image to populate the earth and rule the created order (1:26-31). God made Adam from earth and breathed life into him (2:7); he was to cultivate the garden (2:15), name the animals (2:19-20), and follow God’s instructions (1:28; 2:16-17). God created the woman as a companion and helper for Adam (2:18-22). Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib portrays the unity that God intended for man and woman in marriage (2:23-25).

After the serpent deceived Eve into rejecting God’s rule, Adam also rebelled (3:1-6). Their willful disobedience disrupted their relationship (3:7) and separated them from God. God looked for Adam after his rebellion; he was hiding among the trees, already aware of his alienation (3:8). When God questioned him, Adam blamed Eve and, by implication, God (3:12). Adam’s rebellion brought hardship in governing the earth as well as physical and spiritual death (3:17-19, 22). God provided animal skins to cover Adam and Eve (3:21), and promised that Eve’s offspring would defeat Satan (3:15; see Rom 16:20; Rev 12:1-9; 20:1-10).

Adam was a historical individual (4:25; 5:1-5; 1 Chr 1:1; Hos 6:7; Luke 3:38; Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22, 45; 1 Tim 2:13-14; Jude 1:14) who represents humanity as a whole. God’s mandates (1:26-30) and curses (3:16-19) affected not only Adam and Eve, but the entire human race. Adam represents the separation from God that all humanity experiences.

The apostle Paul contrasted those represented by Adam, the first man, with those who follow Christ, the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45-50; see Rom 5:12-21; 8:5-11, 20-22). Those represented by Adam live only in him; they partake of his sin, his alienation from God and creation, and his spiritual death. Those who follow Christ live by faith in him. They are recreated in Christ’s image and become “new people” who partake of a new creation (see Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 5:17). The barriers Adam raised are removed by Christ (Rom 5:1; 2 Cor 5:19; Gal 3:27-28; 6:15; Eph 2:14-16); Christ restores what Adam lost.

a role and would be punished (3:14), but that did not release the woman or the man from their guilt.

3:14-19 The parties were judged in the order of their transgression—serpent, woman, man. Each received a punishment unique to his or her situation, and each had a key relationship altered. God is principled in judgment, not fickle; each punishment is proportionate to the offense.

3:14 to the serpent: Though later revelation identifies the deceiver as Satan, it is the created animal who was cursed, like the ground (3:17). *Groveling in the dust* is a posture of humiliation and defeat (Ps 72:9; Mic 7:17).

3:15 hostility: The prophet Isaiah envisions the day when the Messiah’s kingdom will restore all of creation to a harmonious state like the Garden of Eden before humans sinned (see Isa 11:8). *her offspring* (literally her seed): This collective noun can refer to a single descendant or many. The ancient Near Eastern concept of corporate solidarity (e.g., “you and your descendants,” 28:14) is also behind this description of the ongoing hostility that would exist between humans and snakes. The pattern is set using singular terms (He . . . you). Christian interpreters have traditionally understood this verse as a prophecy of Christ, the seed of Abraham and the culmination of the woman’s seed (Gal 3:16; 4:4). *strike (Or bruise, in both occurrences): The striking of his heel is a reference to the suffering of God’s servant (see Isa 53), while striking the serpent’s head—a more definitive blow—is ultimately fulfilled in Christ’s death, resurrection, and final victory over Satan (1 Cor 15:55-57; Rev 12:7-9; 20:7-10).

3:16 Judgment falls on the woman’s unique role of childbearing and on her relationship with her husband. *And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you* (Or And though you will have desire for your husband, / he will rule over you): The marriage relationship now included an element of antagonism rather than just security and fulfillment. New life in Christ allows for the restoration of a man and a woman’s marriage relationship (Eph 5:18-32; cp. Matt 20:25-28).

3:17-19 God highlighted his original
“Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree
 whose fruit I commanded you not to eat,
 the ground is cursed because of you.
 All your life you will struggle to
 scratch a living from it.
 It will grow thorns and thistles for you,
 though you will eat of its grains.
 By the sweat of your brow
 will you have food to eat
 until you return to the ground
 from which you were made.
 For you were made from dust,
 and to dust you will return.”

Expulsion and Hope

20 Then the man—Adam—named his wife
 Eve, because she would be the mother of all
 who live. 21 And the Lord God made clothing
 from animal skins for Adam and his wife.

22 Then the Lord God said, “Look, the human beings
 have become like us, knowing both good and evil.
 What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it?
 Then they will live forever!” 23 So the Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate
 the ground from which he had been made.

24 After sending them out, the Lord God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming
 sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Results of Rebellion (4:1-24)

Cain and Abel

4 Now Adam had sexual relationships with
 his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant.
 When she gave birth to Cain, she said,
 “With the Lord’s help, I have produced a man!” 5 Later she gave birth to his brother
 and named him Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd,
 while Cain cultivated the ground.

3 When it was time for the harvest, Cain
 presented some of his crops as a gift to the
 Lord. 4 Abel also brought a gift—the best
 of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The
 Lord accepted Abel and his gift, 5 but he did
 not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain
 very angry, and he looked dejected.

6 “Why are you so angry?” the Lord asked
 Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? 7 You
 will be accepted if you do what is right. But
 if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to
 command not to eat the fruit by speaking
 of eating several times in 3:17-19.
 The judgment affected humanity’s ability
 to get food, and it was proportionate
to their offense of eating what had been prohibited.
 • the ground is cursed: The relationship of the man to the ground
 (see note on 2:7) was now antagonistic as judgment fell on his primary role
 (2:5, 15). He must labor and toil to work
 the ground, but with diminished pro-
ductivity. Human sin has broad effects
 on creation (see 4:12; 6:7; Lev 26; Deut
 11:13-17, 28; Rom 8:22).

3:20-24 Soon after they were judged for their sin, Adam and Eve were banished from the garden.

3:20 Eve (Hebrew khawah) sounds like a Hebrew term (khayawah) that means “to give life.” Following God’s pronouncement of Adam’s impending death (3:19), Adam expressed hope by giving Eve a name associated with life. Adam’s naming of Eve in such close proximity to 3:16 may suggest that the narrator views it as Adam’s first act of ruling over
 women after the Fall (see note on 2:19-20).

3:21 God mercifully provided more substantial clothing for Adam and Eve (cp. 3:7) before expelling them into the harsh environment outside the garden.

3:22 human beings: Or the man;
 Hebrew reads ha-adam. • like us: The plural probably reflects God’s conversation with his angelic court (see note on 1:26). • the tree of life . . . live forever! Mercifully, God prevented humankind from eating of the tree of life and having to live forever in a fallen state. Through Jesus Christ, however, eternal life is once again made available (see Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19).

3:23 So the Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden: Before the fall, the garden was a sanctuary in
 which humans could move freely in
 God’s holy presence. Now their sin
 required expulsion from that environ-
 ment. This same principle was behind
 the laws that restricted an Israelite’s
 access to God’s presence in the Tabernacle or Temple (e.g., Lev 16:1-2; Num 5:3).

3:24 cherubim are a class of angelic beings that guard access to God’s presence (Exod 26:31; Ezek 28:14). • east . . . of Eden: In Genesis, movement eastward often implies leaving the presence or blessing of God, whether in judgment (see also 4:16), self-aggrandizement (11:2; 13:11), or estrangement (25:6).

4:1 Adam: Or the man; also in 4:25. • had sexual relations (literally knew): In certain contexts, the Hebrew term
 meaning “to know” is an idiom for sexual knowledge of another person
 (4:17; 19:33, 35). It is never used of ani-
 mals, which mate by instinct. • With the
 Lord’s help: Eve fulfilled her God-given role of procreation despite the negative effects of the Fall (see 3:16, 20). • I have produced: Or I have acquired. Cain (Hebrew qayin) sounds like a Hebrew term (qanah) that can mean “produce” or “acquire.”

4:2 his brother . . . Abel: The name (Hebrew abel) means “breath,” “vapor,” or “meaningless,” anticipating his tragically brief life (cp. Eccl 1:2).

4:3 There was nothing wrong with offering grain to the Lord (Lev 2:14; Deut 26:2-4), but Cain brought only a token gift (some of his crops), whereas God requires the first and best (Exod 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26). Cain’s heart attitude made his offering inferior to Abel’s (cp. Heb 11:4).

4:4-5 the best of the firstborn lambs: Or the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. Abel was giving God the best animals and the richest parts. Abel’s offering, in contrast to Cain’s, was the best he had to offer. True worship is a costly privilege.

4:7 Sin is crouching at the door . . . you must subdue it: Sin is pictured as a vi-
cious animal living in wait to pounce on
cain (cp. note on 3:16). Either sin will
dominate Cain, or Cain will resist the temptation to sin. There is no neutral
ground in that conflict.
control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

8One day Cain suggested to his brother, “Let’s go out into the fields.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.

9Afterward the Lord asked Cain, “Where is your brother? Where is Abel?”

“I don’t know,” Cain responded. “Am I my brother’s guardian?”

10But the Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! 11Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother’s blood. 12No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth.”

13Cain replied to the Lord, “My punishment is too great for me to bear! 14You have banished me from the land and from your presence; you have made me a homeless wanderer. Anyone who finds me will kill me!”

15The Lord replied, “No, for I will give a sevenfold punishment to anyone who kills you.” Then the Lord put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who might try to kill him. 16So Cain left the Lord’s presence and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

The Descendants of Cain

17Cain had sexual relations with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to

Original Sin (3:1-19)

Genesis 3 describes how human moral innocence collapsed through rebellion (3:11, 17). What God declared as “very good” (1:31) was no longer completely so. Man and woman ate the fruit that promised knowledge of good and evil and thus broke God’s command (2:17). Worse, they tried to become like God (3:5) and thus fell from their sinless state. Alienated from God, one another, and creation, they also became subject to death.

The term “original sin” denotes sin’s complete, universal infiltration into individual lives and human society as a result of human rebellion. When the first man and woman ate the fruit in disobedience to God, they forfeited their own innocence and that of their children, the entire human race (Rom 5:12-14; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49). All humans are “fallen,” born in sin, predisposed to sin (8:21; Job 4:17-21; Ps 51:5; 103:10; 143:2; Prov 20:9), and awaiting death. As people yield to their inherited predisposition to sin, they become responsible for their own wrongdoing (Eccl 7:20; Rom 3:23).

The first man, Adam, introduced sin, but the “second Adam,” Jesus Christ, is sin’s antidote (1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:21). When Christ died as Redeemer, he made God’s salvation from sin available to all (John 3:16; Rom 1:16).

4:8 The effects of the Fall on human relationships are tragically expressed in the first murder. • The word brother is used seven times in 4:2-11, highlighting Cain’s fratricide in the face of familial responsibility. • Let’s go out into the fields: As in Samaritan Pentateuch, Greek and Syriac versions, and Latin Vulgate; Masoretic Text lacks this phrase.

4:9 Where is your brother? The questions God asked Cain (4:6, 9, 10) recall those that God asked Cain’s parents (3:9-13). In both cases, humans put up evasive answers (cp. 3:12-13). Cain’s answer is shockingly defiant—another clue that the problem with his token offering was the attitude that lay behind it.

4:10 What have you done? is more an expression of horror and rebuke than a fact-finding question (cp. 3:13). • Abel’s blood is personified as a legal witness that cries out against Cain. • from the ground: See note on 4:11-12.

4:11-12 As with his father (cp. 3:9-12, 17-19), Cain’s interrogation (4:9-10) was followed by God’s verdict. Adam’s sin had already caused the ground to be cursed. Now Cain was cursed and banished from the land he farmed because he had contaminated it with innocent blood. • homeless wanderer: Cain was condemned to ceaseless roving in a land that would provide neither sustenance nor security. The effects of sin were escalating.

4:13-14 For Cain, eviction from the land—the domain of his vocation as a farmer (see 4:2; cp. 3:23)—amounted to exile from God’s presence. The Israelites were warned that unfaithfulness to the Sinai covenant would similarly result in eviction from the Promised Land and from God’s presence in the Temple (see, e.g., Lev 26:27-32).

4:13 My punishment: Or My sin.

4:15 Sevenfold punishment was the full weight of justice. Cain complained that his punishment was too great, but the full sentence that would fall on anyone who committed Cain’s crime against him shows how gracious the Lord was to Cain. Cain deserved death (see 9:5-6). • The mark graciously provided protection following Cain’s judgment (cp. 3:21).

4:16 Not graciously provided protection following Cain’s judgment (cp. 3:21).

4:17-5:32 These back-to-back genealogies do more than list names for the record. They contrast the ways that human culture spread, some in rebellion against God (Cain, 4:17-24) and some in obedience to God (Seth, 4:25-5:32). In Genesis, the history of the rejected branch is generally explained before carrying forward the line that led to Israel. Two points of contrast are especially worth noting: (1) Lamech, the seventh from Adam through the lineage...
Enoch. Then Cain founded a city, which he named Enoch, after his son. 18Enoch had a son named Irad. Irad became the father of Mehujael. Mehujael became the father of Methushael. Methushael became the father of Lamech.

19Lamech married two women. The first was named Adah, and the second was Zillah. 20Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the first of those who raise livestock and live in tents. 21His brother’s name was Jubal, the first of all who play the harp and flute. 22Lamech’s other wife, Zillah, gave birth to a son named Tubal-cain. He became an expert in forging tools of bronze and iron. Tubal-cain had a sister named Naamah. 23One day Lamech said to his wife,

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; listen to me, you wives of Lamech. I have killed a man who attacked me, a young man who wounded me.

24 If someone who kills Cain is punished seven times, then the one who kills me will be punished seventy-seven times!”

Epilogue: The Birth of Seth (4:25-26)

Adam had sexual relations with his wife again, and she gave birth to another son. She named him Seth, for she said, “God has granted me another son in place of Abel, whom Cain killed.” 26When Seth grew up, he had a son and named Enosh. At that time people first began to worship the Lord by name.

3. THE ACCOUNT OF ADAM’S DESCENDANTS (5:1–6:8)

Human Identity Restated

5 This is the written account of the descendants of Adam. When God created human beings, he made them to be like himself—2 he created them male and female, and he blessed them and called them “human.”

Genealogy: Adam to Noah

3When Adam was 130 years old, he became the father of a son who was just...
like him—in his very image. He named his son Seth. After the birth of Seth, Adam lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.  
6 When Seth was 105 years old, he became the father of Enosh. After the birth of Enosh, Seth lived another 807 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Seth lived 912 years, and then he died.  
7 When Enosh was 90 years old, he became the father of Kenan. After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived another 815 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died.  
8 When Kenan was 70 years old, he became the father of Mahalalel. After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived another 840 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died.  
9 When Mahalalel was 65 years old, he became the father of Jared. After the birth of Jared, Mahalalel lived another 830 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Mahalalel lived 895 years, and then he died.  
10 When Jared was 162 years old, he became the father of Enoch. After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Jared lived 962 years, and then he died.  
11 When Enoch was 65 years old, he became the father of Methuselah. After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch lived in close fellowship with God for another 300 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Enoch lived 365 years, walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.  
12 When Methuselah was 187 years old, he became the father of Lamech. After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived another 782 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Methuselah lived 969 years, and then he died.  
13 When Lamech was 182 years old, he became the father of a son. Lamech named his son Noah, for he said, “May he bring us relief from our work and the painful labor of farming this ground that the Lord has cursed.” After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived another 595 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died.  
14 By the time Noah was 500 years old, he was the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

### Corruption of the Human Race

6 Then the people began to multiply on the earth, and daughters were born to them. The sons of God saw the beautiful women and took any they wanted as their wives. Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not put up with humans for such a long time,

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**5:5 he died:** Death indeed came to Adam (see 2:17; 3:18-19) and his descendants (see Rom 5:12-14). Cain’s violence is omitted (see 4:8, 15, 23-24) and key figures in Seth’s line live in hope (5:29).  
**5:6 the father of:** Or the ancestor of; also in 5:9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 25. Hebrew genealogies do not necessarily list every single generation.  
**5:7 After the birth of:** Or After the birth of this ancestor of; also in 5:10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 26 (see note on 5:6).  
**5:22 Enoch lived in close fellowship with God:** (literally Enoch walked with God; also in 5:24): Enoch’s position as seventh from Adam in the genealogy strikes a contrast with Lamech, the seventh from Adam in the line of Cain (see note on 4:17–5:32).  
**5:24 Unlike all other sons of Adam, Enoch did not succumb to death; rather, he disappeared, because God took him:** (cp. 2 Kgs 2:9-12; see also Heb 11:5).  
**5:29 969 years:** This statement and the numbers given in 5:25, 28 and 7:6 mean that Methuselah died in the year of the flood.  
**5:28-29** As with Enoch (5:21-24), the normal genealogical formula is interrupted to highlight important theological information about Noah. Noah sounds like a Hebrew term (nakhah) that can mean “relief” or “comfort,” and another term (nuakh) that means “rest.” As the first person born after Adam’s death (see note on 5:5), Noah prompted his father Lamech to hope that the curse brought on by Adam’s sin (3:17) might be lifted. See 8:21; 2 Cor 1:3-7; 2 Thes 2:16-17.  
**6:1-8** Human wickedness reached a climax, prompting God to send the flood to destroy all living things. A glimmer of hope appears in God’s favor toward Noah (6:8).  
**6:1-2** The sons of God have generally been understood as fallen angels (cp. the same Hebrew phrase in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps 29:1; 89:7). This interpretation is prominent in ancient Jewish and Christian literature (e.g., 1 Enoch 6:1–7:6; Justin Martyr, Apology 2:5) and is apparently supported by the NT (see 1 Pet 3:18-20; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6-7). Some interpreters do not believe that God would permit angels to procreate with humans and doubt that the above NT texts should be read in this way. Another possibility is that sons of God refers to the righteous descendants of Seth, while the beautiful women (6:2, literally daughters of men; also in 6:4) were female descendants of Cain’s wicked line. This interpretation is in harmony with 4:17–5:32, but is weakened by the language of 6:1-2, which seems to refer to the daughters of humanity in general not the daughters of Cain specifically. Others believe that sons of God refers to tyrannical human kings (possibly demon-possessed) who took Lamech’s polygamy (4:19) to a new height of wickedness by seizing the daughters of the righteous. Language reminiscent of 3:6 (saw . . . took) shows the rebellious nature of this act.  
**6:3 will not put up with** (Greek version reads will not remain in): Many think that this is an announcement of God’s decision to withdraw the restraining influence of his spirit from human
for they are only mortal flesh. In the future, their normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years.”

4In those days, and for some time after, giant Nephilites lived on the earth, for whenever the sons of God had intercourse with women, they gave birth to children who became the heroes and famous warriors of ancient times.

5The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. 6So the Lord was sorry that he had made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. 7And the Lord said, “I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them.” 8But Noah found favor with the Lord.

4. THE ACCOUNT OF NOAH’S FAMILY (6:9–29)

The Story of Noah

9This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God.

10Noah was the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11Now God saw that the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence.

NOAH (6:8-22)

Noah was the son of Lamech, a descendant of Seth (5:3-29). Lamech might have hoped that Noah (whose name means “rest” or “relief”) would ease the curse of hardship in working the ground (see note on 5:29). God used Noah to help relieve the world of evil.

God intended to destroy creation because of pervasive human wickedness (6:1-7; see Matt 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-27), but he decided to preserve Noah (6:8). God gave Noah, a righteous and blameless man (6:9), precise instructions for building the ark in which only the eight people of his family would be saved, along with every kind of creature (6:14–8:19). When Noah and his family finally emerged from the ark after the flood, Noah pleased God by building an altar and sacrificing burnt offerings. God promised that he would never again flood the whole earth or disrupt the sequence of the seasons, despite human sin (8:20–9:17).

Noah’s sons were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. All the nations of the earth descended from them (9:18-19). When Noah became drunk on wine from his vineyard, his sons and their descendants were cursed or blessed in accord with how they responded to him (9:22-27). Noah lived for 950 years, including 350 years after the flood (9:28-29); he is an example of righteousness, obedience, courage, and faith (see Ezek 14:12-20; Heb 11:7; 2 Pet 2:5).

society and allow human wickedness to run its full course. Others think it means that God would withdraw his life-giving breath from humans at an earlier age (ruakh, the Hebrew term for “spirit,” can also mean “breath”; see 6:17; 7:22; see also Ps 104:29-30). *normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years (literally his days will be 120 years): It is possible that this was a new restriction on the number of years individuals would generally be allowed to live (so the NLT). However, for generations after the flood, humans lived well beyond 120 years (see, e.g., 11:10-26). An alternative interpretation sees this as a 120-year grace period before the arrival of the flood (see Jon 3:4; Matt 24:37-38; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:5).

6:4 Giant Nephilites (Hebrew neqilim): The term may mean “fallen ones.” The context implies that they were the offspring of the “sons of God” and would be destroyed in the flood. Numbers 13:31-33 uses the same term to describe other giants who were hostile toward God’s people and would also be destroyed (see also Deut 2:11, which connects the Anakite neqilim with another group called the repa’m).

6:5 everything they thought or imagined (literally every intention of the thoughts of their hearts): In the OT, the heart is the core of volition, thought, and morality (see Prov 4:23). Wicked actions stem from a corrupt inner life. *consistently and totally evil: Strong language captures the pervasiveness, depth, and persistence of human wickedness. Human nature continued to be corrupt even after the flood (see 8:21).

6:6 the Lord was sorry: The extent of human wickedness made the Lord regret having created them (see also 6:7; cp. 1 Sam 15:11, 35). *it broke his heart: The evil in humanity’s heart (6:5) pained God greatly. Sending the flood was a heart-wrenching act on God’s part.

6:7 wipe . . . from the . . . earth: As Adam and Eve were banished from the garden-sanctuary (3:23), all of humankind would be expunged from God’s good creation. *every living thing: Human sin had so corrupted the earth that judgment fell on the animals and birds over which they had dominion (see 1:28 and note). The special role of humans in the created order (1:28-30) means that nature is affected by human moral choices (see 8:1; Job 38:41; Hos 4:3; Rom 8:19-22).

6:8 Noah and his godly life stand in stark contrast to the selfishness of the rest of the people.

6:9 the account: See note on 2:4 *a righteous man, the only blameless person: The text does not claim that Noah was without sin (see Rom 5:12-14). Noah’s righteousness and blamelessness came about because he walked in close fellowship with God. See also 7:1; 17:1; Heb 11:7.

12God observed all this corruption in the world, for everyone on earth was corrupt. 
13So God said to Noah, “I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth. 
14“Build a large boat from cypress wood and waterproof it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout its interior. 15Make the boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. 16Leave an 18-inch opening below the roof all the way around the boat. Put the door on the side, and build three decks inside the boat—lower, middle, and upper.
17“Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die. 18But I will confirm my covenant with you. So enter the boat—you and your wife and your sons and their wives. 19Bring a pair of every kind of animal—a male and a female—into the boat with you to keep them alive during the flood. 20Pairs of every kind of bird, and every kind of animal, and every kind of small animal that scurries along the ground, will come to you to be kept alive. 
21And be sure to take on board enough food for your family and for all the animals.”
22So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.

The Universal Flood

7When everything was ready, the Lord said to Noah, “Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I can see that you alone are righteous. 2Take with you seven pairs—male and female—of each animal I have approved for eating and for sacrifice, and take one pair of each of the others. 3Also take seven pairs of every kind of bird. There must be a male and a female in each pair to ensure that all life will survive on the earth after the flood. 4Seven days from now I will make the rains pour down on the earth. And it will rain for forty days and forty nights, until I have wiped from the earth all the living things I have created.”
5So Noah did everything as the Lord commanded him. 
6Noah was 600 years old when the flood covered the earth. 7He went on board the boat to escape the flood—he and his wife

### Noah’s Ark

#### 6:14-16

An ark built to the dimensions specified in Genesis would have been immense. Its ratio of length to width (6 to 1) is the most stable known and is used for the design of modern tankers and freight-hauling ships. The ark was able to carry 20,000 tons of cargo; the required number of young adult land animals would have occupied less than half of the available space. The design given was perfect for the ark’s function.

**6:14 a large boat:** Traditionally rendered an ark, this was a long rectangular barge designed for survival, not for navigation. The Hebrew word tebah is used again only of the basket in which the baby Moses was floated on the Nile (Exod 2:3, 5). *cypress wood:* Or gofer wood. It is not clear what kind of wood this was. It was possibly from a conifer, such as cypress. 

**6:15 The ark’s dimensions:** Hebrew 300 cubits [138 meters] long, 50 cubits [23 meters] wide, and 30 cubits [13.8 meters] high. This floating barge displaced around 43,300 tons of water. 

**6:16 An 18-inch opening** (Hebrew an opening of 1 cubit [46 centimeters]) below the roof encircled the boat, providing light and air. *Noah was to build a door and God would close it* (7:16). God was the captain of this peculiar boat with no sail or rudder. God also brought the animals to Noah (6:20).

**6:17 cover the earth with a flood:** Some propose that the flood might only have covered the ancient Near East as it was known to Noah or Moses. However, the flood’s stated purpose—to destroy every living thing that breathes (see also 6:7, 11-13; 7:1, 4, 18-23; 8:21)—and its effect of undoing creation (see notes on 1:9-10; 7:11-12) suggest that the flood covered the entire planet (see also 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:5; 3:6).

**6:18 This first explicit mention of a covenant in the Bible refers to the unilateral pact that God made with human kind and the world after the flood (see 9:9, 11, 14-17).**

**6:19-20 God’s instructions to Noah repeat the language of creation (every kind, cp. 1:24).** *a male and a female:* These animals would procreate and repopulate the earth after the flood. **7:2 of each animal I have approved for eating and for sacrifice (literally of each clean animal)**; similarly in 7:8; in addition to the animals that were to repopulate the earth, these “clean” animals were for food and for Noah’s sacrifice after the flood (8:20-21). This passage does not use the precise technical language that is found in the regulations concerning “clean” and “unclean” given directly to Noah.

**7:4 The number forty is often associated with affliction, trial, or punishment** (see Exod 16:35; Judg 13:1; 1 Kgs 19:8; Ezek 4:6; Jon 3:4; Matt 4:2; Acts 1:3).

**7:6 covered the earth:** See note on 6:17.
and his sons and their wives. 8With them were all the various kinds of animals—those approved for eating and for sacrifice and those that were not—along with all the birds and the small animals that scurry along the ground. 9They entered the boat in pairs, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah. 10After seven days, the waters of the flood came and covered the earth.

11When Noah was 600 years old, on the seventeenth day of the second month, all the underground waters erupted from the earth, and the rain fell in mighty torrents from the sky. 12The rain continued to fall for forty days and forty nights.

13That very day Noah had gone into the boat with his wife and his sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—and their wives. 14With them in the boat were pairs of every kind of animal—domestic and wild, large and small—along with birds of every kind. 15Two by two they came into the boat, representing every living thing that breathes. 16A male and female of each kind entered, just as God had commanded Noah. Then the Lord closed the door behind them.

17For forty days the floodwaters grew deeper, covering the ground and lifting the boat high above the earth. 18As the waters rose higher and higher above the ground, the boat floated safely on the surface. 19Finally, the water covered even the highest mountains on the earth, 20rising more than twenty-two feet above the highest peaks. 21All the living things on earth died—birds, domestic animals, wild animals, small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the people. 22Everything that breathed and lived on dry land died. 23God wiped out every living thing on the earth—people, livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and the birds of the sky. All were destroyed. The only people who survived were Noah and those with him in the boat. 24And the floodwaters covered the earth for 150 days.

The Floodwaters Recede

8But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and livestock with him in the boat. He sent a wind to blow across the earth, and the floodwaters began to recede. 2The underground waters stopped flowing, and the torrential rains from the sky were stopped. 3So the floodwaters gradually receded from the earth. After 150 days, 4exactly five months from the time the flood began, the boat came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5Two and a half months later, as the waters continued to go down, other mountain peaks became visible.

6After another forty days, Noah opened the window he had made in the boat 7and released a raven. The bird flew back and forth until the floodwaters on the earth had dried up. 8He also released a dove to see if the water had receded and it could find dry ground. 9But the dove could find no place to land because the water still covered the ground. So it returned to the boat, and it returned to the boat.
Noah held out his hand and drew the dove back inside. 10 After waiting another seven days, Noah released the dove again. 11 This time the dove returned to him in the evening with a fresh olive leaf in its beak. Then Noah knew that the floodwaters were almost gone. 12 He waited another seven days and then released the dove again. This time it did not come back.

13 Noah was now 601 years old. On the first day of the new year, ten and a half months after the flood began, the floodwaters had almost dried up from the earth. Noah lifted back the covering of the boat and saw that the surface of the ground was drying. 14 Two more months went by, and at last the earth was dry!

Noah’s Worship and God’s Promise
15 Then God said to Noah, 16 “Leave the boat, all of you—you and your wife, and your sons and their wives. 17 Release all the animals—the birds, the livestock, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—so they can be fruitful and multiply throughout the earth.”

18 So Noah, his wife, and his sons and their wives left the boat. 19 And all of the large and small animals and birds came out of the boat, pair by pair.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and there he sacrificed as burnt offerings the animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose. 21 And the Lord was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice.

Retribution (6:1–7:24)

God gave humans the commission of procreating and caring for the world (1:28). Instead, murder and violence multiplied with humanity’s spiritual wickedness (4:8, 23; 6:11-13), resulting in a corrupt world that required cleansing.

The purpose of the flood was to enact God’s global cleansing and retribution against evildoers. Retribution means “giving what is due” and usually refers to recompense for wrongdoing. Retribution is motivated by the conviction that moral order is woven into the fabric of the world and must be maintained or restored (see Ps 7:14-16; Prov 11:18; 26:27).

God maintains moral order by meting out justice, punishing wickedness, and rewarding right behavior (Gal 6:7). Since God oversees the world, it is never entirely overwhelmed by moral chaos; God holds people accountable for what they do. The judgment and exile of Adam and Eve (3:8-24), Cain’s sentence and blood-revenge (4:10-15), and the worldwide flood and annihilation (chs 6–9) are OT examples of God’s retribution. They reveal a sovereign God who exacts just punishment in the context of his good intentions for the world (see also Num 16; Deut 30:15-20; Josh 7; Mic 2:1-3).

Retribution is an application of God’s righteousness; it purifies the world for his kingdom of peace. Through retribution, the divine King proclaims his universal rule and exercises his justice on all who reject his rule or defy his commands (Deut 7:10; 1 Sam 24:19; Ps 149; Prov 15:25; Mic 5:15; 1 Cor 16:22; Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thes 1:5-10).

For God’s people, retribution is his discipline. It is intended to restore covenant fellowship with him (see Isa 44:22; Jer 3:12-14; Lam 3:19-33; Hos 14:1-2; Joel 2:12-13). When God’s people experience his chastening, they can respond in hope because God’s truth and righteousness will triumph (Ps 58:10-11) and God will redeem and restore his people who trust in him (Lev 26:40-45; Hos 2:2-23).

8:11 Unlike the raven (8:7), the dove feeds on vegetation. Since olive trees are not tall, Noah could tell that the water was almost gone.

8:13 On the first day of the new year, ten and a half months after the flood began (literally On the first day of the first month; see 7:11): This was two months after the peaks of the mountains first became visible (8:5).

8:14 Two more months went by: Literally The twenty-seventh day of the second month arrived; see note on 8:13. * the earth was dry! This special word for dry land is uniquely used in connection with the sea to portray God’s sovereignty over both domains (see 1:9-10; Exod 14:22, 29; Ps 95:5; Jon 1:9).

8:17 be fruitful and multiply: See 9:1.

8:20 This first mention of an altar in the Bible (see “Altars” at 35:1-15, p. 91) shows Noah’s gratitude for having passed through the judgment. * sacrificed as burnt offerings: The same term is used of the whole burnt offering in Leviticus (Lev 1:3-9); however, it can refer to any offering that is burned. Noah gave this offering to thank and worship God, who had delivered him and his family from the flood. * the animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose: Literally every clean animal and every clean bird.

8:21 pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice (literally smelled the sweet aroma): The narrator uses anthropomorphic language (i.e., he describes God’s activity in human terms) to show God’s acceptance of Noah’s offering (see also Exod 29:18; Lev 1:9; Num 15:3). The common ancient Near Eastern notion that the gods ate the sacrifices offered to them is notably absent. * to himself (literally in his heart): The phrase echoes “broke his heart” (6:6), just as think or imagine echoes “everything they thought or imagined” (6:5). God’s commitment to a new order replaced
and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things. As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.”

God’s Covenant with All Living Creatures

Then God blessed Noah and his sons and told them, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth. All the animals of the earth, all the birds of the sky, all the small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the fish in the sea will look on you with fear and terror. I have placed them in your power. I have given them to you for food, just as I have given you grain and vegetables. But you must never eat any meat that still has the lifefood in it.

And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person’s life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. If anyone takes a human life, that person’s life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image. Now be fruitful and multiply, and repopulate the earth.”

Then God told Noah and his sons, “I hereby confirm my covenant with you and your descendants, and with all the animals that were on the boat with you—the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals—every living creature on earth. Yes, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again will floodwaters kill all living creatures; never again will a flood destroy the earth.”

Then God said, “I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the ‘eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth.” Then God said to Noah, “Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth.”

his grief over the old. *I will never again curse... destroy: The old curse was not lifted (5:29), but God promised not to add to it, thus establishing new limits for life in a disordered world (cp. Isa 54:9). The flood was to stop violence, not to reform the human heart (6:5). Humankind’s *bent toward evil would be contained to some degree through accountability to a new law (9:5-6).

8:22 God’s promise to sustain the rhythm of the seasons reaffirmed the created order (1:14; see also Jer 33:20; Zech 14:7).

9:1-7 God’s first post-flood speech opens and closes with blessing (9:1, 7). In it, human and animal relationships are again defined, with some modification of the original created order. The sanctity of life is given special focus.

9:1 Be fruitful and multiply: The blessing and mandate first given to Adam (1:28) are now reissued to Noah, the “Adam” of the newly cleansed world in need of repopulation.

9:2-3 There are two modifications to the original created order. (1) Previously, humans reigned over the animals (1:28), but now animals would live in terror of humans (similar military language is found in Exod 23:27-31; Deut 11:25; 31:8). (2) The animals’ terror was related to a change in human diet. Humans were now permitted to eat the meat of animals to supplement their subsistence on grains, fruits, and vegetables (1:29).

9:4 A key restriction is imposed. Since blood was identified with life, it had to be drained from a slain animal before its meat could be eaten (see Lev 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10-14; Deut 12:16, 23). The law of Moses prohibited eating animals that died naturally, since their blood had not been drained (Deut 14:21). God provided animal blood to atone for human sin (Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22).

9:5-6 Violence, including murder, was a major factor in bringing about God’s judgment of the flood (4:8; 6:11, 13). At this new beginning for humans, God affirmed the sanctity of human life and established a system of retributive justice for the taking of human life (see also Ps 9:12; “Retribution” at 6:1-7:24, p. 35). The function of law is to restrain human wickedness and preserve moral order. This law was further developed in the law of Moses (Exod 21:12-14; Lev 24:17-22; Num 35:16-34; Deut 17:6-7; 19:15).

9:6 For God made human beings in his own image: The death penalty has a theological basis. God’s image gives humans a unique status and authority within creation (1:26-28). Since murder destroys a person made in God’s image, the ultimate penalty must be imposed on a murderer. See also Exod 21:23-25. We are not to pursue personal revenge (Rom 12:17-19), but are to uphold the justice of the “governing authorities” that God has established (Rom 13:1-7).

9:7 Now be fruitful and multiply, and repopulate (literally swarm and fill): In contrast to those who would destroy human life (9:5-6), God’s desire is that human life should abound and flourish.

9:8-17 God’s second post-flood speech conveys his promise and plan for preserving creation.

9:9-10 God had promised this covenant before the flood (6:18). Its scope extends beyond humanity to include the earth and all animals.

9:11 This promise does not prohibit worldwide judgment, but it restricts the means by which God will do it (see 2 Pet 3:4-13).

9:12 In the Bible, covenants are frequently confirmed by some sort of sign (e.g., 17:11; Exod 31:13, 17; Luke 22:20).

9:13-16 God brought cataclysmic judgment through the rainstorm; now, the rainbow, a meteorological phenomenon associated with the rainstorm, would be an image of peace for all the earth (see 9:17). *“Rainbow” and “bow” are the same term in Hebrew. Since God is sometimes pictured as a warrior who shoots arrows of judgment (see Deut 32:42; Ps 7:12; 18:13-14; Hab 3:9-11),
God’s Covenant with Noah (9:1-17)

The first explicit reference to a covenant in Scripture occurs after the flood (9:1-17). Covenant (Hebrew berith) means “bond”. A covenant is a binding relationship rooted in a commitment that includes promises and obligations. Whether between individuals (e.g., 21:27), whole nations (e.g., Josh 9:15-18), or God and humans, the covenant relationship calls for faithfulness and makes peace and harmony possible.

Here God took the initiative to bind himself again to human beings and to the whole creation despite human faithlessness (see 6:1-7). When God charged Noah to build an ark to escape the impending deluge (6:13-17), he also promised to establish a covenant with him (6:18). The corruption and violence of the human race had provoked God’s anger (6:11, 13), but his gracious favor remained with Noah (6:8). Through this covenant, God guaranteed that he would maintain a relationship with one family even as other divine-human relationships were being severed. God’s covenant promise to Noah came with his command to build an ark (6:14); Noah’s receipt of the covenant blessing depended on his obedience to this divine command (6:22; 7:5).

When Noah made an offering to God after the flood (8:20-22), God elaborated on his covenant with Noah as a universal covenant with humans and with all living creatures (9:8-10). God promised never to send such a flood again as judgment on the world.

This covenant helps us understand God as a covenant-maker. Although human beings deserve punishment because of their wickedness, God withholds ultimate destruction. God’s covenant with Noah did not establish an intimate relationship between God and each living being, but it recalibrated moral and ecological life to be as God intended it (9:1-7), leaving open the possibility of a more intimate covenant to come (see 17:1-21). Despite their evil, human beings are allowed to live in God’s world and seek a deeper relationship with the world’s Creator during their time on earth. God’s later covenants with his people made intimacy with him freely available to all (see Acts 2:22-40; 3:17-26).

some think that the imagery in 9:13-17 is of the Divine Warrior hanging up his bow of judgment.

9:18 Ham is the father of Canaan:
See also 9:20-27; 10:6-20. The text emphasizes Canaan’s ancestral connection to Ham to show that the Canaanite identity was inseparably linked to Ham’s shameful behavior (9:20-27). The citizens of both Egypt (from which Israel escaped slavery) and Canaan (to which Israel was headed) were Ham’s descendants (10:6; see Lev 18:3, 24-26; Ps 105:23, 27; 106:22). Later stories in Genesis emphasize the immoral climate of both Egypt (12:10-20) and Canaan (chs 34, 38). See 9:20-27 and 10:6-20.

9:20-27 The story of Noah begins with him walking in righteousness and obeying the Lord (6:9), but it ends with him lying drunk and naked in his tent and then delivering a curse on Canaan. Even after the great flood, the human race exhibited some of the same sinful characteristics that warranted the judgment in the first place. Special attention is given to the cursed origin of the Canaanites, the corrupt and idolatrous nation Israel would later displace from the Promised Land (see also 15:16 and note; Lev 18:3; 20:23).

9:21 wine . . . became drunk: Wine is a gift from God (Deut 14:26; Ps 104:15; Isa 55:1; see Luke 2:14-20; John 2:1-11). Scripture is clear, however, that excessive consumption of alcohol is a perilous sin (Prov 23:20-21, 29-35; 1 Cor 6:10).

9:22 the father of Canaan: See note on 9:18. • Ham’s behavior was shameful. He gazed upon his naked father and, rather than covering him and keeping the matter secret, robbed him of his dignity by announcing it to his brothers (see Exod 21:15, 17; Lam 4:21; Hab 2:15). An ancient Near Eastern tale says that a son is expected to come to his father’s aid when he is drunk (Tale of Aqhat; cp. Isa 51:17-18). Ham’s neglect of familial duty explains why Noah praised Shem and Japheth but cursed Ham (9:24-27).

9:25 Noah’s curse foresaw Ham’s actions as morally representative of Ham’s descendants through Canaan (see 10:6).

• lowest of servants: Having refused aid to his family, Ham was condemned to base servitude.
26Then Noah said,

“May the LORD, the God of Shem, be blessed,

and may Canaan be his servant!

27May God expand the territory of Japheth!

May Japheth share the prosperity of Shem,

and may Canaan be his servant.”

28Noah lived another 350 years after the great flood. 29He lived 950 years, and then he died.

5. THE ACCOUNT OF NOAH’S SONS (10:1–11:9)

Nations of the Ancient World (10:1-32)

Superscription

10 This is the account of the families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah. Many children were born to them after the great flood.

Descendants of Japheth

2The descendants of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.

3The descendants of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphat, and Togarmah.

4The descendants of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim. 5Their descendants became the seafaring peoples that spread out to various lands, each identified by its own language, clan, and national identity.

Descendants of Ham

6The descendants of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

7The descendants of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan.

8Cush was also the ancestor of Nimrod, who was the first heroic warrior on earth.

9:26 Noah refers to God as the LORD, who formed the covenant with Israel. Shem was the privileged forefather of the Israelites (see 10:21-32).


10:1-11:9 The fifth account (10:1) in Genesis (see note on 2:4) unites the Table of Nations (10:2-32) and the Babel story (11:1-9) around the theme of the Israelites (see 10:21-32).

10:6-11:9 The Table of Nations precedes the Babel story even though the Babel incident caused the geopolitical situation reflected in the Table of Nations. By reversing the order, Genesis links the repopulation of the earth with the blessing conferred upon Noah and his sons (see 9:1 and note) and shows that Abram’s call (12:1-3) was God’s solution to the problem of human estrangement from God as reflected in the Babel story (11:1-9).

10:1 Many children were born … after the great flood: This fulfilled the renewed creation mandate (9:1, 9; cp. 1:28).

10:2-32 This section describes the ancestral origin of the nations of the ancient Near East. Ham was at the center (10:6-20), while the descendants of Japheth and Shem spread out to the surrounding regions of Greece, Crete, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Madai, the Arabian peninsula, and northeast Africa. The list selectively highlights nations relevant to Israel. The total of seventy (seven times ten) names indicates completeness (see 46:27; Deut 32:8) and symbolizes the totality of the world, which would later be blessed by the descendants of Abraham (18:18). • Although Shem is mentioned first in 10:1, he is addressed last in the Table because of his connection to Abram (10:21-31; 11:10-32; 12:1). Although God established the boundaries of all nations (see Deut 32:8; Amos 9:7; Acts 17:26), Israel was his special creation—a microcosm of seventy peoples (46:27) called to be a blessing to a world of seventy nations (see 12:3).

10:2 The seven sons of Japheth settled in the region of Anatolia (the western plateau lands of Turkey) and spoke Indo-European languages. • Gomer was the ancestor of the later Cimmerians who lived north of the Black Sea. • Magog was probably the ancestor of those who settled in the region of Lydia (see Ezek 38:2). • The descendants of Madai were the later Medes of northwest Iran (see 2 Kgs 17:6; Jer 51:11; Dan 5:28). • The descendants of Javan were the later Ionian Greeks. • The descendants of Tubal and Meshech were sometimes allies in battle (Ezek 38:2). Both were possibly from the coastal regions of Anatolia (see Ezek 27:13). • The descendants of Tiras possibly became the Thracians that lived near the Aegean Sea.

10:3 The descendants of Gomer came from near the Upper Euphrates region north of the Black Sea (cp. Ezek 38:1-9). • The descendants of Ashkenaz were the later Scythians who inhabited the region between the Black and Caspian Seas. • Riphat is near Carchemish. • The descendants of Togarmah are associated with Til-garimmu, the capital of Kammanu in modern Armenia (see Ezek 38:6).

10:4 Elishah is probably Cyrus. • Tarshish is possibly southwest Spain (see note on Jon 1:3). • The Kittim were inhabitants of southern Cyprus. • The Rodanim (as in some Hebrew manuscripts and Greek version [see also 1 Chr 1:7]; most Hebrew manuscripts read Dodanim) were inhabitants of the island of Rhodes, later a territory of Greece.

10:5 seafaring peoples … various lands: They settled around the Mediterranean and on various islands. • language: This occurred after the Tower of Babel episode (11:1-9; see note on 10:1-11:9).

10:6 The peoples descended from Ham’s four sons (Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Canaanites) were Israel’s most hostile neighbors. • Cush was possibly in Ethiopia or ancient Nubia (northern Sudan). • Mizraim was the ancient name for Egypt (50:11). • Put was in Libya. • Canaan encompassed southern Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine west of the Jordan River. In Moses’ time, Egypt and Canaan were provinces of the same empire. Ham’s descendants were excluded from the blessing of Shem’s line (9:20-28).

10:7 The sons of Cush and Raamah together total seven. • Seba was in northern Africa (see Isa 43:3; 45:14). • Havilah was in southwest Arabia. • Sabtah was in southern Arabia, in ancient Hadramaut, near the Persian Gulf. • Raamah was in southwest Arabia near Najran. • Sabteca was in ancient Samudake near the Persian Gulf. • Sheba was a kingdom in southwest Arabia with commercial colonies (see 1 Kgs 10). • Dedan was in northern Arabia.

10:8-12 Special attention is given to the early history of Babylonia and Assyria, the Mesopotamian empires that would conquer and exile Israel and Judah.

Noah's descendants (10:1-32) spread out after "the LORD scattered them" (11:1-9), and they became the nations of the ancient world. Over half of the names listed in Gen 10 are identifiable ancient peoples, whose broad areas of settlement are shown. Arrows indicate lines of descent. In general, Japheth's descendants (10:2-5) went to ASIA MINOR and Europe (JAVAN, etc.), Ham's (10:6-20) to AFRICA and southern ARABIA (CUSH, RAAMAH, etc.), and Shem's (10:21-31) to MESOPOTAMIA and northern ARABIA (ASSHUR, ELAM, ARAM, etc.). The ancients knew a large area of civilization, from SPAIN to Media (MADAI), and from the Caucasus Mountains (east of the BLACK SEA) to southern ARABIA.

Japheth 9:27
Gomer Ezek 38:6
Ashkenaz Jer 51:27
Togarmah Ezek 27:14; 38:6
Magog Ezek 38:2; 39:6; Rev 20:8
Madai [Medes] 2 Kgs 17:6; Esth 1:19; Acts 2:9
Javan Ezek 27:7
Elishah Ezek 27:7
Tarsish Ps 72:10; Isa 23:1; 60:9; 66:19; Jer 10:9; Jon 1:3
Tubal Isa 66:19; Ezek 27:13; 38:2
Meshech Ps 120:5; Ezek 32:26, 39:1
Ham 14:5; 1 Chr 4:38-41; Ps 105:27
Cush 2:13; Num 12:1; 1 Chr 1:10
Havilah 25:18; 1 Sam 15:7
Raamah Ezek 27:22

Sheba 1 Kgs 10:1-13; Isa 60:6; Ezek 27:22-23; Matt 12:42
Dedan 25:3; Jer 25:23;
Ezek 25:13; 27:15
Nimrod 1 Chr 1:10; Mic 5:6
Mizraim 50:11
Caphtorites Deut 2:23
Put Nah 3:9
Canaan 11:31; 12:5-10
Sidon Jos 13:4-6; 1 Kgs 5:6; 11:33;
16:31; Ezek 28:21-24; Matt 11:21-22;
Luke 6:17; Acts 27:3
Hittites 23:1-20; Num 13:29; Josh 1:4
Jebusites Josh 15:63; Judg 19:10-11;
2 Sam 5:6-8; Zech 9:7
Amorites 14:7, 13; Num 21:21-35;
Josh 5:1; 10:1-13

Girgashites 15:21; Deut 7:1; Josh 3:10;
24:11; 1 Chr 1:14; Neh 9:8
Hivites 34:1-2; 36:2; Deut 20:17; Josh 9:3-7; 11:3
Arkites Josh 16:2; 2 Sam 15:32
Arvadites Ezek 27:8, 11
Zemarites 2 Chr 13:4
Hamathites 2 Sam 8:9-10;
2 Kgs 14:28; 23:33

Shem
Elam 14:1-9; Ezra 4:9; Isa 22:6; Jer 49:34-39; Ezek 32:24; Dan 8:2; Acts 2:9
Asshur 2:14; 25:3; 25:18; Ezek 27:23
Aram 24:10; 25:26; 28:5-31:21; Num 23:7; Judg 3:8; 2 Sam 8:5-6

Japheth 9:27
Gomer Ezek 38:6
Ashkenaz Jer 51:27
Togarmah Ezek 27:14; 38:6
Magog Ezek 38:2; 39:6; Rev 20:8
Madai [Medes] 2 Kgs 17:6; Esth 1:19; Acts 2:9
Javan Ezek 27:7
Elishah Ezek 27:7
Tarsish Ps 72:10; Isa 23:1; 60:9; 66:19; Jer 10:9; Jon 1:3
Tubal Isa 66:19; Ezek 27:13; 38:2
Meshech Ps 120:5; Ezek 32:26, 39:1
Ham 14:5; 1 Chr 4:38-41; Ps 105:27
Cush 2:13; Num 12:1; 1 Chr 1:10
Havilah 25:18; 1 Sam 15:7
Raamah Ezek 27:22

Sheba 1 Kgs 10:1-13; Isa 60:6; Ezek 27:22-23; Matt 12:42
Dedan 25:3; Jer 25:23;
Ezek 25:13; 27:15
Nimrod 1 Chr 1:10; Mic 5:6
Mizraim 50:11
Caphtorites Deut 2:23
Put Nah 3:9
Canaan 11:31; 12:5-10
Sidon Jos 13:4-6; 1 Kgs 5:6; 11:33;
16:31; Ezek 28:21-24; Matt 11:21-22;
Luke 6:17; Acts 27:3
Hittites 23:1-20; Num 13:29; Josh 1:4
Jebusites Josh 15:63; Judg 19:10-11;
2 Sam 5:6-8; Zech 9:7
Amorites 14:7, 13; Num 21:21-35;
Josh 5:1; 10:1-13

Girgashites 15:21; Deut 7:1; Josh 3:10;
24:11; 1 Chr 1:14; Neh 9:8
Hivites 34:1-2; 36:2; Deut 20:17; Josh 9:3-7; 11:3
Arkites Josh 16:2; 2 Sam 15:32
Arvadites Ezek 27:8, 11
Zemarites 2 Chr 13:4
Hamathites 2 Sam 8:9-10;
2 Kgs 14:28; 23:33

Shem
Elam 14:1-9; Ezra 4:9; Isa 22:6; Jer 49:34-39; Ezek 32:24; Dan 8:2; Acts 2:9
Asshur 2:14; 25:3; 25:18; Ezek 27:23
Aram 24:10; 25:26; 28:5-31:21; Num 23:7; Judg 3:8; 2 Sam 8:5-6
Since he was the greatest hunter in the world, his name became proverbial. People would say, “This man is like Nimrod, the greatest hunter in the world.”

He built his kingdom in the land of Babylonia, with the cities of Babylon, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh. From there he expanded his territory to Assyria, building the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, and Resen (the great city located between Nineveh and Calah).

Mizraim was the ancestor of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, Pathrusites, Casluhites, and the Caphtorites, from whom the Philistines came.

Canaan’s oldest son was Sidon, the ancestor of the Sidonians. Canaan was also the ancestor of the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites. The Canaanite clans eventually spread out, and the territory of Canaan extended from Sidon in the north to Gerar and Gaza in the south, and east as far as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, near Lasha.

These were the descendants of Ham, identified by clan, language, territory, and national identity.

Descendants of Shem

Sons were also born to Shem, the older brother of Japheth. Shem was the ancestor of all the descendants of Eber.

The descendants of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

Nimrod attained great fame by conquest and terror; his empire extended from Babylonia in the south to Assyria in the north (10:10-12). He was the greatest hunter in the world (literally “a great hunter before the Lord”); Assyrian monarchs glorified their own power, often depicting themselves as valiant hunter-conquerors.

Babylonia (Hebrew Shinar) is the area surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates in southern Mesopotamia. This kingdom eventually reached into northern Mesopotamia (Assyria). Of the cities mentioned, Babylon is most important because of its role in building the Tower of Babel (see 11:4 and note). Erech was ancient Uruk and is now Warka in southern Iraq (see Ezra 4:9-10). Akkad was the ancient Agade north of Babylon, home of the famous ruler Sargon (2370-2295 BC). The location of Calneh is uncertain, though it is presumably one of Nimrod’s cities located north of Aram-naharaim in southern Mesopotamia (cp. Amos 6:2).

Building . . . Nineveh: Like Cain, Nimrod built cities (see 4:17 and comments). Nineveh was an ancient Assyrian city on the east bank of the Tigris River in northern Iraq. Rehoboth-ir was a daughter-city of Nineveh or was located nearby. Calah is modern Tell Nimrud, south of Nineveh. Resen is possibly modern Selamiyeh, northwest of Tell Nimrud.

From there he expanded his territory to Assyria: The Hebrew text can also be translated From that land Assyria went out.

The Ludites were Lydian tribes west of the Nile delta. The identity of the Anamites is uncertain. They were possibly Egyptians near Cyrene, west of Egypt. The Lehabites were possibly a Libyan tribe. The Naphtuhites inhabited northern Egypt. The Pathrusites inhabited southern Egypt. Casluhites, from whom the Philistines came, and Caphtorites; cp. Jer 47:4; Amos 9:7: The Casluhites possibly inhabited an Egyptian district also known as Cyrenaica. The Caphtorites were Cretans (see Jer 47:4; Amos 9:7). The Philistines from Crete were sea people who lived intermittently in southwest Canaan during the period of the Exodus and later (Josh 13:17; Amos 9:7). They were among Israel’s most troublesome enemies during the early monarchy (see 1–2 Samuel).

Sidon settled in Phoenicia, north of Canaan. Hittites (Hebrew Heth): The Hittites in Genesis were a coalition of cities within Canaan (see 26:34-35; 27:46; Ezek 16:3). They probably were not the same as the Hittites of Anatolia (Asia Minor), whose empire was one of the great empires of antiquity during the patriarchal period. The Jebusites were ancient inhabitants of Jerusalem (Josh 15:63; Judg 19:10-11; 2 Sam 5:6-9). The Amorites lived throughout the mountains of Palestine in Canaan (see 15:16; 48:22; Num 13:29; Deut 3:8; Josh 10:5; Judg 1:35; 10:8; Ezek 16:3). Little is known of the Girgashites, a Canaanite tribe (15:21; Deut 7:1; Josh 3:10). The Hivites were an uncircumscribed Canaanite tribe (34:2; 13-24; Josh 9:1, 7; 11:3; Judg 3:3; 2 Sam 24:7). The Arkites resided in Tell Arga in Lebanon. The Sinites formed a city-state and inhabited Phoenicia. The Arvadites inhabited Ruad in northern Phoenicia, near the El Kebir River. They were known for shipping (cp. Ezek 27:8). The Zemarites inhabited Sumur (modern Sumra), north of Arka on the Phoenician coast. The Hamathites founded what is now Hama on the Orontes River, the northern boundary of Canaan (see Num 34:8; Josh 13:5; 2 Sam 8:9-10; 1 Kgs 8:65; 2 Kgs 14:25-28).

The territory of Canaan is specifically marked off because it would be taken from its inhabitants and given to Israel (see 15:18; Num 34:2-12; Ezek 17:15-20; 48:1-28). An ancient north-south seacoast highway (the Via Maris) extended from Sidon . . . to Gerar, connecting Egypt to Mesopotamia. Modern Gaza is 11 miles northwest of Gerar. Sodom and Gomorrah were cities on the border of the land southeast of the Dead Sea. Admah and Zeboiim are mentioned 15 times in connection with Sodom and Gomorrah (14:2, 8; Deut 29:23; see Hos 11:8). All four cities were destroyed by God to cleanse the land (see ch 19). Lasha was possibly in the northern region of the northern Sea of the Dead Sea.

Shem, the older brother of Japheth (or Shem, whose older brother was Japheth), was the father of the Semitic peoples. The descendants listed represent countries east of Israel (modern Iraq, Iran, and Syria). The narrator lists these locations within Mesopotamia since Abram, the father of Israel, originated from this area (see 11:27-32). Abram receives special attention because of his connection with Abram (see note on 10:24).

Eber receives special attention because of his connection with Abram (see note on 10:24).

The descendants of Elam lived in the region of modern southwestern Iran (see 14:1, 9; Ezra 4:9; Isa 11:11). The descendants of Asshur were later Assyrians who lived under Nimrod’s jurisdiction (see 10:11). Sumerians descended from Ham were ousted by Mesopotamian Semites. Arphaxad possibly settled northeast of Nineveh; his descendants are further described in 11:12-26. Lud was near the Tigris River; its people were related to the Lydians (see 10:13). Aram was a kingdom of tribes that lived in the Mesopotamian plains.
The genealogy of Arphaxad and Eber

23 The descendants of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.  
24 Arphaxad was the father of Shelah, and Shelah was the father of Eber.  
25 Eber had two sons. The first was named Peleg (which means “division”), for during his lifetime the people of the world were divided into different language groups. His brother’s name was Joktan.

26 Joktan was the ancestor of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were descendants of Joktan. The territory they occupied extended from Mesha all the way to Sephar in the eastern mountains.

31 These were the descendants of Shem, identified by clan, language, territory, and national identity.

Conclusion

32 These are the clans that descended from Noah’s sons, arranged by nation according to their lines of descent. All the nations of the earth descended from these clans after the great flood.

The Dispersion at Babel (11:1-9)
The Tower of Babel

11 At one time all the people of the world spoke the same language and used the same words. As the people migrated to the east, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there.

3 They began saying to each other, “Let’s make bricks and harden them with fire.” (In this region bricks were used instead of stone, and tar was used for mortar.) Then they said, “Come, let’s build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world.”

The LORD Dispenses the Nations

5 But the Lord came down to look at the city and the tower the people were building.

6 Look!” he said. “The people are united,
and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them. 7Come, let’s go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won’t be able to understand each other.”

8In that way, the Lord scattered them all over the world, and they stopped building the city. 9That is why the city was called Babylon, because that is where the Lord confused the people with different languages. In this way he scattered them all over the world.

6. THE ACCOUNT OF SHEM’S DESCENDANTS (11:10-26)

This is the account of Shem’s family.

Two years after the great flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad. 11After the birth of Arphaxad, Shem lived another 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

12When Arphaxad was 35 years old, he became the father of Shelah. 13After the birth of Shelah, Arphaxad lived another 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

14When Shelah was 30 years old, he became the father of Eber. 15After the birth of Eber, Shelah lived another 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

16When Eber was 34 years old, he became the father of Peleg. 17After the birth of Peleg, Eber lived another 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

18When Peleg was 30 years old, he became the father of Reu. 19After the birth of Reu, Peleg lived another 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

20When Reu was 32 years old, he became the father of Serug. 21After the birth of Serug, Reu lived another 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

22When Serug was 30 years old, he became the father of Nahor. 23After the birth of Nahor, Serug lived another 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

24When Nahor was 29 years old, he became the father of Terah. 25After the birth of Terah, Nahor lived another 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

26After Terah was 70 years old, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.


This is the account of Terah’s family. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot.

28But Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, the land of his birth, while his father, Terah, was
12:1
Gen 15:7
*Acts 7:3
Heb 11:8  
* crets (0776)
* Gen 13:17

12:2
Gen 13:16; 15:5; 17:4;
18:18; 22:17
Zech 8:13
* horeak (1298)
* Gen 49:28

12:3
Gen 22:18; 26:4
Exod 23:22
Acts 3:25
* Gal 3:8

12:4
Gen 11:26, 31

still living. 29Meanwhile, Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor’s wife was Milcah. (Milcah and her sister Iscakh were daughters of Nahor’s brother Haran.) 30But Sarai was unable to become pregnant and had no children.

31One day Terah took his son Abram, his daughter-in-law Sarai (his son Abram’s wife), and his grandson Lot (his son Haran’s child) and moved away from Ur of the Chaldeans. He was headed for the land of Canaan, but they stopped at Haran and settled there. 32Terah lived for 205 years and died while still in Haran.

The Call of Abram (12:1-9)

12 The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. 3He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and his family, the people in his household to join him in the

main city of Sumer in Mesopotamia near the mouth of the Persian Gulf. The family had moved there perhaps generations before the family. Their ancestral home (“native country,” 12:1) was apparently near Haran, in the region of the descendants of Shem (11:10-26); thus they settled there when they left Ur (11:31) and were later described as “Arameans” (Deut 26:5). 3A land of his birth: The same Hebrew phrase is repeated in 12:1 (“native country”), making Ur, not Haran, the location of Abram’s call (see 15:7; Neh 9:7; Acts 7:2).

11:29 Sarai means “princess” in Hebrew. No mention is made of Sarai’s parentage, perhaps to add suspense to the Abimelech story, which reveals that she was Abram’s half sister (20:9-12). Later, the law prohibited such a marriage (Lev 18:9; 20:17; Deut 27:22). 3A Nahor’s wife was Milcah: Milcah was Haran’s daughter and Nahor’s niece (see 11:29). Her son Bethuel was the father of Rebekah, the wife of Abram’s son Isaac (24:10, 15, 24). The name Milcah is related to the Hebrew word meaning “queen.” In Akkadian, it is a title of the goddess Ishtar, the moon-god’s daughter. Terah’s name is related to the word for “moon” in Hebrew; his whole family appears to have worshiped Sin, the moon-god (see Josh 24:14).

11:30 Sarai, Rebekah (25:21), and Rachel (29:31) all suffered infertility. Sarai’s situation in particular highlights the paradox between the apparent reality and God’s promise to give many descendants (12:2). The Israelite nation’s origin from barren women fixes its identity in the sovereignty of God, who miraculously gives children to barren women (see also 1 Sam 1:1-2; 2:5; Ps 113:9; Isa 54:1).

11:31 Terah took: The text is clear that Abram’s departure from Ur was prompted by God’s calling (see note on 11:28), but the event is described from Terah’s perspective, in keeping with the patriarchy of ancient Near Eastern culture. This cultural deference to the oldest male is evidently why Abram did not continue on to Canaan by himself at this time (see Acts 7:2-4).

3Haran was 590 miles northwest of Ur, near the Syrian-Turkish border. Despite the similar name, there is no connection with Terah’s son Haran, who had died in Ur (11:28). 3Haran means “caravan.” Ancient commercial routes converged there, making it a key site for trade.

3Haran was also well-known for the moon worship to which Terah’s family was apparently devoted (see note on 11:29).

11:32 205 years: Some ancient versions read 145 years; cp. 11:26 and 12:4.

12:1-9 Through Abram’s faith and family, God began restoring the blessing. God called Abram from a pagan world to begin a new nation; his promises to Abram later became a covenant (ch 15). God’s call to Abram later helped convince the Israelites to leave Egypt and go to the land God promised to Abram. It also reminded the Babylonian exiles of their need to return to their own land (e.g., Isa 51).

12:1-3 These verses are structured around two commands to Abram: Leave and be a blessing (see note on 12:2). Each directive is followed by three promises conditioned upon obedience.

12:1 Abram knew that he should leave, but he did not know where he was going. Obedience required faith.

12:2 and you will be a blessing (or so that you will be a blessing): This clause is a command in Hebrew, but it is also a promise conditioned upon Abram’s obedience to God’s command (12:1): “Go . . . so that you will be a blessing. Be a blessing, so that I can bless and curse others.” * make you famous (literally make your name great): Abram received the fame sought by the builders of Babel (see 11:4 and note).

12:3 Based on Abram’s obedience to the command to be a blessing (12:2), God gave him three more promises. ** those who treat you with contempt: People who disregarded Abram and his covenant were rejecting God’s choice and plan. ** All the families on earth will be blessed: By faith, they could participate in the covenant God was making with Abram. The blessing spread to the whole world through Abraham, Israel, the covenantants, the prophets, Scripture, and the Messiah (Gal 3:8, 16; cp. Rom 9:4-5).

12:4-9 Abram’s obedience to God’s call corresponded to God’s commands (see note on 12:1-3). He journeyed to Canaan (12:4-6) and became a blessing (12:5-9).

12:4 Abram was middle-aged, settled, prosperous, aristocratic, and polytheistic (see note on 11:27-32). When the Lord spoke to him (12:1-3), he obediently left his old ways in Ur to follow God’s plan. Since Abram responded in faith, God’s promises (12:2-3) could be confirmed in a binding covenant (13:8-21).

12:5 The people (Hebrew hannepesh, “the lives”) he had taken into his household were probably converts; Abram first became a blessing by influencing people in his household to join him in following the Lord.
and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.

Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your descendants.” And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the LORD, who had appeared to him. After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built another altar and dedicated it to the LORD, and he worshiped the LORD. Then Abram continued traveling south by stages toward the Negev.

**Abraham and Sarai in Egypt (12:10-20)**

At that time a severe famine struck the land of Canaan, forcing Abram to go down

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**God’s Covenant Relationships (12:1-9)**

The covenant relationships that God established and developed with his people may be the most important theological theme of the OT. The covenant theme in the OT begins with Noah, through whom God made a covenant with all of creation. God promised to uphold the created order and give the rainbow as the sign of this commitment (9:1-17).

God later established a covenant relationship with Abraham and his family; the sign of this covenant was circumcision (12:1-9; 15:1-21; 17:9-14). God’s covenant with Abraham promised descendants, land, and rulers; these promises formed the basis for the covenants God later made with his people.

God’s covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai was a national covenant (Exod 19–24) whose sign was the Sabbath; it addressed how Israel would be the chosen descendants of Abraham. This covenant took the form of a suzerain-vassal treaty, an ancient relationship established between a great king and loyal subjects (see note on Exod 20:1–23:33).

The Sinai covenant was renewed in Deuteronomy and Josh 24:1-28. The renewal focused on God’s promise of land and how Israel would conduct itself while inhabiting the land. Through his covenant with Israel, God affirmed that he was their God and they were his people, a relationship that required their complete loyalty (Jer 11:4; 24:7; Ezek 11:20; 14:11).

God, the great king, would bless and protect the nation Israel. Israel’s obligation was to keep God’s commands, decrees, and regulations (Exod 19:5, 8; 24:3, 7; Deut 30:15-20).

God later formed a covenant with King David (2 Sam 7:5-16), which provided the line of kings promised to Abraham and Jacob (Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11).

Years later, at a low point in Israel’s history, the prophet Jeremiah foretold a “new covenant” in Israel’s future (Jer 31:31-33), in which the ideals of the covenants with Abraham and Israel would finally be realized. Jeremiah’s prophecy found fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ (see Luke 22:20; Heb 8:6-13; 12:24). This new covenant provides the ultimate fulfillment of the previous promises that were made to God’s people.

God’s covenants were motivated by God’s faithful love (Hebrew khesed), which enabled a relationship to continue between God and his people. God initiated this relationship, announced its conditions, and rewarded his people accordingly. These covenants were not rewards but divine gifts. God may exclude people from the covenant relationship (Hos 1:9), but he will not break, revoke, or withdraw his covenants. If broken or annulled by the human parties, the covenant could be renewed only through a reapplication of God’s faithful love (Exod 34:6-9; Jer 31:31-33). God’s love has preserved the relationship, but his grace must not be mocked (Isa 54:7-10; 55:3; 61:8; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 6:7).

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12:6-7 The oak of Moreh was apparently a Canaanite shrine; fertile groves of trees were sacred to the Canaanites (cp. Isa 1:29), and Moreh means “teacher.” Abram proclaimed (Luther: “preached”) the Lord’s name beside a pagan place of worship and instruction (12:8). Abram continued to be a blessing when he built an altar to worship God at Shechem and east of Bethel (12:8).

12:7 The LORD appeared to Abram at Shechem (12:6) to confirm that this land was the Promised Land. Israel was to occupy this land, but sharing in God’s promises required their faith (cp. Num 14; Josh 1:6-9). To your descendants (literally seed): Abram did not yet possess the land; he lived as a temporary settler.

12:8-9 Abram had to keep moving camp because the Canaanites had the fertile land.

12:8 He worshiped the LORD (literally he made proclamation of the Lord by name): Proclaiming the name (identity and character) of the Lord is central to worship and witness (cp. 4:26; see Exod 34:5-7). Abram had to distinguish his sacrificial worship from that of the pagan Canaanites.
12:10-13:18

12:10-20 This episode shows that God would not allow Abram to jeopardize his promises. Just after Abram’s obedience to the call, a famine tested his faith. God delivered him and his family, even though Abram foolishly used deception rather than trusting in God to preserve him in Egypt. This story deliberately parallels Israel’s later bondage in Egypt. Because of a famine (12:10 // 47:13), Abram/Israel went to Egypt (12:10 // 47:27); there was an attempt to kill the males and save the females (12:12 // Exod 1:22); God plagued Egypt (12:17 // Exod 7:14–11:10); Abram/Israel plundered Egypt (12:16 // Exod 13:25–36); they were expelled (Hebrew shalakh, “send”; 12:19–20 // Exod 12:31–33) and ascended to the Negev (13:1 // Num 13:17, 22). Israel was to believe that God would deliver them from bondage in Egypt through the plagues because their ancestor had already been rescued from bondage in Egypt.

12:10-13 Abram’s scheme was rooted in fear that jeopardized his family and God’s promises. Abram was not walking by faith when he went to Egypt. He stopped building altars and his deception took center stage. Deception would plague his family throughout Genesis (26:1–11; 27:1–29; 29:15–30; 30:34–36; 31:6–11; 37:18–35; 39:7–20).

12:14-15 Sarai was 65 years old, but she lived to be 127; she was like a modern childless woman of about 35. She and Abram came from a noble family (see note on 11:29), so she was regal in her person and dress. Pharaoh was attracted by her physical appearance and her political assets.

12:15 Pharaoh was a title, not a personal name (37:36; Exod 1:15).

12:17-19 God’s intervention rescued Sarai and preserved the marriage to fulfill the covenant promise. Sarai’s restoration to Abram came with a rebuke from Pharaoh on God’s behalf (12:18–19).

12:20 No answer to Pharaoh’s questions (12:18–19) was needed, because the rebuke was followed by expulsion. Pharaoh’s command paralleled God’s command to Abram (12:1), but Pharaoh’s demand brought shame and disgrace. God was faithful in preserving his promise.

13:1-7 This story is set in conflict amidst God’s blessings. In the opening verses, Abram returns to a place where he had built an altar. Previous events are emphasized as Abram’s return to the land is described (13:3–4); Abram renewed his worship and again proclaimed the Lord’s name (cp. 12:8).

13:2 Abram already had powerful resources (12:5); his Egyptian sojourn augmented his wealth and power (12:16).
ABRAHAM (11:26–25:11)

"By faith . . . Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land. . . . He went without knowing where he was going. . . . By faith . . . Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him" (Heb 11:8, 17). These key events in Abraham's life illustrate the faithful obedience for which he is best known.

God called Abram from the city of Ur to become the patriarch of God's people. Abram's family relationships are recorded in Gen 11:26-32. Terah had three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Terah left Ur with Abram, Abram's wife Sarai, and Lot, whose father, Haran, had died. On his way to Canaan, Terah settled in the city of Haran (11:31). God had called Abram to a new land while he was still in Ur (Acts 7:2-4); God told Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you” (12:1). God blessed Abram by making a covenant with him that included promises of great blessing, numerous descendants, and a new land (12:1-3). These promises later saved Israel from destruction when they repeatedly failed to keep their covenant with God (see Lev 26:40-45).

Abram left Haran at age seventy-five. Entering Canaan, he went first to Shechem, a Canaanite city between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. God appeared to Abram near the oak of Moreh, a Canaanite shrine (see note on 12:6-7). Abram built altars there and near Bethel (12:8), proclaiming the one true God at these centers of false worship. Abram later moved to Hebron by the oaks of Mamre, again building an altar to worship God (13:18). When God again promised blessings to Abram in a vision (15:1), Abram exclaimed that he was still childless because Sarai was barren (11:30), and that Eliezer of Damascus was his heir (15:2). This obscure statement is clarified by the Nuzi documents. According to Hurrian custom, a childless couple of means could adopt an heir, often a slave who would be responsible for their burial and mourning. A natural son born after the slave-heir’s adoption would supplant him. Apparently Abram had adopted Eliezer in this manner, but God promised that Abram’s own son would be his heir (15:4).

The hallmark of Abram’s life was that he believed the Lord, and the Lord considered him righteous because of his faith (15:6; see Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23). Abram’s righteousness was not because he never sinned—on several occasions he failed to do what was right, twice he lied about Sarah out of fear, and he took the provision of a son into his own hands with Hagar rather than praying for God to act (16:1-5; cp. 25:21). But he consistently returned to faith as the fundamental principle of his life before God.

Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born to Sarai’s servant Hagar. When Abram was ninety-nine, the Lord appeared to him and reaffirmed his covenant promise of a son and of blessing (ch 17), adding circumcision as the mark of the covenant relationship (17:9-14). God also changed Abram’s and Sarai’s names to Abraham and Sarah (17:5, 15). Abraham laughed at the promise of another son (17:17). Shortly afterward, the Lord appeared again to Abraham (ch 18) and again announced the promised son. This time, Sarah was caught laughing in disbelief (18:12-15). Abraham was 100 years old and his wife 90 when the Lord did “exactly what he had promised” (21:1). The long-promised son was born and was fittingly named Isaac (“he laughs!”).

The supreme test of Abraham’s faith came when God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac (ch 22). Abraham obeyed faithfully, trusting that God would not thwart his own purposes (see Heb 11:17-19). Just as the knife was about to fall, the angel of God stopped Abraham and provided a ram for him to sacrifice in Isaac’s place (22:13). Abraham’s faith was complete (22:12).

Christians understand the sacrifice of Isaac as prefiguring God’s provision of his only Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. God has fulfilled his covenant with Abraham through Jesus Christ, through whom the blessing of salvation is extended to all who have faith (Rom 4:16-17), and believers become Abraham’s spiritual descendants (Gal 3:29). Abraham’s life shows that God is faithful and worthy of belief and obedience. The full import of God’s promise was realized when the gospel was preached to all nations and people from all families of the earth responded in faith (see Gal 3:6-9).

Abraham was God’s friend (2 Chr 20:7; Jas 2:23). All who live by faith are challenged to live as he did, daily venturing into the unknown with trust in God’s guidance and sustenance. Abraham is one of many great “witnesses” to a life of faith (Heb 12:1; see Heb 11), inspiring believers to persevere in faith because we know God is faithful.
and gold.) 3From the Negeb, they continued traveling by stages toward Bethel, and they pitched their tents between Bethel and Ai, where they had camped before. 4This was the same place where Abram had built the altar, and there he worshiped the Lord again.

5Lot, who was traveling with Abram, had also become very wealthy with flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and many tents. 6But the land could not support both Abram and Lot with all their flocks and herds living so close together. 7So disputes broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. (At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.)

8Finally Abram said to Lot, "Let's not allow this conflict to come between us or our herdsman. After all, we are close relatives! 9The whole countryside is open to you. Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want the land to the left, then I'll take the land on the right. If you prefer the land on the right, then I'll go to the left."

10Lot took a long look at the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley in the direction of Zoar. The whole area was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord or the beautiful land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)

11Lot chose for himself the whole Jordan Valley to the east of them. He went there with his flocks and servants and parted company with his uncle Abram. 12So Abram settled in the land of Canaan, and Lot moved his tents to a place near Sodom and settled among the cities of the plain. 13But the people of this area were extremely wicked and constantly sinned against the Lord.

14After Lot had gone, the Lord said to Abram, "Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west. 15I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession. 16And I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted! 17Go and walk through the land in every direction, for I am giving it to you."

18So Abram moved his camp to Hebron and settled near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. There he built another altar to the Lord.

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**Age | Event | Reference**
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10 | Sarai is born | Gen 12:17, 20:12
75 | Abram leaves Haran, moves to Canaan | Gen 11:26-32
85 | Abram takes Hagar as a secondary wife | Gen 16:1-3
86 | Ishmael is born | Gen 16:15-16
99 | Abram is renamed Abraham, is promised a son through Sarah, is given circumcision | Gen 17:1-8
100 | Isaac is born | Gen 21:1-7
103 | Isaac is weaned, Ishmael is sent away | Gen 21:18-24
137 | Sarah dies | Gen 23:1
140 | Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac | Gen 24:1-9, 25:20
160 | Jacob and Esau are born | Gen 25:20, 26
175 | Abraham dies | Gen 25:7-9

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**Abraham's Life (11:26-25:11).**
Abram’s Encounter with Kings (14:1-24) 
Abram Rescues Lot

14 About this time war broke out in the region. King Amraphel of Babylonia, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Kedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim fought against King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (also called Zoar).

2This second group of kings joined forces in Siddim Valley (that is, the valley of the Dead Sea). For twelve years they had been subject to King Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled against him.

3One year later Kedorlaomer and his allies arrived and defeated the Rephaites at Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzites at Ham, the Emites at Shaveh-kiriathaim, and the Horites at Mount Seir, as far as El paran at the edge of the wilderness. Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (now called Kadesh) and conquered all the territory of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites living in Hazazon-tamar.

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7This second group of kings joined forces in Siddim Valley (that is, the valley of the Dead Sea). For twelve years they had been subject to King Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled against him.

8Then the rebel kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (also called Zoar) prepared for battle in the valley of the Dead Sea. They fought against King Kedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Babylonia, and King Arioch of Ellasar—four kings against five. As it happened, the valley of the Dead Sea was filled with tar pits. And as the army of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into the tar pits, while the rest escaped into the mountains.

9The victorious invaders then plundered Sodom and Gomorrah and headed for home, taking with them all the spoils of war and the food supplies. They also captured Lot—Abram’s nephew who lived in Sodom—and carried off everything he owned.

10But one of Lot’s men escaped and reported everything to Abram the Hebrew, who was living near the oak grove belonging to Mamre the Amorite. Mamre and his relatives, Eshcol and Aner, were Abram’s allies.

11When Abram heard that his nephew...
Lot had been captured, he mobilized the 318 trained men who had been born into his household. Then he pursued Kedorlaomer’s army until he caught up with them at Dan. There he divided his men and attacked during the night. Kedorlaomer’s army fled, but Abram chased them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. Abram recovered all the goods that had been taken, and he brought back his nephew Lot with his possessions and all the women and other captives.

**Melchizedek Blesses Abram**

After Abram returned from his victory over Kedorlaomer and all his allies, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).

And Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a ‘priest of God Most High, brought Abram some bread and wine. Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing:

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.
20 And blessed be God Most High, who has defeated your enemies for you.”

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.

**Abram Rejects Sodom’s Goods (14:21-24)**

The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give back my people who were captured. But you may keep for yourself all the goods you have recovered.”

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**Notes:**

- **14:15** Damascus was 40 miles north of Dan. Hobah was about 60 miles north of Damascus.
- **14:17** The valley of Shaveh or King’s Valley was probably the Kidron Valley (see 2 Sam 18:18).
- **14:18** Melchizedek means “king of righteousness,” suggesting that he was a righteous servant of God. He was probably a Jebusite priest and king; later authors regarded him as a type of Christ (Ps 110:4; Heb 7:1-19). • Salem is Jerusalem (cp. Ps 76:2). • God Most High: Hebrew El-Elyon; also in 14:19, 20, 22.
- **14:19-20** By paying a tithe (a tenth) to Melchizedek, Abram acknowledged Melchizedek as a spiritual superior (see Heb 7:4) and affirmed that God had given him victory.
- **14:21-24** Abram knew that accepting the offer of the king of Sodom could make him an ally or subject, as Lot had been. This would jeopardize the fulfillment of God’s promises. Faith looks beyond the riches of the world to the greater blessings that God has in store.
Abram replied to the king of Sodom, “I solemnly swear to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will not take so much as a single thread or sandal thong from what belongs to you. Otherwise you might say, ‘I am the one who made Abram rich.’ I will accept only what my young warriors have already eaten, and I request that you give a fair share of the goods to my allies—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre.”

The Lord’s Covenant Promise to Abram (15:1-21)

Some time later, the Lord spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, “Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great.”

But Abram replied, “O Sovereign Lord, what good are all your blessings when I don’t even have a son? Since you’ve given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth. You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir.”

Then the Lord said to him, “No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir.” Then the Lord took Abram outside and said to him, “Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!” And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.

Melchizedek (14:17-24)

Melchizedek is a mysterious biblical personality whose name means “king of righteousness.” He was a Canaanite priest and king; there is no record of his family or of the beginning or end of his life.

Abraham met Melchizedek after defeating four Mesopotamian kings. The Mesopotamians had raided Sodom and Gomorrah and captured Abraham’s nephew Lot (14:1-16). When Abraham returned from battle, Melchizedek, king of Salem (=Jerusalem; see note on Ps 76:2), was with the grateful kings of the Dead Sea confederacy. When Melchizedek gave Abraham bread, wine, and his blessing, he was acting as “a priest of God Most High” (14:18), the true God who created heaven and earth (see Ps 7:17; 47:2; 57:2; 78:56). Melchizedek correctly understood that Abraham worshiped the true God (14:22), and he praised God for giving victory to Abraham. Abraham received Melchizedek’s gifts and gave him his tithe, thus recognizing Melchizedek’s higher spiritual rank as a patriarchal priest (see Heb 7:4-7).

Melchizedek is an unusual figure in Genesis, which gives genealogies for its other characters. Melchizedek appears without any such record, and as quickly disappears. Much later in Israel’s history, King David was perhaps reflecting on this when he said that the Messiah is “a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4; cp. Heb 7:15-25). The book of Hebrews explains this statement, saying that Melchizedek is remembered as “resembling the Son of God” (Heb 7:3), but was not himself the Son of God. His priesthood lasts forever as an archetype that prefigures the Messiah’s priesthood. Like Melchizedek (but unlike the kings of Israel), Jesus is a king who also fulfills priestly functions.

Melchizedek, a royal priest, was superior to Levi, the ancestor of Israel’s priests. In the same way, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is a better priest than the descendants of Aaron. Jesus provides permanent atonement for sins and direct access to his Father through his name (Heb 7:24-28). He guides his people by the Spirit rather than by law (Heb 8:7-13) and lives forever as priest and king for those who trust in him.
God made his stars; it just says parenthetically that support the doctrine of righteousness to faith. The Hebrew text does not link the strength of Abram’s faith. This promise in Rom 4:18 to underscore his first great act that demonstrated it had faith; his departure from Ur was before God by faith.

51 Heb 6:13-15
Gal 3:6-9; 3:29
Rom 4:11-25; 9:7-8; Acts 3:24-26; 7:2-8
Luke 3:7-9
Ps 105:7-45
Lev 1:17
Acts 2:24
Deut 1:8
Neh 9:7-8
Exod 2:24
Gen 12:1; 13:17
Acts 7:6
Gen 2:21; 28:11
Gen 12:13 Exod 12:40
Gal 3:17
Exod 6:5
Gen 25:8
Exod 12:40

**God’s Covenant with Abraham (15:1-21)**

The Lord had already established a relationship with Abraham (12:1-9) before he made a formal covenant with him (ch 15). God took all the initiative: He approached Abraham and spoke to him in a vision. God presented the impossible promise that the old man would have a son through whom his descendants would eventually be as numerous as the stars of heaven. Abraham believed God (15:6), and his faith proved to be an act of righteousness—faith is righteousness, and faith produces righteousness in covenant relationship with God (see Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; 4:3, 17; Gal 3:6, 11; Heb 10:37-38). The covenant of ch 15 includes a royal grant (15:18-21) in which God, the king, gave land to Abraham, his subject, as a possession and an inheritance. (In the ancient Near East, kings sometimes granted land or other gifts to loyal subjects.) At the end of that day, Abraham knew that his own and his descendants’ future was firmly in the hands of the covenant God. Later, the grant would be transferred to his descendants.

God later ratified his covenant with Abraham (17:1-22), giving him circumcision as its sign (17:10) and condition (17:4, 9). The almighty God once again took the initiative (17:1) in granting Abraham an extraordinary privilege. The covenant was not a relationship between equals, yet both partners in the covenant assumed responsibilities. God committed himself voluntarily to Abraham and his descendants, while requiring faithfulness from Abraham (17:1, 9-14). The blessing Abraham received as God’s covenant partner was embodied in the new name that God gave him (17:5-6).

God’s family covenant with Abraham also applied to his descendants (13:15-16; 15:3-5; 17:6-10). It pointed to blessing in the relatively near future when his descendants would possess the land (15:12-16). Much later, Abraham’s faith became a blessing to all through his descendant, Jesus Christ, through whom all the families of the earth can share in God’s blessing on Abraham (12:3; see Rom 4:11-25; Gal 3:8-9, 16).

15:6 And Abram believed: God made his covenant with a believer; the statement does not indicate when Abram came to faith. The Hebrew text does not link Abram’s belief with the promise of the stars; it just says parenthetically that Abram believed God. Abram already had faith; his departure from Ur was his first great act that demonstrated it (see Heb 11:8-10). *God counted him as righteous because of his faith:* This central statement about Abram’s saving faith is quoted three times in the NT (Rom 4:3, 22-23; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23) to support the doctrine of righteousness before God by faith.

15:7-21 With a solemn ceremony, God made a binding covenant with Abram that guaranteed the fulfillment of God’s promises to him.

15:10 Obeying God’s instructions, Abram gathered three herd animals for the ceremony and cut them in half. Cutting the animals symbolized the oath, indicating that the covenant maker staked his own life on his word (Jer 34:18).

15:11 Vultures are unclean birds of prey that symbolize those who unjustly attack Abraham’s heirs (15:13-14).

15:13-16 Not even 400 years of bondage could interfere with God’s plan to fulfill the covenant.

15:13 oppressed: The same word is used in Exod 1:11-12. Egypt, like predatory birds (15:11), would try to destroy Israel and hinder the covenant’s fulfillment.

15:16 The reasons for Israel’s bondage included God’s justice. God would tolerate the sins of the Amorites until they fully deserved judgment. *do not yet warrant their destruction (literally are not yet full) : To give the Promised Land to Israel, the Lord would dispossess the land’s inhabitants in a way that satisfied
the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction.”

17After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses. 18So the Lord made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River—19the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

God Provides the Promised Offspring
(16:1–22:19)
Hagar and Ishmael

16Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, “The Lord has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her.” And Abram agreed with Sarai’s proposal. 3So Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.)

4So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt. 5Then Sarai said to Abram, “This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she’s pregnant she treats me with contempt. The Lord will show who’s wrong— you or me!”

6Abram replied, “Look, she is your servant, uncomfortable by custom, set a problematic human plan to separate God’s people from his love or to interfere with God’s plan.

his justice. The fulfillment of promises to Israel also brought retributive judgment on people of the land (though individuals were saved by faith; see Josh 2:1–15; 6:23–25; Heb 11:31; Jas 2:25). Until then, God would send the family to Egypt where Israel could become a great nation. Seeing all this in advance was terrifying (15:12), but it was comforting to know that nothing could interfere with God’s plan.

15:17–18 smoking firepot . . . flaming torch: Fire represented the Lord’s cleansing, consuming zeal and unapproachable holiness (cp. Isa 6:3–7). The holy God made (literally cut) a unilateral covenant with Abram; its promises were absolutely sure because they did not depend on what Abram or his descendants might do.

15:18–19 God specified the boundaries of the Promised Land. His clear message to Abram was that despite prospects of death and suffering (enslavement), he and his descendants would eventually receive the promises, for God had sworn an oath (see Heb 6:13–14). Nothing can separate God’s people from his love or the fulfillment of his plans (see Rom 8:18–39; 2 Pet 1:3–4). • the border of Egypt: Literally the river of Egypt, referring either to an eastern branch of the Nile River or to the Brook of Egypt in the Sinai (see Num 34:5).

16:1–16 While waiting for their promised son to be born, Abram and Sarai attempted an alternate plan that was not in keeping with faith.

16:1–3 Abram and Sarai faced the tension of her being barren and beyond childbearing years. By custom, a barren woman could give her servant to her husband as a slave-wife; the child born to that union was considered the wife’s child and could be adopted as the heir. Sarai’s suggestion, unbelievable by custom, set a problematic human plan in motion. God’s promises would be fulfilled by faith.

16:4–6 Perhaps Hagar expected to become the favored wife instead of Sarai (cp. Prov 30:21–23).
so deal with her as you see fit.” Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.

7The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. 8The angel said to her, “Hagar, Sarai’s servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?”

“I’m running away from my mistress, Sara,” she replied.

9The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority.” 10Then he added, “I will give you more descendants than you can count.”

11And the angel also said, “You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means ‘God hears’), for the Lord has heard your cry of distress. 12This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives.”

13Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the Lord, who had spoken to her. She said, “You are the God who sees me.” She also said, “Have I truly seen the One who sees me?”

14So that well was named Beer-lahai-roi (which means “well of the Living One who sees me”). It can still be found between Kadesh and Bered.

15So Hagar gave Abram a son, and Abram named him Ishmael. 16Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born.

ISHAEL (16:11-16)

Ishmael was Abraham's first son, born of Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian servant. The boy was born near Hebron when Abraham was 86 years old (13:18; 16:16). God had promised to make a great nation of the childless Abraham (12:2) and assured him that his son would be his heir (15:4). Ishmael was born in Abraham's attempt to fulfill God's promise by human means (see 16:1-16; Gal 4:23), but God would accomplish this through Sarah (see 17:15–18:15; 21:1-7).

When God announced that Sarah would have a son to fulfill the promise (17:15-16), Abraham asked God to accept Ishmael (17:17-18). Ishmael was not the promised son—the covenant would be established with Isaac (17:19)—but God did bless Ishmael and make him the father of a great nation (17:20-21).

At age thirteen, Ishmael was circumcised in witness to God's covenant with Abraham (17:9-14, 22-27). Then, at Isaac's weaning celebration (when Ishmael was about seventeen), Ishmael made fun of Isaac (21:9), and Abraham sent Ishmael and Hagar away with provisions. The angel of God helped Hagar survive in the wilderness, and Ishmael became a wild game hunter. He settled in the wilderness of Paran and married an Egyptian woman (21:20-21). He assisted in Abraham's burial (25:9-10), gave his daughter Mahalath in marriage to Esau (28:9), and died at age 137 (25:17). His twelve sons are named in 25:13-15.

Paul alluded to Ishmael when urging the Galatians to put their faith in God rather than in the law (see Gal 4:21-31). Those who trust the law will not inherit the kingdom, just as the slave woman's son did not inherit with the son of the free woman (Gal 4:30).

16:7 The angel of the Lord was the Lord himself (16:13; 21:17; 22:11-12; 31:11-13; 48:16; Exod 3:2; 32:34; Judg 6:11, 16, 22; 13:22-23; Zech 3:1-2), but was also distinct from the Lord (24:7; 2 Sam 24:16; Zech 1:12). The angel of the Lord was probably a theophany (a manifestation of God) or a Christophany (an appearance of the pre-incarnate Messiah; see 18:1-2; 19:1; Num 22:22; Judg 2:1:4; 5:23; Zech 12:8), speaking with the authority of the Lord himself.

16:8-12 The angel's rhetorical questions encouraged Hagar to pour out her heart to God. When she did, God commanded her to return and submit (16:9), promising that her son would have innumerable descendants. The angel of the Lord never referred to Hagar as Abram's wife, only as Sarai's servant. She would have Abram's child, but Ishmael was not central to God's covenant with Abram.

16:10-12 Hagar's son would become the father of a great but wild and hostile nation living in the Arabian Desert as perennial enemies of Israel (cp. 25:18). God blessed Ishmael as Abram's descendant, but not as the line chosen to carry the covenant. That blessing was reserved for Abram's chosen heir.

16:11 Names in Genesis often capture the message of a passage and aid the reader in taking the fulfillment of the promise into their own hands by following social custom (cp. 25.21). Giving children to the barren woman is God's work (Ps 113:9; cp. 1 Sam 1:1-28; Luke 1:1-25); impossible difficulties cannot be resolved by human intervention. The Lord hears the afflicted, sees them in their need, and will miraculously provide for them.
The Covenant Confirmed:

Abraham Is Named Abraham

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am El-Shaddai—’God Almighty.’ Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to give you countless descendants.”

"At this, Abram fell face down on the ground. Then God said to him, "This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of a multitude of nations! What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram. Instead, you will be called Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations. I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them!"

"I will confirm my covenant with you and your descendants after you, from generation to generation. This is the everlasting covenant:"

**Circumcision (17:1-9)**

Circumcision is the removal of the male foreskin. It was practiced by some cultures in the ancient world (see Jer 9:25-26); the Bible uses it to symbolize the removal of sin and an old identity, accompanied by inclusion in the covenant community.

God chose circumcision as the sign of a covenant that focuses on descendants. God had promised to make Abraham and his descendants into a great nation (17:7, 13, 19) and to use them to redeem the Gentile nations (12:3; 17:4-6; see Gal 3:8-9). Circumcision was God’s signature in flesh; it would identify Abraham and his descendants as God’s own people (17:9-14) and remind them to live in faithfulness to the covenant.

Although circumcision was applied to adult males when they joined the covenant community (17:23-27; Exod 12:48; Josh 5:3-7), it was usually performed on infants (21:4; Lev 12:3), who received God’s promises and membership in the covenant community through their parents. Faith was required in order to receive God’s blessings, however, as can be seen in the differentiation between Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, and Joseph and his brothers. Non-Israelites could also obligate themselves to Israel’s covenant (Exod 12:48; cp. Gen 34:15-24); circumcision marked their inclusion into the worshiping community (e.g., Exod 12:44).

Circumcision would help Israel recognize and remember that they must lay aside natural impurity. God’s people had to be loyal to the covenant, to the family, and to their own marriages. Intermarriage with uncircumcised people who were not of the covenant was a violation of the covenant. Any man who refused to be circumcised (cut physically in this symbolic way) would be cut off from the covenant people because of his disobedience to God’s command (17:14).

Circumcision is a symbol of separation from the world, of purity, and of loyalty to the covenant. It provides the powerful metaphor of “circumcision of the heart,” which designates a heart that is committed to God and is inwardly set apart to God, rather than being stubbornly resistant (Jer 9:26; Lev 26:41; Deut 30:6; Jer 4:4; Eph 2:11). Circumcision of the heart evidences salvation and fellowship with God (see Ezek 18:31-32; 36:25-27; Rom 2:28-29; 4:11).

When Jesus Christ established God’s new covenant, he fulfilled the requirements of the old covenant, so a new sign was given to identify members of the covenant community. Thus baptism replaces circumcision, and it too must be accompanied by faith. It is not necessary for Gentile believers to be circumcised, since they are incorporated into the people of God through faith in Christ (Acts 15:1-29; Rom 2:25-29; Gal 2:1-10; 6:15; Col 2:11-12). One must turn in confidence to God and his promises, lay aside natural strength and the customs of the world, and live a new life by faith (see Jer 31:33-34; Rom 8:1-17; Gal 5:16-6:10).
covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you. And I will give the entire land of Canaan, where you now live as a foreigner, to you and your descendants. It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God."

The Mark of the Covenant
9Then God said to Abraham, “Your responsibility is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility. 10This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised. 11You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12From generation to generation, every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This applies not only to members of your family but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased. 13All must be circumcised. Your bodies will bear the mark of my everlasting covenant. 14Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant.”

The Promise Affirmed: Sarai Is Named Sarah
15Then God said to Abraham, “Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah. 16And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will be among her descendants.”

17Then Abraham bowed down to the ground, but he laughed to himself in disbelief. “How could I become a father at the age of 100?” he thought. “And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?” 18So Abraham said to God, “May Ishmael live under your special blessing!”

Sarah (17:15-22)
Sarah is among the women in Scripture who were barren but miraculously bore a son (see also 30:22-24; 1 Sam 1:11, 19-20; 2 Kgs 4:14-17; Luke 1:5-25). Because Sarah was ninety years old when this happened (cp. 17:17; 21:1-5), she testifies to God’s ability to do what is humanly impossible. She was Abraham’s wife and the mother of Isaac, through whom God promised to multiply the Israelite nation (12:2; 17:19). Jesus was born from her descendants. Her name Sarai was changed to Sarah when Isaac’s birth was promised (see note on 17:15-16). Sarah is honored for her faithfulness, even though she laughed at the prediction of Isaac’s birth (18:10-15), twenty-five years after God’s original promise to Abraham.

Sarah was also Abraham’s half sister (11:29; 20:12). Sarah accompanied Abraham from Ur to Haran to Canaan (11:31; 12:5). On two occasions, in Egypt (12:10-20) and Gerar (20:1-18), Abraham asked Sarah to say that she was his sister rather than his wife because he was afraid that he would be killed as her husband. In both cases, despite Abraham’s lack of faith, God protected Sarah, preserving her as his mother and preventing any doubt as to who Isaac’s father was when he was born (21:1-5) about a year after his birth was promised (17:21; 18:10-14). God thus preserved his chosen line.

Sarah died at age 127 and was buried in the cave that Abraham purchased (ch 23) at Machpelah. She is known as the mother of the nation of Israel (Isa 51:2), just as Abraham is its father. She is a key player in accounts of Abraham’s faith (Rom 4:19). She represents the freedom that Christians have, as children of Sarah the free woman, through faith in Christ (see Gal 4:21-31). Peter cites her as an example of holy submission (1 Pet 3:6). Sarah believed in God’s ability to keep his promises, and her life shows that he does (Rom 9:6-9; Heb 11:11-12).

everlasting possession for the descendants of Abraham; the Lord would be their God forever (see Jer 31:31-40; Zech 8:8; Luke 1:68-79; Rev 21:1-4).
17:7 descendants: Literally seed; also in 17:8, 9, 10, 19.
17:9-14 God gave circumcision as a confirming sign that reminded all households of loyalty to the covenant.
17:14 will be cut off: This punishment seems to have several applications. A person could be exiled from society or put to death by the community; most often it warned that a person might die prematurely as God cut him off from the land of the living (see Exod 31:14; Lev 7:20-27; 17:3-4; 20:17-18; 23:28-29; Num 15:30-31; see also Ps 31:22; Ezek 21:4; Rom 9:3; 11:22). Failure to be circumcised was a serious violation (see Exod 4:24-26; cp. Gal 5:2-4).
17:15-16 Sarai and Sarah both mean "princess"; the change in spelling may reflect the difference in dialect between Ur and Canaan. The new name, fitting for one who would be the mother of kings, was a milestone in Sarah’s calling and brought attention to the promise.
17:17-18 Abraham laughed (Hebrew yitskhaq) because the promise seemed unbelievable; he had begun to believe that his line would come through Ishmael. But Abraham and Sarah would have a son of their own.
19But God replied, “No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac, and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant. 20As for Ishmael, I will bless him also, just as you have asked. I will make him extremely fruitful and multiply his descendants. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21But my covenant will be confirmed with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year.” 22When God had finished speaking, he left Abraham.

Abraham Accepts the Covenant
23On that very day Abraham took his son, Ishmael, and every male in his household, including those born there and those he had bought. Then he circumcised them, cutting off their foreskins, just as God had told him. 24Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, 25and Ishmael, his son, was thirteen. 26Both Abraham and his son, Ishmael, were circumcised on that same day, 27along with all the other men and boys of the household, whether they were born there or bought as servants. All were circumcised with him.

A Son Is Promised to Sarah
18The Lord appeared again to Abraham near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. One day Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. 2He looked up and noticed three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground.

17:19 The name Isaac means “he laughs” (Hebrew vitshqha); it would constantly recall Abraham’s disbelieving laughter when he heard the promise. It was also a reminder of God’s favor and his pleasure in the birth (cp. 21:6).
17:20-21 Ishmael would not be abandoned; his family would prosper (see 25:13-16), but the covenant promises were for Isaac.
17:23-27 Having received God’s word about Isaac, Abraham immediately complied with God’s instructions. He implemented the rite of circumcision as an act of faith; it signified his participation in the covenant (cp. Rom 4:11-12; Gal 5:2-6, 11; 6:15; Phil 3:2-3; Col 2:11-12; 1 Pet 3:21).
18:1-15 The Lord’s visit to Abraham set the time for Isaac’s birth. The three visitors were probably the Lord and two angels (see note on 16:7). Abraham’s peaceful and generous reception of the visitors contrasts sharply with the chaos and corruption of Sodom (ch 19). Eating together was important in making or confirming covenants; when God was ready to fulfill the covenant promise, he came in person to share a meal with Abraham. Fellowship with God has always been signified by a communal meal (see Exod 24:9-11; Matt 26:17-30 // Luke 22:7-38; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 11:20-34).
18:2-8 Abraham received his visitors as very important guests, perhaps realizing that they were messengers from God.
18:3 My lord: The Hebrew text uses ‘adonay (“Lord”), the word that is usually reserved for God. In Hebrew tradition, it was spoken in places where the holy name Yahweh (the Lord) was in the text. Perhaps the text uses ‘adonay rather than the more common ‘adoni to show that this was the angel of the Lord—i.e., the Lord himself (see note on 16:7). We don’t know whether Abraham knew his visitors’ identity at the outset, but by the story’s end Abraham certainly knew he had been talking with God.
18:6 three large measures: Hebrew 3 seahs, about 15 quarts or 14 liters.
18:9 The visitors’ rhetorical question focuses attention on Sarah, whom the visitors knew by name.
18:10 I will return: The Hebrew verb means “to intervene in someone’s life to change their destiny.” The statement announced a coming dramatic change.
18:13-15 Sarah thought her disbelieving laughter was hidden, but God knows human hearts (see Ps 69:5; Prov 20:27; Mark 4:22; Luke 8:43-48; Heb 4:13), whether they stagger at the promises or step out in faith (see Heb 11:11-12).
18:14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? The question is rhetorical. God is able to do marvelous things. Nothing is incredible to those in covenant fellowship...
about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah was afraid, so she denied it, saying, “I didn’t laugh.”

But the Lord said, “No, you did laugh.”

Abraham Intercedes for Sodom

Then the men got up from their meal and looked out toward Sodom. As they left, Abraham went with them to send them on their way.

“Should I hide my plan from Abraham?” the Lord asked. “For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Then I will do for Abraham all that I have promised.”

So the Lord told Abraham, “I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so flagrant. I am going down to see if their actions are as wicked as I have heard. If not, I want to know.”

The other men turned and headed toward Sodom, but the Lord remained with Abraham. Abraham approached him and said, “Will you sweep away both the righteous and the wicked? Suppose you find fifty righteous people living there in the city—will you still sweep it away and not spare it for their sakes? Surely you wouldn’t do such a thing, destroying the righteous along with the wicked. Why, you would be treating the righteous and the wicked exactly the same! Surely you wouldn’t do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?”

Abraham was responsible for teaching his descendants righteousness and justice so that they might enjoy God’s blessings. It was important for Abraham to know how God’s righteousness was at work in judgment.

The omniscient God was cautious in his judgment: He knew the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, but this close scrutiny communicated God’s justice in human terms—He would not destroy the people of the plain unless he was absolutely sure they were wicked.

And the Lord replied, “If I find fifty righteous people in Sodom, I will spare the entire city for their sake.”

Then Abraham spoke again. “Since I have begun, let me speak further to my Lord, even though I am but dust and ashes. Suppose there are only forty-five righteous people rather than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?”

And the Lord said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five righteous people there.”

Then Abraham pressed his request further. “Suppose there are only forty?”

And the Lord replied, “I will not destroy it for the sake of the forty.”

“Please don’t be angry, my Lord,” Abraham pleaded. “Let me speak—suppose only thirty righteous people are found?”

And the Lord replied, “I will not destroy it if I find thirty.”

Then Abraham said, “Since I have dared to speak to the Lord, let me continue—suppose there are only twenty?”

And the Lord replied, “Then I will not destroy it for the sake of the twenty.”

Finally, Abraham said, “Lord, please don’t be angry with me if I speak one more time. Suppose only ten are found there?”

And the Lord replied, “Then I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten.”

When the Lord had finished his conversation with Abraham, he went on his way, and Abraham returned to his tent.

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

That evening the two angels came to the entrance of the city of Sodom. Lot was sitting there, and when he saw them,
he stood up to meet them. Then he welcomed them and bowed with his face to the ground. 23“My lords,” he said, “come to my home to wash your feet, and be my guests for the night. You may then get up early in the morning and be on your way again.”

“Oh no,” they replied. “We’ll just spend the night out here in the city square.”

4But Lot insisted, so at last they went home with him. Lot prepared a feast for them, complete with fresh bread made without yeast, and they ate. 5But before they retired for the night, all the men of Sodom, young and old, came from all over the city and surrounded the house. 6They shouted to Lot, “Where are the men who came to spend the night with you? Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them!”

4So Lot stepped outside to talk to them, shutting the door behind him. 7“Please, my brothers,” he begged, “don’t do such a wicked thing. 8Look, I have two virgin daughters. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do with them as you wish. But please, leave these men alone, for they are my guests and are under my protection.”

9“Stand back!” they shouted. “This fellow came to town as an outsider, and now he’s acting like our judge! We’ll treat you far worse than those other men!” And they lunged toward Lot to break down the door.

10But the two angels reached out, pulled Lot into the house, and bolted the door. 11Then they blinded all the men, young and old, who were at the door of the house, so they gave up trying to get inside.

12Meanwhile, the angels questioned Lot. “Do you have any other relatives here in

**LOT (19:1-38)**

Lot was Abraham’s nephew and the ancestor of the Moabites and Ammonites. Like Abraham, Lot was born in Ur and accompanied Terah to Haran (11:27-32). After Terah’s death, he joined Abraham in journeying to Canaan and Egypt.

When Lot and Abraham returned from Egypt to Canaan, their flocks and herds grew too numerous for them to live together. Abraham gave Lot his choice of land on which to settle. Lot chose the fertile plain of the Jordan that was like “the garden of the Lord” (13:10), and eventually he took up residence in Sodom. His increasing involvement with the completely corrupt cities of the plain contaminated Lot and resulted in the loss of all his wealth.

While Lot lived in Sodom, four Mesopotamian kings defeated the kings of five towns in the area; in the subsequent plundering, they carried off Lot, his family, and his possessions (14:1-12). When word of this reached Abraham, he launched a rearguard action against the invaders and recovered the prisoners and property (14:13-16). Later, two angelic visitors called on Lot in Sodom to hasten his departure from the doomed city (ch 19). The homosexual attack on the visitors illustrates the city’s depravity, and Lot’s willingness to sacrifice his daughters shows how corrupt and compromised he had become. Lot was reluctant to leave Sodom. No one but his immediate family accompanied him, and his wife was destroyed when she turned back.

His daughters, despairing of finding husbands, got Lot drunk enough to have sexual relations with them. Their two sons, Moab and Ben-ammi, were ancestors of the Moabites and Ammonites (19:30-38), two nations that became inveterate enemies of Israel (see Deut 23:3-6).

Lot was a fool and a hypocrite to the people of the town, and on his journey out of Sodom he was still bargaining with God. His drunkenness and incest with his two daughters also reveals his character. Despite his waywardness, Peter declares that Lot was a “righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day” (2 Pet 2:6-9).
Lot escaped judgment by 19:15-23

19:14 Lot’s warning words were not taken seriously because of his hypocrisy. It seemed that there would not be even ten righteous people in the city.  
19:15 Lot escaped judgment by God’s grace, but his heart was still in the valley.  
19:16-22 Lot demanded a concession from the angels even after he was delivered. He wanted to live in the small town of Zoar (little place).

Lot’s warning words were not taken seriously because of his hypocrisy. It seemed that there would not be even ten righteous people in the city. Lot escaped judgment by God’s grace, but his heart was still in the valley. Lot demanded a concession from the angels even after he was delivered. He wanted to live in the small town of Zoar (little place).
live in a cave in the mountains with his two daughters. 31 One day the older daughter said to her sister, “There are no men left anywhere in this entire area, so we can’t get married like everyone else. And our father will soon be too old to have children. 32 Come, let’s get him drunk with wine, and then we will have sex with him. That way we will preserve our family line through our father.”

33 So that night they got him drunk with wine, and the older daughter went in and had intercourse with her father. He was unaware of her lying down or getting up again.

34 The next morning the older daughter said to her younger sister, “I had sex with our father last night. Let’s get him drunk with wine again tonight, and you go in and have sex with him. That way we will preserve our family line through our father.”

35 So that night they got him drunk with wine again, and the younger daughter went in and had intercourse with him. As before, he was unaware of her lying down or getting up again.

36 As a result, both of Lot’s daughters became pregnant by their own father. 37 When the older daughter gave birth to a son, she named him Ben-ammi. He became the ancestor of the nation now known as the Moabites. 38 When the younger daughter gave birth to a son, she named him Ben-ammi. He became the ancestor of the nation now known as the Ammonites.

Abraham Deceives Abimelech

20 Abraham moved south to the Negev and lived for a while between Kadesh and Shur, and then he moved on to Gerar. While living there as a foreigner, 2 Abraham introduced his wife, Sarah, by saying, “She is my sister.” So King Abimelech of Gerar sent for Sarah and had her brought to him at his palace.

3 But that night God came to Abimelech in a dream and told him, “You are a dead man, for that woman you have taken is already married!”

4 But Abimelech had not slept with her yet, so he said, “Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? 5 Didn’t Abraham tell me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘Yes, he is my brother.’ I acted in complete innocence! My hands are clean.”

6 In the dream God responded, “Yes, I know you are innocent. That’s why I kept you from sinning against me, and why I did not let you touch her. 7 Now return the woman to her husband, and he will pray for you, for he is a prophet. Then you will live. But if you don’t return her to him, you can be sure that you and all your people will die.”
8Abimelech got up early the next morning and quickly called all his servants together. When he told them what had happened, his men were terrified. 9Then Abimelech called for Abraham. “What have you done to us?” he demanded. “What crime have I committed that deserves treatment like this, making me and my kingdom guilty of this great sin? No one should ever do what you have done! 10Whatever possessed you to do such a thing?” 11Abraham replied, “I thought, ‘This is a godless place. They will want my wife and will kill me to get her.’ 12And she really is my sister, for we both have the same father, but different mothers. And I married her. 13When God called me to leave my father’s home and to travel from place to place, I told her, ‘Do me a favor. Wherever we go, tell the people that I am your brother.’”

14Then Abimelech took some of his sheep and goats, cattle, and male and female servants, and he presented them to Abraham. He also returned his wife, Sarah, to him. 15Then Abimelech said, “Look over my land and choose any place where you would like to place, I told her, ‘Do me a favor. Wherever we go, tell the people that I am your brother.’”

16And he said to Sarah, “Look, I am giving your ‘brother’ 1,000 pieces of silver in the presence of all these witnesses. This is to compensate you for any wrong I may have done to you. This will settle any claim against me, and your reputation is cleared.” 17Then Abraham bprayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants, so they could have children.

18For the Lord had caused all the women to be infertile because of what happened with Abraham’s wife, Sarah.

The Birth of Isaac

21The Lord kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. 2She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would. 3And Abraham named their son Isaac. 4Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded. 5Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

6And Sarah declared, “God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me. 7Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!”

Hagar and Ishmael Are Sent Away

8When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a huge feast to celebrate the occasion. 9But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac. 10So she turned to Abraham and demanded, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won’t have it!”

11This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son. 12But God told

Abimelech learned that Abraham’s God was sovereign, and that Abraham, God’s prophet, had received God’s revelation and would intercede for others (see Num 12:13; Deut 9:20), even if he did not always live up to the office.

20:8-10 Abraham had earned rebukes from Abimelech and from God (cp. 12:17-19). Abimelech was angry that Abraham’s deception had made him guilty of this great sin (see note on 20:3-7). He knew that taking a married woman into his harem was wrong.

20:11-13 Abraham’s duplicity was not a momentary loss of faith. Despite the rebuke he received in Egypt, he practiced this strategy wherever he went (cp. 12:12-13). Living by faith requires perseverance.

20:14-16 Abimelech secured his reputation as a good man (see note on 20:4-5) and demonstrated his integrity. He made amends by allowing Abraham to live in the region, and by giving him slaves, livestock (cp. 21:27), and 1,000 pieces of silver (Hebrew 1,000 shekels) of silver, about 25 pounds or 11.4 kilograms in weight to compensate...for any wrong done to Sarah.

20:17-18 Sarah’s barrenness suggests that some time had passed. God controls births; he opens and closes wombs (25:21; 29:31; 30:2, 17, 22-23; 1 Sam 1:19-20; Ps 113:9; 127:3; Luke 1:13).


21:3-4 Abraham responded in faith by naming his son Isaac and circumcising him according to the terms of the covenant (see 17:9-14).

21:5 Isaac was born twenty-five years after the promise was first given (cp. 12:4).

21:6-7 Sarah was filled with joy and praise for this amazing event—only God could enable her to have a child.

21:6 The name Isaac (Hebrew yitskhaq) means “he laughs.” Sarah’s wordplay shows that the laughter of unbelief when the promise was given (18:12) had changed to the laughter of joy at its fulfillment. Isaac’s name could refer to the pleasure of God and of his parents at his birth. Sarah knew that everyone who heard about this would laugh with her and rejoice at the news.

21:8-21 God used the incident of Ishmael’s mocking Isaac to separate Ishmael and Hagar from the family and the child of promise. They would constantly threaten the promised descendant if they remained with the family.

21:8-9 The feast for Isaac’s weaning probably occurred when he was three and Ishmael about seventeen years old (16:16). Sarah saw Ishmael making fun of her son, Isaac (as in Greek version and Latin Vulgate; Hebrew lacks of her son, Isaac). The verb metsakheq (“making fun of”) is related to the word for “laughter”; this theme (21:6) is given a sour twist by Ishmael’s mockery.

21:10 Earlier, Sarah mistreated Hagar and pressured her to flee (16:6); when Hagar’s son mistreated Isaac, Sarah demanded that that slave woman and her son leave.

21:11-13 Abraham was upset by Sarah’s demand to oust Hagar and Ishmael.
Abraham, “Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted. But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar’s son because he is your son, too.”

14So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar’s shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.

15When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush. 16Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away. “I don’t want to watch the boy die,” she said, as she burst into tears.

17But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, “Hagar, what’s wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.

18Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants.”

19Then God opened Hagar’s eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink.

20And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. He became a skillful archer, 21and he settled in the wilderness of Paran. His mother arranged for him to marry a woman from the land of Egypt.

Abraham’s Covenant with Abimelech

22About this time, Abimelech came with Phicol, his army commander, to visit Abraham. “God is obviously with you, helping you in everything you do,” Abimelech said.

23“Swear to me in God’s name that you will never deceive me, my children, or any of my descendants. I have been loyal to you, so now swear that you will be loyal to me and to this country where you are living as a foreigner.”

24Abraham replied, “Yes, I swear to it!” 25Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well that Abimelech’s servants had taken by force from Abraham’s servants.

26“This is the first I’ve heard of it,” Abimelech answered. “I have no idea who is responsible. You have never complained about this before.”

27Abraham then gave some of his sheep, goats, and cattle to Abimelech, and they made a treaty. 28But Abraham also took seven additional female lambs and set them off by themselves. 29Abimelech asked, “Why have you set these seven apart from the others?”

30Abraham replied, “Please accept these seven lambs to show your agreement that I dug this well.” 31Then he named the place Beersheba (which means “well of the oath”), because that was where they had sworn the oath.

God told him to comply, assuring Abraham that Ishmael would also have a future as Abraham’s offspring.

21:14-21 God again rescued Hagar in the wilderness and guaranteed her future (cp. 16:7-14). This passage is similar to ch 16, but the differences are great. Here, Hagar and Ishmael are rescued, but there is no commemorative naming. God’s earlier promise to Hagar is reiterated, but this time Hagar is not told to return to Sarah. The repeated motifs on the two occasions confirm God’s sovereign plan for Hagar and Ishmael. As Joseph told Pharaoh, the twofold event showed that God confirmed it (41:32). God did not abandon Hagar and Ishmael but met them in their despair (cp. 16:7), provided sustenance for them, and promised again that Ishmael would found a great nation (21:13; cp. 16:11-12). Paul uses this event in his letter to the Galatians to illustrate how God’s people must relinquish all that threatens the fulfillment of God’s promise (Gal 4:21-31).

21:16 a hundred yards (literally a bow-shot): This description connects with Ishmael’s vocation (21:20).

21:22-34 This passage, at its climax, explains the name of Beersheba, Abraham’s home (21:31-34). Beersheba reflected the covenant Abraham made with the residents of the land, which enabled him to dwell there in peace and prosperity. God’s promise was coming to fruition (12:7; 13:14-17; 15:7, 18-21; 17:8).

21:22-23 Abimelech pressed for the treaty so that Abraham would not cheat or deceive him. Abimelech knew that God was blessing Abraham even though Abraham was not entirely trustworthy (20:9-10). This sad contradiction made the treaty necessary. By contrast, God’s faithful people are exhorted to speak the truth (Eph 4:15, 25), and Jesus warned against manipulating truth by the clever use of oaths (Matt 5:37; Jas 5:12).

21:25 The motif of the well appears again (cp. 16:14; 21:19). God provided water (a symbol of blessing) in the bar-
Abraham's Faith Tested


22 "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."

The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. "On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. "Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the servants. "The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back."

ISAAC (21:1-12)

At Isaac’s birth, his parents, Abraham and Sarah, were beyond childbearing age. God had promised Abraham a son (15:4-6), but no son had come. Ishmael had been born through Hagar (16:1-16), but he was not the promised son.

Isaac means “he laughs,” reflecting the circumstances of his birth. When God promised that Isaac would be born, both Abraham and Sarah first laughed in disbelief (17:15-19; 18:9-15). When he was born, they laughed for joy (21:6-7).

During Isaac’s adolescence, God tested Abraham by telling him to sacrifice Isaac (22:1-19). Abraham’s faith remained firm; he obeyed, and Isaac submitted to his father. God then intervened to provide a sacrificial ram in Isaac’s place. Abraham’s faith in God was rewarded with the promise of great blessings (22:15-18).

Isaac married Rebekah and was ready to carry on the chosen line, but Rebekah was unable to bear children (25:21). Rather than take matters into his own hands as his father had done (see 16:1-16), Isaac “pleaded with the LORD” and Rebekah bore twin sons. Isaac favored Esau, the older son, while Rebekah preferred Jacob. Favoritism remained a problem among Isaac’s descendants (see notes on 29:30; 33:1-2; 37:4) and led to Isaac’s being deceived by his son Jacob when he was old and blind (ch 27).

Isaac followed his father Abraham’s example in relating to surrounding nations. When visiting another kingdom during a famine, he fearfully claimed that his wife was his sister (26:1-11; cp. 12:10-20; 20:1-18). Like his father, Isaac became prosperous in that land and was asked to leave (26:12-16; cp. 12:16-20); he experienced conflict over water and land with other herdsmen (26:17-22; cp. 21:25-31); and he made a treaty with the king of the Philistines (26:26-31; cp. 21:22-31). When Isaac worshiped the Lord at Beersheba, he was given the same promise that his father had received (26:2-5, 23-25; cp. 21:32-33; 22:16-18).

Isaac continued God’s covenant with Abraham and linked Abraham with Jacob (see Acts 7:8; Heb 11:9-20). As the child of promise, Isaac represents all who are children of Abraham by faith in Christ and are thereby free to live as God’s children rather than as slaves (see Gal 4:21–5:1).
So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"

"God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.

When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. At that moment the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!"

"Don't lay a hand on the boy!" the angel said. "Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son."

Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means "the Lord will provide"). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

Then the angel of the Lord called again to Abraham from heaven. "This is what the Lord says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me."

Then they returned to the servants and traveled back to Beersheba, where Abraham continued to live.

**Nahor's Family (22:20-24)**

Soon after this, Abraham heard that Milcah, his brother Nahor's wife, had borne Nahor eight sons. The oldest was named Uz, the next oldest was Buz, followed by...
Kemuel (the ancestor of the Arameans),
Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.  
23(Bethuel became the father of Rebekah.)
In addition to these eight sons from Milcah,
Nahor had four other children from his concubine Reumah. Their names were Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

### The Burial of Sarah: Abraham’s Land Purchase (23:1-20)

23 When Sarah was 127 years old,  
2 she died at Kiriath-arba (now called Hebron) in the land of Canaan. There Abraham mourned and wept for her.

3Then, leaving her body, he said to the Hittite elders, 4"Here I am, a stranger and a foreigner among you. Please sell me a piece of land so I can give my wife a proper burial.”

5The Hittites replied to Abraham, 6"Listen, my lord, you are an honored prince among us. Choose the finest of our tombs and bury her there. No one here will refuse to help you in this way.”

7Then Abraham bowed low before the Hittites 8and said, “Since you are willing to help me in this way, be so kind as to ask Ephron son of Zohar 9to let me buy his cave at Machpelah, down at the end of his field. I will pay the full price in the presence of witnesses, so I will have a permanent burial place for my family.”

10Ephron was sitting there among the others, and he answered Abraham as the
others listened, speaking publicly before all the Hittite elders of the town. 11"No, my lord," he said to Abraham, “please listen to me. I will give you the field and the cave. Here in the presence of my people, I give it to you. Go and bury your dead.”

12Abraham again bowed low before the citizens of the land, 13and he replied to Ephron as everyone listened. “No, listen to me. I will buy it from you. Let me pay the full price for the field so I can bury my dead there.”

14Ephron answered Abraham, 15"My lord, please listen to me. The land is worth 400 pieces of silver, but what is that between friends? Go ahead and bury your dead.”

16So Abraham agreed to Ephron’s price and paid the amount he had suggested—400 pieces of silver, weighed according to the market standard. The Hittite elders witnessed the transaction.

17So Abraham bought the plot of land belonging to Ephron at Machpelah, near Mamre. This included the field itself, the cave that was in it, and all the surrounding trees. 18It was transferred to Abraham as his permanent possession in the presence of the Hittite elders at the city gate. 19Then Abraham buried his wife, Sarah, there in Canaan, in the cave of Machpelah, near Mamre (also called Hebron). 20So the field and the cave were transferred from the Hittites to Abraham for use as a permanent burial place.

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23:22-23 Bethuel was the youngest of Nahor’s eight sons by Milcah; he was the father of Rebekah, Isaac’s future wife (see 24:15, 67). Rebekah would follow Sarah as matriarch of the clan (23:1-2).

23:1-20 When Sarah . . . died, Abraham acquired a parcel of land for a burial place. This transaction was the first sign that a permanent transition had taken place, as people were normally buried in their ancestral homeland (cp. 49:29–50:13). In burying Sarah, Abraham detached from his just-mentioned ancestral home (where his relatives still lived, 22:20-24); his future would be in Canaan, where his descendants would realize the promise.

23:1 Sarah was 127 years old: Isaac was 37 at this time (cp. 17:17).  
23:2-3 Abraham bargained with local Hittite elders for a piece of land for a burial site. These Hittites had apparently migrated south to Canaan from the great Hittite empire in eastern Asia Minor (modern Turkey; cp. 10:15).  
2 Abraham was a stranger and a foreigner among these people; his hope was in God’s promise that he would eventually possess the land.

23:5-6 my lord, you are an honored prince: Either Abraham was highly regarded by these people, or they were politely appealing to his generosity.  
2 Choose the finest. . . . No one here will refuse: They were willing to accommodate his request, especially if they could legally obligate him to themselves (23:11).

23:7-16 Abraham wanted to buy Ephron’s cave at Machpelah, but Ephron wanted him to buy the entire field.

23:9 This would be a permanent burial place for Abraham’s family. The site was near Mamre (23:19), where Abraham lived (see 13:18; 14:13; 18:1). Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah would all be buried in this cave (23:19; 25:9; 35:27-29; 49:30-31; 50:13), their permanent place in the Promised Land.

23:11 Ephron did not intend to give the cave to Abraham; Abraham was expected to “give” the full price in return. Ephron wanted to sell as much as he could to avoid responsibility for caring for the cave and to receive as high a price as possible.

23:12-13 Abraham didn’t want the whole field, but he was willing to take it to get the cave.

23:15 400 pieces (Hebrew 400 shekels, about 10 pounds or 4.6 kilograms in weight; also in 23:16) of silver was a very high price. Ephron’s politeness was typical of the bargaining process.

23:16-20 Abraham paid the amount and finalized the transaction, avoiding indebtedness by accepting no gifts from the people (cp. 14:21-24). The Hittite elders witnessed the transaction, ensuring that no one could challenge Abraham’s full ownership of the land. The transaction took place at the city gate, where public legal and business dealings were conducted (cp. 19:1). The land became Abraham’s permanent possession, a down payment on God’s promise to give him the land. Abraham knew that God’s promise was not fulfilled (12:7) by this acquisition, so he planned for the future. By buying land for his dead, he declared that God’s promises do not end with this life. This is the hope of all who die in faith.
A Wife for Isaac from Nahor's Family
[24:1-67]  Commission to Find a Wife

24 Abraham was now a very old man, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. One day Abraham said to his oldest servant, the man in charge of his household, “Take an oath by putting your hand under my thigh. Swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not allow my son to marry one of these local Canaanite women. Go instead to my homeland, to my relatives, and find a wife there for my son Isaac.”

5The servant asked, “But what if I can’t find a young woman who is willing to travel so far from home? Should I then take Isaac there to live among your relatives in the land you came from?”

6“Not!” Abraham responded. “Be careful never to take my son there. For the Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and my native land, solemnly promised to give this land to my descendants. He will send his angel ahead of you, and he will see to it that you find a wife there for my son. If she is unwilling to come back with you, then you are free from this oath of mine. But under no circumstances are you to take my son there.”

Dependence on God’s Leading
8So the servant took an oath by putting his hand under the thigh of his master, Abraham. He swore to follow Abraham’s instructions. Then he loaded ten of Abraham’s camels with all kinds of expensive gifts from his master, and he traveled to distant Aram-naharaim. There he went to the town where Abraham’s brother Nahor had settled. 11He made the camels kneel beside a well just outside the town. It was evening, and the women were coming out to draw water.

12“O Lord, God of my master, Abraham,” he prayed. “Please give me success today, and show unfailing love to my master, Abraham. 13See, I am standing here beside this spring, and the young women of the town are coming out to draw water. This is my request. I will ask one of them, ‘Please give me a drink from your jug.’ If she says, ‘Yes, have a drink, and I will water your camels, too!’—let her be the one you have selected as Isaac’s wife. This is how I will know that you have shown unfailing love to my master.”

15Before he had finished praying, he saw a young woman named Rebekah coming out with her water jug on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham’s brother Nahor and his wife, Milcah. 16Rebekah was very beautiful and old enough to be married, but she was still a virgin. She went down to the spring, filled her jug, and came up again. 17Running over to her, the servant said, “Please give me a little drink of water from your jug.”

18“Yes, my lord,” she answered, “have a drink.” And she quickly lowered her jug from her shoulder and gave him a drink. 19When she had given him a drink, she said, “I’ll draw water for your camels, too, until they have had enough to drink.” 20So she quickly emptied her jug into the watering trough and ran back to the well to draw water for all his camels.

21The servant watched her in silence, wondering whether or not the Lord had given him success in his mission. 22Then at last, when the camels had finished drinking, he

24:1-67 Isaac’s marriage to Rebekah ensured that God’s plan would continue into the next generation. God showed covenant faithfulness by working through his faithful people (24:12, 27, 49).

24:1-9 Confident in the Lord’s promise, Abraham had his chief servant (probably Eliezer, 15:2) swear to find a wife among Abraham’s relatives in his homeland, some 450 miles away. Abraham was faithful to the covenant by preparing for Isaac’s future.

24:2-8 Under no circumstances was the servant to take Isaac from the Promised Land to seek a wife. Abraham ensured Isaac’s safety and secured God’s promises in the land of blessing.

24:7 descendants: Literally seed; also in 24:60.

24:10-60 The servant faithfully carried out the mission, and he glorified God for displaying faithful covenant love for Abraham’s family by bringing all the details together. God sovereignly worked behind the scenes to accomplish his will through the circumstances of those acting responsibly in faith.

24:10-27 The servant obeyed his master’s instructions and trusted God to lead him to the right woman.

24:10 Aram-naharaim (“Aram of the two rivers”) was also called Paddan-aram (“the field of Aram,” cp. 25:20). It was a two-week journey in each direction, so the servant had ten . . . camels for provisions and gifts (24:22, 53).

24:14 Abraham’s future daughter-in-law manifested hospitality and industry like Abraham’s (see 18:1-8). Ten thirsty camels could drink 250 gallons of water, so a woman who would work that hard for a stranger was certainly not lazy, but generous and hospitable.

24:15-22 The servant received a precise, immediate answer to his prayer for guidance.

24:22 The servant showed his gratitude by giving the girl expensive jewelry. * a gold ring for her nose and two large gold bracelets: Hebrew a gold nose-ring weighing a half shekel [0.2 ounces or 6 grams] and two gold bracelets weighing 10 shekels [4 ounces or 114 grams].
took out a gold ring for her nose and two large gold bracelets for her wrists. 23“Whose daughter are you?” he asked. “And please tell me, would your father have any room to put us up for the night?”

24“I am the daughter of Bethuel,” she replied. “My grandparents are Nahor and Milcah. 25Yes, we have plenty of straw and feed for the camels, and we have room for guests.”

26The man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. 27“Praise the LORD, the God of my master, Abraham,” he said. “The LORD has shown unfailing love and faithfulness to my master, for he has led me straight to my master’s relatives.”

The Success of the Mission
28The young woman ran home to tell her family everything that had happened. 29Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, who ran out to meet the man at the spring. 30He had seen the nose-ring and the bracelets on his sister’s wrists, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man had said. So he rushed out to the spring, where the man was still standing beside his camels. 31Laban said to him, “Come and stay with us, you who are blessed by the LORD! Why are you standing here outside the town when I have a room all ready for you and a place prepared for the camels?”

32So the man went home with Laban, and Laban unloaded the camels, gave him straw for their bedding, fed them, and provided water for the man and the camel drivers to wash their feet. 33Then food was served. But Abraham’s servant said, “I don’t want to eat until I have told you why I have come.”

“All right,” Laban said, “tell us.” 34“I am Abraham’s servant,” he explained. 35“And the LORD has greatly blessed my master; he has become a wealthy man. The LORD has given him flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, a fortune in silver and gold, and many male and female servants and camels and donkeys.

36“When Sarah, my master’s wife, was very old, she gave birth to my master’s son, and my master has given him everything he owns. 37And my master made me take an oath. He said, ‘Do not allow my son to marry one of these local Canaanite women. 38Go instead to my father’s house, to my relatives, and find a wife there for my son.’

39“But I said to my master, ‘What if I can’t find a young woman who is willing to go back with me?’ 40He responded, ‘The LORD, in whose presence I have lived, will send his angel with you and will make your mission successful. Yes, you must find a wife for my son from among my relatives, from my father’s family. 41Then you will have fulfilled your obligation. But if you go to my relatives and they refuse to let her go with you, you will be free from my oath.’ 42“So today when I came to the spring, I prayed this prayer: ‘O LORD, God of my master, Abraham, please give me success on this mission. 43See, I am standing here beside this spring. This is my request. When a young woman comes to draw water, I will say to her, ‘Please give me a little drink of water from your jug.’ If she says, ‘Yes, have a drink, and I will draw water for your camels, too,’ let her be the one you have selected to be the wife of my master’s son.”

These words express this chapter’s message (cp. 24:48). Believers can trust the Lord’s leading because he is sovereign in all things. He never leaves his people to their own resources in carrying out his covenant work.


24:25 Rebekah again showed kindness by offering lodging for the servant and food for his camels.

24:26 The servant bowed to the ground and worshiped the LORD for his loyal love and faithfulness in guiding him to the exact family he sought.

24:27 The Lord has shown unfailing love and faithfulness to my master:
45"Before I had finished praying in my heart, I saw Rebekah coming out with her water jug on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water. So I said to her, ‘Please give me a drink.’ 46She quickly lowered her jug from her shoulder and said, ‘Yes, have a drink, and I will water your camels, too!’ So I drank, and then she watered the camels.

47Then I asked, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She replied, ‘I am the daughter of Bethuel, and my grandparents are Nahor and Milcah.’ So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her wrists.

48Then I bowed low and worshiped the Lord. I praised the Lord, the God of my master, Abraham, because he had led me straight to my master’s niece to be his son’s wife. 49So tell me—will you or won’t you show unfailing love and faithfulness to my master? Please tell me yes or no, and then I’ll know what to do next.”

50Then Laban and Bethuel replied, “The Lord has obviously brought you here, so there is nothing we can say. 51Here is Rebekah; take her and go. Yes, let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has directed.”

52When Abraham’s servant heard their answer, he bowed down to the ground and worshiped the Lord. 53Then he brought out silver and gold jewelry and clothing and presented them to Rebekah. He also gave expensive presents to her brother and mother. 54Then they ate their meal, and the servant and the men with him stayed there overnight.

But early the next morning, Abraham’s servant said, “Send me back to my master.”

55But we want Rebekah to stay with us at least ten days,” her brother and mother said. “Then she can go.”

56But he said, “Don’t delay me. The Lord has made my mission successful; now send me back so I can return to my master.”

57“Well,” they said, “we’ll call Rebekah and ask her what she thinks.” 58So they called Rebekah. “Are you willing to go with this man?” they asked her.

And she replied, “Yes, I will go.”

59So they said good-bye to Rebekah and sent her away with Abraham’s servant and his men. The woman who had been Rebekah’s childhood nurse went along with her. 60They gave her this blessing as she parted:

“Our sister, may you become the mother of many millions! May your descendants be strong and conquer the cities of their enemies.”

61Then Rebekah and her servant girls mounted the camels and followed the man. So Abraham’s servant took Rebekah and went on his way.

The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah

62Meanwhile, Isaac, whose home was in the Negev, had returned from Beer-lahai-roi. 63One evening as he was walking and meditating in the fields, he looked up and saw the camels coming. 64When Rebekah looked up and saw Isaac, she quickly dismounted from her camel. 65“Who is that man walking through the fields to meet us?” she asked the servant.

And he replied, “It is my master.” So Rebekah covered her face with her veil. 66Then the servant told Isaac everything he had done.

67And Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah’s tent, and she became his wife. He loved her deeply, and she was a special comfort to him after the death of his mother.
Abraham married another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2She gave birth to Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. 3Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. Dedan’s descendants were the Assurites, Letushites, and Leummites. 4Midian’s sons were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. These were all descendants of Abraham through Keturah.

Isaac Receives the Inheritance
5Abraham gave everything he owned to his son Isaac. 6But before he died, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them off to a land in the east, away from Isaac.

The Death of Abraham
7Abraham lived for 175 years, 8and he died at a ripe old age, having lived a long and satisfying life. He breathed his last and joined his ancestors in death. 9His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite. 10This was the field Abraham had purchased from the Hittites and where he had buried his wife Sarah. 11After Abraham’s death, God blessed his son Isaac, who settled near Beer-lahai-roi in the Negev.

8. THE ACCOUNT OF ISHMAEL’S DESCENDANTS (25:12-18)
11This is the account of the family of Ishmael, the son of Abraham through Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian servant. 13Here is a list, by their names and clans, of Ishmael’s descendants: The oldest was Nebaioth, followed by Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. 16These twelve sons of Ishmael became the founders of twelve tribes.

REBEKKAH (24:12-67)
Genesis 24 describes the mission of Abraham’s servant to find a wife for Isaac. At Abraham’s command, he went to Haran in Aram-naharaim (northwest Mesopotamia), to Abraham’s relatives, because Abraham did not want Isaac to marry a local Canaanite. The servant prayed that the young woman God had selected to be Isaac’s wife would answer his request for a drink by immediately giving it and watering his camels as well (24:12-14). Such a young woman would readily exercise hospitality and be willing to work hard (see note on 24:14). God abundantly answered his prayer with Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel (22:23; 25:20), the son of Abraham’s brother Nahor (11:27-32).

When Abraham’s servant described how God had led him (24:34-49), Rebekah’s father and brother recognized it as God’s hand, but they were reluctant to let her go immediately (24:50-56). Rebekah, however, demonstrated faith in God’s plan; she was willing to leave her family without delay to marry Isaac (24:57-58). Rebekah’s faith was richly rewarded; the blessing her womenfolk gave her in parting (24:59-60) came true when she bore to Isaac the next generation of God’s chosen line.

Rebekah bore twins, Esau and Jacob (25:20-26). She preferred Jacob, the younger, whom God had told her would be the stronger and the leader of the two (25:23). Rebekah helped Jacob seize the blessing of the firstborn by deceiving Isaac (27:1-40). Afterward, she arranged for Jacob to be sent to Haran to get away from his brother’s anger over the stolen blessing (27:41–28:5). Rebekah’s deceptive scheme created a lasting schism in the family, and she apparently never saw her favorite son again. She was, however, buried beside her husband in the family burial site (49:31), and she fulfilled God’s plan as the mother of Jacob, the founding father of Israel.

25:1-4 //1Chr 1:32-33
25:5 Gen 24:35-36
25:7 Gen 12:4
25:11 Gen 12:2; 24:62
25:12-16 //1Chr 1:29-31

25:1-4
Exactly when Abraham married . . . Keturah is unknown. It was probably, but not necessarily, after Sarah’s death.

25:2-4 The birth of these nations from Abraham partially fulfilled God’s promise to him (12:2; 17:4).

Abraham’s descendants probably settled in these regions and became identified by their names, along with people of other lineage.

25:5-6 Abraham loved all his sons, so before he died, he gave them gifts and sent them away as he had sent Ishmael (21:8-14). In this way, he preserved Isaac’s position as his heir.

25:7-8 Abraham’s death is recorded before the births of Jacob and Esau, but he lived until they were fifteen years old (25:19-26; cp. 21:5; 25:26). This literary arrangement closes Abraham’s story before focusing on Isaac’s family.

25:11 God’s blessing transferred to Isaac; Abraham’s other sons had been sent away. Isaac lived near Beer-lahai-roi—a special place where God had answered prayer (16:14) and where Isaac waited on the Lord (24:62).

25:12-18 This record lists Ishmael’s descendants before tracing Isaac’s (25:19–35:29), which is in keeping with the literary arrangement of Genesis (see Introduction to Genesis: “Summary,” p. 15).

25:16 Ishmael’s twelve sons fulfilled God’s promise of blessing (17:20).
The Births of Esau and Jacob (25:19-26)

19 This is the account of the family of Isaac, years old, he married Rebekah, the daughter of Isaac. When Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram and the sister of Laban the Aramean.

21 Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was unable to have children. The LORD answered Isaac’s prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant with twins.


The Births of Esau and Jacob (25:19-26)

19 This is the account of the family of Isaac, the son of Abraham. 20 When Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram and the sister of Laban the Aramean.

Infertility (25:21)

With the possible exception of Leah, each of the patriarchs’ wives suffered infertility for a time before having children (11:30; 25:21; 29:31; see also 1 Sam 1:1-18). Children continued the family line, helped protect the tribe, and provided labor. They ensured that hereditary property would stay within the family, guaranteed assistance in old age, and enacted the proper funeral rites. Infertility was therefore a crushing stigma for a woman (Ps 113:9; Prov 30:15-16; Isa 54:1), who understood herself to be created as a vessel of life (1:28; 3:20). It was considered a denial of blessing, design, and desire (1:28), and it brought shame (1 Sam 1:7), ridicule (16:4), and vicious jealousy (30:1).

In the OT, childlessness is a theological issue. Fertility is controlled by the Creator (20:17-18; 30:2, 23; 1 Sam 1:6, 27), who causes fertility and infertility according to his purpose and his promises (17:19; 30:2; Ps 113:9; Luke 1:11-20; Rom 4:19). God often chose infertility as a precursor to the birth of a promised or unique child, marking the birth as God’s own work. Childlessness is thus a trial of patience that prompts prayer and faith (25:21; 1 Sam 1:11). Abraham learned to nurture faith in God’s promise long before his child arrived (15:4-6; 17:15-21; Rom 4:20-22). When a couple has been infertile, a child’s arrival is marked as a special display of God’s faithfulness and creative authority.

God’s delays are not necessarily denials, but they remind longing parents to use trials for growth and to see children as a gift that cannot be taken for granted. A childless home can be filled with devotion as human expectations submit to future glory (see, e.g., Luke 2:36-37).
25:26
Hos 12:3
25:30
Gen 36:1, 8
25:31
Deut 21:16-17
1 Chr 5:1-2
25:33
Gen 27:36
Heb 12:16

birth and covered with thick hair like a fur coat. So they named him Esau. 26 Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau’s heel. So they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when the twins were born.

Esau Sells His Birthright (25:27-34)
27 As the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter. He was an outdoorsman, but Jacob had a quiet temperament, preferring to stay at home. 28 Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the wild game Esau brought home, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau arrived home from the wilderness exhausted and hungry. 30 Esau said to Jacob, “I’m starved! Give me some of that red stew!” (This is how Esau got his other name, Edom, which means “red.”)

31 “All right,” Jacob replied, “but trade me your rights as the firstborn son.”

32 “Look, I’m dying of starvation!” said Esau. “What good is my birthright to me now?”

33 But Jacob said, “First you must swear that your birthright is mine.” So Esau swore:

ESAU (25:21-34)

Esau, the son of Isaac and Rebekah, was Jacob’s older twin brother (25:24-26), so named because his body was hairy at birth. His descendants were called Edom (“red”) on account of his reddish color at birth, the red lentil soup he received from Jacob (25:30), and the reddish color of the land in which he settled (see note on 25:25). Esau was a proficient hunter who brought tasty wild meat to his father. Isaac enjoyed its strong flavor more than the mild meat Jacob provided from the family flocks. One day Esau returned home very hungry from an unsuccessful hunt, and Jacob persuaded Esau to surrender his birthright in exchange for food (25:29-34). Esau had little regard for his birthright and was controlled by his carnal desires (see Heb 12:16). He also married two local women who were not Abraham’s descendants (26:34-35), which may be why Rebekah coached Jacob in obtaining the patriarchal blessing that would normally have belonged to the elder brother (ch 27). Esau’s anger on discovering his brother’s deception prompted Jacob to flee for Haran. The brothers were reunited 20 years later because of Esau’s gracious forgiveness (33:1-16).

Jacob was born grasping Esau’s heel; this omen was interpreted to mean that Esau’s Edomite descendants would be subject to Jacob’s offspring. The subservient relationship between the Edomites and the Israelites in David’s time (2 Sam 8:11-15; 1 Chr 18:13) continued until the reign of Jehoram (2 Kgs 8:20-22; 2 Chr 21:8-10). Following a rebellion in 845 BC, the Edomites briefly gained their independence but were conquered again by Amaziah (796-767 BC). They regained their freedom in 735 BC and then remained independent of Judah.

In the NT, Esau represents the line of Abraham’s descendants who lacked the gift of faith and were rejected by God as recipients of his promised blessings (see Rom 9:6-24).
an oath, thereby selling all his rights as the firstborn to his brother, Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate the meal, then got up and left. He showed contempt for his rights as the firstborn.

Isaac and Abimelech (26:1-35)

Isaac Deceives Abimelech

A severe famine now struck the land, as had happened before in Abraham’s time. So Isaac moved to Gerar, where Abimelech, king of the Philistines, lived.

The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, “Do not go down to Egypt, but do as I tell you.” (3-8; 22:15-18; 28:13-14) would pass despite his failures of faith.

Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out his window and saw Isaac caressing Rebekah.

Immediately, Abimelech called for Isaac and exclaimed, “She is obviously your wife! Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’?”

“Because I was afraid someone would kill me to get her from me,” Isaac replied.

“Because I was afraid someone would kill me to get her from me,” Isaac replied.

How could you do this to us?” Abimelech exclaimed. “One of my people might easily have taken your wife and slept with her, and you would have made us guilty of great sin.”

Then Abimelech issued a public proclamation: “Anyone who touches this man or his wife will be put to death!”

Conflict over Water Rights

When Isaac planted his crops that year, he harvested a hundred times more grain than he planted, for the Lord blessed him. He became a very rich man, and his wealth continued to grow. He acquired so many flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and servants that the Philistines became jealous of him. So the Philistines filled up all of Isaac’s wells with dirt. These were the wells that had been dug by the servants of his father, Abraham.

Finally, Abimelech ordered Isaac to leave the country. “Go somewhere else,” he

25:33-34 Esau eagerly took Jacob’s bait and fell into the trap. He ate and left too quickly to have been near death (25:32). The final comment on the passage explains that Esau showed contempt for his birthright, considering it worthless (Heb 12:16). It is foolish to sacrifice spiritual blessings to satisfy physical appetites (cp. 3:6).

26:1-13 In this digression from Jacob’s story, Isaac’s prosperity (ch 26) shows that the blessing had passed to him (cp. 25:11) despite his failures of faith.

26:1 This Abimelech is probably not the man in ch 20, for these events could have been 90 years apart. Possibly Abimelech was a dynastic name or title (a later King Achish, 1 Sam 21:10, was also called Abimelech, Ps 34:TITLE).

26:2-5 The Lord assured Isaac that the covenant promises (cp. 12:2-3; 15:5-8; 17:3-8; 22:15-18; 28:13-14) would pass to him because Abraham faithfully listened to God and obeyed all his requirements, commands, decrees, and instructions. These terms were later used in Deuteronomy to describe God’s full legal covenant with Israel. An Israelite reader would immediately think of the complete Torah when hearing these words and be prompted to obey God’s law as Abraham did, though Abraham had only a few commands from the Lord. Through these words, the text emphasizes that Abraham would have obeyed the later commands if he had had them, because he was an obedient servant of the Lord.

26:3 descendants: Literally seed; also in 26:4, 24.

26:6-11 While staying in Gerar, Isaac, like his father, deceived people into believing that his wife was his sister. Some suppose that this story duplicates the stories of Abraham’s deception (12:10-20; 20:1-18), but the differences are greater than the similarities, and the son’s repetition of his father’s lie is natural. Through numerous parallels with Abraham, ch 26 shows how God’s plan continued with Isaac. Even when Isaac jeopardized the covenant as his father had, God prevented disaster and preserved the marriage. Abraham’s descendants would be blessed because of Abraham, but they had to exercise their own faith to enjoy the blessings. Genuine faith in God’s promises engenders a fearless walk with him; foregoing in fear endangers the blessing and mocks the faith.

26:8 Abimelech . . . saw Isaac caressing Rebekah: The word for “caressing” (Hebrew metsakheq) is the same as the word used for Ishmael’s “making fun of” Isaac (21:9); the word is related to the name “Isaac” (Hebrew yitskhaq). It is as though Isaac’s lapse of faith made fun of Abimelech and made a mockery of Rebekah and the great promise embodied in Isaac’s name.

26:10-11 Isaac, like his father, was rebuked by Abimelech (see note on 20:1-18). This legal wording would remind Israel of how important it was to preserve marital purity. Abimelech recognized the danger to his own people. Though his decree preserved his own society, it was also a word from God that preserved the sanctity of Isaac’s and Israel’s marriages. If Isaac’s marriage had ended here, there would have been no Israelite society.

26:12-13 Isaac lived in the land as a temporary settler, enjoying abundant prosperity because of God’s blessing; his crops flourished and he became very rich.

26:14-16 The Philistines envied Isaac’s prosperity and filled his wells with dirt. The king then ordered Isaac to leave that region because he was too powerful for them (cp. 21:22-23).
said, “for you have become too powerful for us.”

17 So Isaac moved away to the Gerar Valley, where he set up their tents and settled down. 18 He reopened the wells his father had dug, which the Philistines had filled in after Abraham’s death. Isaac also restored the names Abraham had given them.

19 Isaac’s servants also dug in the Gerar Valley and discovered a well of fresh water. 20 But then the shepherds from Gerar came and claimed the spring. “This is our water,” they said, and they argued over it with Isaac’s herdsmen. So Isaac named the well Esek (which means “argument”). 21 Isaac’s men then dug another well, but again there was a dispute over it. So Isaac named it Sitnah (which means “hostility”). 22 Abandoning that one, Isaac moved on and dug another well. This time there was no dispute over it, so Isaac named the place Rehoboth (which means “open space”), for he said, “At last the Lord has created enough space for us to prosper in this land.”

23 From there Isaac moved to Beersheba, where the Lord appeared to him on the night of his arrival. “I am the God of your father, Abraham,” he said. “Do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you. I will multiply your descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will do this because of my promise to Abraham, my servant.” 24 Then Isaac built an altar there and worshiped the Lord. He set up his camp at that place, and his servants dug another well.

Isaac’s Covenant with Abimelech

26 One day King Abimelech came from Gerar himself, 26:6, but probably still within ten miles) and reopened his father’s wells. Isaac was also opposed there, but chose not to fight back; he relinquished one well after another until God’s blessing outdistanced the opposition. Whenever Isaac reopened a well, and regardless of how often enemies caused them to cave in, he found water. God was blessing Isaac and that blessing could not be hindered. Finally, the Philistines left Isaac alone.

26:23-25 At Beersheba, . . . the Lord appeared to Isaac to confirm his covenant (cp. 21:31-33). Isaac responded in faith as his father had done by building an altar to the Lord and proclaiming the Lord’s identity and nature (see note on 12:8; 21:33).

26:26-33 This treaty is similar to the one an earlier king had made with Abraham (cp. 21:22-31). This king acknowledged that God was blessing Isaac and realized that a treaty with Isaac would benefit him. No opposition can hinder God’s blessing—it will flourish, and other nations will see it and seek peace with God’s people to share in the blessing.

26:33 Since the earlier treaty was renewed with Isaac, the name of the well was also renewed by the oath.

26:34-35 Esau’s marriages illustrate how unfit he was to lead the covenant people into God’s blessings, and how foolish was Isaac’s later attempt to bless Esau (27:1-40). Esau later married a third wife in a vain attempt to do the right thing (28:6-9).

27:1-40 Jacob got his father Isaac’s blessing through deception. In this story, an entire family tries to carry out their responsibilities by physical means rather than by faith. Faith would have provided Rebekah and Jacob a more honorable solution to the crisis.

27:1-4 The first scene sets up the chapter’s crisis. Isaac knew of God’s oracle (25:22-23), yet he thwarted or ignored it by trying to bless Esau. Isaac was old and turning blind: He was losing his senses, both physically and spiritually.

27:3-4 Like Esau, Isaac allowed his palate to govern his heart (cp. 25:28-34).
5But Rebekah overheard what Isaac had said to his son Esau. So when Esau left to hunt for the wild game, 6she said to her son Jacob, “Listen. I overheard your father say to Esau. 7Bring me some wild game and prepare me a delicious meal. Then I will bless you in the Lord’s presence before I die.” 8Now, my son, listen to me. Do exactly as I tell you. 9Go out to the flocks, and bring me two fine young goats. I’ll use them to prepare your father’s favorite dish. 10Then take the food to your father so he can eat it and bless you before he dies.”

11“But look,” Jacob replied to Rebekah, “my brother, Esau, is a hairy man, and my skin is smooth. 12What if my father touches me? He’ll see that I’m trying to trick him, and then he’ll curse me instead of blessing me.”

13But his mother replied, “Then let the curse fall on me, my son! Just do what I tell you. Go out and get the goats for me!”

14So Jacob went out and got the young goats for his mother. Rebekah took them and prepared a delicious meal, just the way Isaac liked it. 15Then she took Esau’s favorite clothes, which were there in the house, and gave them to her younger son, Jacob. 16She covered his arms and the smooth part of his neck with the skin of the young goats. 17Then she gave Jacob the delicious meal, including freshly baked bread.

18So Jacob took the food to his father. “My father?” he said.

“Yes, my son,” Isaac answered. “Who are you—Esau or Jacob?”

19Jacob replied, “It’s Esau, your firstborn son. I’ve done as you told me. Here is the wild game. Now sit up and eat it so you can give me your blessing.”

20Isaac asked, “How did you find it so quickly, my son?”

“The Lord your God put it in my path!” Jacob replied.

21Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come closer so I can touch you and make sure that you really are Esau.” 22So Jacob went closer to his father, and Isaac touched him. “The voice is Jacob’s, but the hands are Esau’s,” Isaac said.

23But he did not recognize Jacob, because Jacob’s hands felt hairy just like Esau’s. So Isaac prepared to bless Jacob. 24“But are you really my son Esau?” he asked.

“Yes, I am,” Jacob replied.

25Then Isaac said, “Now, my son, bring me the wild game. Let me eat it, and then I will give you my blessing.” So Jacob took the food to his father, and Isaac ate it. He also drank the wine that Jacob served him.

26Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come a little closer and kiss me, my son.”

27So Jacob went over and kissed him. And when Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he was finally convinced, and he blessed his son. He said, “Ah! The smell of my son is like the smell of the outdoors, which the Lord has blessed!

28 “From the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth, may God always give you abundant harvests of grain and bountiful new wine.

29 May many nations become your servants, and may they bow down to you.

May you be the master over your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you.

All who curse you will be cursed, and all who bless you will be blessed.”

30As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and almost before Jacob had left his father, Esau returned from his hunt. 31Esau prepared a delicious meal and brought it to his father. Then he said, “Sit up, my father, and eat my wild game so you can give me your blessing.”

32But Isaac asked him, “Who are you?” Esau replied, “It’s your son, your firstborn son, Esau.”

33Isaac began to tremble uncontrollably and said, “Then who just served me wild game? I have already eaten it, and I blessed him just before you came. And yes, that blessing must stand!”
27:34  Esau was very bitter, and angry enough to kill (27:41).

27:36  Esau began to realize Jacob’s true nature, saying he has cheated me (or tripped me up, or deceived me) twice, by taking the birthright (the right of inheritance, Hebrew berakah); 25:27-34) and by deceiving his father to receive the blessing (the spoken pronouncement of the inheritance, Hebrew berakah).

* Jacob sounds like the Hebrew words for “heel” and “deceiver.” Esau’s assessment of Jacob was correct, but he failed to see his own ungodliness in these transactions (see note on 27:5; Heb 12:16).

27:37  There was no going back. Isaac had declared an oracle from God, who had made Jacob to be Esau’s master (see Rom 9:11-13).

27:39-40  All that remained for Esau was a promise of hardship and struggle (cp. 3:17-19; 16:11-12).

27:41-45  Rebekah and Jacob got the blessing but reaped hatred from Esau and separation from one another; there is no indication that Rebekah and Jacob ever saw each other again. They gained nothing that God was not already going to give them, and their methods were costly. Jacob fled from home to escape Esau’s vengeance.


27:46  Rebekah manipulated Isaac into sending Jacob away. Like Isaac, Jacob took a wife from among his relatives in the east.

28:1-2  Isaac remained in the land, but Jacob had to leave it. God would deal with Jacob under the hand of Laban, his uncle (see note on 29:1–31:55). • Believers in any age must remain spiritually pure by marrying other believers (2 Cor 6:14-18). The Canaanite people incorporated dozens of groups and clans into their society and religion by wars, treaties, and marriages (see 34:20-23). Abraham’s family was to resist such mixing (cp. 24:3; ch 34); they were to marry within their clan to maintain the purity of the line and of the faith that identified them as the chosen seed. The surest way to lose their distinctiveness was to intermarry with people of other tribal backgrounds and beliefs (see Ezra 9–10; Neh 13:23-29).

28:3-5  Before Jacob departed, Isaac gave him a pure, legitimate blessing. He did not hold back, because he now knew what God wanted him to do. Isaac clearly passed on the blessing God Almighty (Hebrew El-Shaddai; see 17:1) had given to Abraham and to him regarding prosperity and the land (cp. 15:5, 18-20).

28:8  descendants: Literally seed; also in 28:13, 14.
Jacob, younger twin son of Isaac and Rebekah, struggled with his twin brother Esau in the womb and was born grasping his heel (25:24-26). God told Rebekah that the boys represented two nations and that the older son would serve the younger (25:23).

Isaac favored Esau, an outdoorsman; Rebekah preferred Jacob, who was happier at home. Once, Esau returned famished from hunting and Jacob bought his birthright with some red stew he had cooked (25:27-34; see Heb 12:16). Later, Isaac asked Esau to prepare wild game so he could eat and bless him (27:1-4; cp. 25:28). Rebekah sent Jacob to deceive Isaac into blessing him instead, and her ploy was successful (27:30-35), but legally valid blessings were irrevocable promises (27:33). So Isaac gave Esau a lesser blessing (27:36-40), and Esau plotted to kill Jacob (27:41). Rebekah convinced Isaac to send Jacob away to her brother Laban so that Jacob would marry among relatives (27:46).

So Isaac transferred the covenant promises to Jacob and sent him to Haran (28:1-5). Along the way, God appeared to Jacob in a dream and affirmed the promises of land and descendants that he had given to Abraham and Isaac (28:10-15). Jacob worshiped the Lord and named the place Bethel (“house of God”).

At Haran, Jacob began to serve his uncle Laban (chs 29–31). Jacob loved Laban’s daughter Rachel and worked seven years to marry her, but Laban deceived him by substituting his older daughter Leah on Jacob’s wedding night. Jacob worked seven more years for Rachel and an additional six years to acquire flocks for himself (30:25-43; see also 31:38-42). Despite many hardships, he had thirteen children and became very prosperous.

After twenty years, God told Jacob to return to Canaan (31:3). Fearing reprisals from Laban and his sons (31:1-2), Jacob organized his caravan and left while Laban was away (31:4-21). Laban gave chase, but God prevented him from harming Jacob (31:22-24, 29). Laban instead upbraided Jacob for leaving stealthily and for stealing his idols (31:25-30; see also 31:19). Jacob let Laban search his tents, but the idols were not found (31:33-35), and Jacob became angry (31:36-42). Though their conflict remained unresolved (31:43), the two men made a peace covenant (31:44-54); the location formed the lasting boundary between Israel and Aram.

Jacob now faced Esau and God. When Esau came to meet him with 400 men, Jacob sought God’s protection and sent gifts to pacify his estranged brother (32:3-21). During a night that symbolized his whole life, Jacob wrestled alone with a man who dislocated his hip and gave him the blessing he sought (32:22-32). God changed his name to Israel (“God fights”).

Jacob met Esau and the two were reconciled (33:1-11); Esau was gracious and forgiving, and Jacob shared some of his blessing. Esau then returned to Seir while Jacob continued to Canaan. In Shechem, Jacob bought land and built an altar (33:16-20), then moved to Bethel and expelled all foreign idols from his household (35:1-8). God reaffirmed Jacob’s new name, Israel, and renewed his promises of land and descendants (35:9-15).

Jacob’s favoritism for Rachel extended to her son Joseph, whom Jacob intended to anoint as the firstborn and heir (37:1-4), a plan that God confirmed through dreams (37:5-11). But then Joseph’s brothers sold him as a slave (Gen 37:9-28) and for over twenty years Jacob believed he was dead. Only after letting Benjamin go to Egypt in Judah’s care did Jacob learn that Joseph was alive and would become the source of famine relief for his family (43:1-14; 45:24-28). Jacob’s spirits revived. He moved to Egypt and joyously reunited with his favorite son at Goshen (Gen 46:28-30), where he prospered for seventeen more years.

When Jacob approached death at age 147, he arranged for the future of his family. He made Joseph swear to bury him in Canaan (47:29-31; 49:29-32). He gave Joseph’s sons his prime blessing (48:1-20) and put Ephraim, the younger son, first. He gave assurance that the family would return to Canaan (48:21-22), then blessed each of his sons and prophesied the future of their descendants (49:1-28). He died (49:33) and was buried at the cave of Machpelah, accompanied by his sons and a large Egyptian procession. His death marked the end of the patriarchal age and the beginning of Israel’s growth as a nation in Egypt until they returned to live again in the Promised Land (see Exodus—Joshua).

The name “Jacob” became synonymous with the nation of Israel (see Num 23:7, 21; 24:5; Hos 12:2). God called the nation to serve him as their forefathers had done (Hos 12:3-13). He promised Israel the same love that he had shown toward Jacob (Mal 1:2), and he promised that a conquering ruler would come from Jacob’s descendants (Gen 49:8-12; Num 24:17-19).
Esau's Ishmaelite Wives (28:6-9)

6Esau knew that his father, Isaac, had blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan-aram to find a wife, and that he had warned Jacob, "You must not marry a Canaanite woman." 7He also knew that Jacob had obeyed his parents and gone to Paddan-aram. 8It was now very clear to Esau that his father did not like the local Canaanite women. 9So Esau visited his uncle Ishmael's family and married one of Ishmael's daughters, in addition to the wives he already had. His new wife's name was Mahalath. She was the sister of Nebaioth and the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son.

Jacob's Dream at Bethel: The Blessing Confirmed (28:10-22)

10Meanwhile, Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran. 11At sundown he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone to rest his head against and lay down to sleep. 12As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway.

13At the top of the stairway stood the Lord, and he said, “I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are

28:11 The good place where Jacob set up camp was apparently a protected area at the foot of a hill. The stone to rest his head against was probably large, more for protection than for a pillow.

28:12-15 The point of the vision was that God and his angels were with Jacob on his journey. God reiterated to Jacob the covenant promises made to Abraham and Isaac, promising him land, descendants numerous as the dust of the earth (cp. 13:16; 22:17), and universal blessing through him (cp. 12:2-3; 15:5, 18; 17:3-8; 22:15-18; 35:11-12). God also promised to be with Jacob and watch over him until he returned.

28:16-17 The second half of the passage gives Jacob's response to the revelation. He felt reverential fear and awe in the Lord's presence, and his acts of devotion became archetypes of Israel's worship. When God graciously visits his people and promises to be with them and make them a blessing to the world, his people respond in faith with reverential fear, worship, offerings, and vows. They preserve their faith in memory for future worshipers.

28:18 Anointing with oil became a way of setting something apart for divine use in Israel's worship (Exod 29:1-7; 40:9; Lev 2:1; 1 Sam 10:1).

28:19 Bethel later became a holy site for Israel (see Judg 20:18-27; 1 Sam 7:16; 10:3; 1 Kgs 12:26–13:10; 2 Kgs 2:2-3).

28:20-22 In view of what God would do for him, Jacob vowed to do certain things for God. He believed the Lord's words and responded in gratitude. Jacob's vow influenced Israel's way of making commitments to God in worship.
father's home, then the LORD will certainly be my God. 22 And this memorial pillar I have set up will become a place for worshiping God, and I will present to God a tenth of everything he gives me."

**Jacob in Paddan-Aram (29:1–31:55)**

**Jacob Meets Rachel and Laban**

29 Then Jacob hurried on, finally arriving in the land of the east. 3 He saw a well in the distance. Three flocks of sheep and goats lay in an open field beside it, waiting to be watered. But a heavy stone covered the mouth of the well.

3 It was the custom there to wait for all the flocks to arrive before removing the stone and watering the animals. Afterward the stone would be placed back over the mouth of the well. 4 Jacob went over to the shepherds and asked, "Where are you from, my friends?"

"We are from Haran," they answered.

5 "Do you know a man there named Laban, the grandson of Nahor?" he asked.

"Yes, we do," they replied.

6 "Is he doing well?" Jacob asked.

"Yes, he's well," they answered. "Look, here comes his daughter Rachel with the flock now."

7 Jacob said, "Look, it's still broad daylight—too early to round up the animals. Why don't you water the sheep and goats so they can get back out to pasture?"

8 "We can't water the animals until all the flocks have arrived," they replied. "Then the shepherds move the stone from the mouth of the well, and we water all the sheep and goats."

9 Jacob was still talking with them when Rachel arrived with her father's flock, for she was a shepherd. 10 And because Rachel was his cousin—the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother—and because the sheep and goats belonged to his uncle Laban, Jacob went over to the well and moved the stone from its mouth and watered his uncle's flock. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and he wept aloud. 12 He explained to Rachel that

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**RACHEL (29:6–30:24)**

Rachel, Laban's beautiful younger daughter, was Jacob's favorite wife. He first met her as he arrived at Paddan-aram in Haran, when he helped Rachel remove the stone from the well and watered her father's sheep (29:10). Jacob agreed to work seven years for Laban in order to have Rachel as his wife, and the time seemed like only a few days because of his great love for her.

Laban deceptively required Jacob to marry Leah, his older, less attractive daughter, before finally giving him Rachel. Unlike Leah, Rachel was barren in the early years of her marriage to Jacob (30:1). She gave her servant Bilhah to Jacob in order to have children, and Dan and Naphtali were born (30:3-8). In time, Rachel conceived and bore Joseph (30:22-25), and Jacob took his wives, children, and possessions away from Haran.

Somewhere between Bethel and Bethlehem, Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin (35:16-20). Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb that was a landmark even in Saul's time (1 Sam 10:2). Rachel and Leah are highly regarded for having built up the house of Israel (Ruth 4:11). In Jer 31:15, Rachel is pictured as crying for her children being carried off into captivity, and Matthew recalls Jeremiah's words at Herod's slaughter of the male infants (Matt 2:18).

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**28:22 I will present to God a tenth:**

By paying a tithe (a tenth) as an act of worship, a person acknowledges that everything is a gift from God and belongs to God (see 14:19-20; Num 18:21-32; Deut 14:22-29; 2 Chr 31:5-6; Mal 3:7-12; Matt 23:23).

**29:1–31:55** These chapters tell how God kept his promise by abundantly blessing Jacob with family and possessions. God also disciplined Jacob, leaving him to struggle with Laban for many years. Laban was Jacob's match in deception, and thus a means of correction. The story of Jacob and Laban parallels Israel's later sojourn in Egypt. Jacob struggled while serving his uncle, but finally emerged with a large family (the founders of the twelve tribes) and great wealth. In Egypt, the Israelites suffered under their oppressors, but they also flourished, becoming a great nation of twelve large tribes and escaping with great riches.

**29:1 Jacob hurried on**: The Hebrew text says that he “picked up his feet” as if he felt the wind at his back; he continued his journey with fresh enthusiasm. His changed outlook was the direct result of the vision he received at Bethel, a marvelous revelation that God was going to protect and bless him. He now sought the fulfillment of God's promises to him, not just an escape from Esau. Jacob's attitude had become positive and magnanimous to the point of being naive and vulnerable.

**29:2-12** Jacob's meeting Rachel at the well was providentially timed by the sovereign God who was leading Jacob to fulfillment of the promises (cp. 24:12-20). The well was a reminder of God's blessing (cp. 16:13-14; 21:19; 26:19-25, 33).

**29:10** In contrast to the lazy, unhelpful shepherds (29:7-8), Jacob is portrayed as generous, industrious, and energetic.

**• Jacob . . . watered his uncle's flock:** Laban's flocks would flourish under Jacob's care.

**29:11 Jacob kissed Rachel:** Kissing relatives was a proper greeting (29:13; cp. Song 8:1).
he was her cousin on her father’s side—the son of her aunt Rebekah. So Rachel quickly ran and told her father, Laban.

As soon as Laban heard that his nephew Jacob had arrived, he ran out to meet him. He embraced and kissed him and brought him home. When Jacob had told him his story, Laban exclaimed, “You really are my own flesh and blood!”

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

After Jacob had stayed with Laban for about a month, Laban said to him, “You shouldn’t work for me without pay just because we are relatives. Tell me how much your wages should be.”

Now Laban had two daughters. The older daughter was named Leah, and the younger one was Rachel. There was no sparkle in Leah’s eyes, but Rachel had a beautiful figure and a lovely face. Since Jacob was in love with Rachel, he told her father, “I’ll work for you for seven years if you’ll give me Rachel, your younger daughter, as my wife.”

“Agreed!” Laban replied. “I’d rather give her to you than to anyone else. Stay and work with me.” So Jacob worked seven years to pay for Rachel. But his love for her was so strong that it seemed to him but a few days.

Finally, the time came for him to marry her. “I have fulfilled my agreement,” Jacob said to Laban. “Now give me my wife so I can sleep with her.”

So Laban invited everyone in the neighborhood and prepared a wedding feast. But that night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. (Laban had given Leah a servant, Zilpah, to be her maid.)

But when Jacob woke up in the morning—it was Leah! “What have you done to me?”

Leah was Laban’s first daughter, Jacob’s unloved first wife, and Rachel’s older sister.

After Jacob deceived his father Isaac into giving him the blessing intended for Esau (27:1-40), Jacob went to his uncle Laban in Mesopotamia to find a wife (27:46–28:2) and escape Esau’s revenge (27:41–42). He fell in love with his cousin Rachel and arranged with her father to marry her after seven years of work (29:17–18). At the wedding feast, Laban deceived Jacob by giving him Leah instead of Rachel (29:21–25), claiming that custom required the older daughter to marry first (29:26).

Leah’s eyes were not beautiful, but Rachel “had a beautiful figure and a lovely face” (29:17).

Jacob’s love for Rachel (29:20) induced him to work another seven years to marry her. In the intense rivalry between the two sisters, Jacob favored Rachel, so the Lord blessed Leah with six sons and a daughter (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah) before Rachel was given any children (30:31–30:22). This barrenness became a great burden for Rachel. At one point she bargained with Leah for mandrakes, a plant believed to ensure conception, in exchange for conjugal rights. This increased her sister’s advantage, because Leah conceived and bore her fifth son (30:14–17).

Leah was the mother of two tribes that played significant roles in Israelite history. The tribe of Levi was the tribe of the priesthood, and the tribe of Judah became the tribe of royalty through which the promised seed (3:15; 12:2; 2 Sam 7:16; Matt 1:1) came in the person of Jesus Christ.
Jacob raged at Laban. "I worked seven years for Rachel! Why have you tricked me?"

26 "It's not our custom here to marry off a younger daughter ahead of the firstborn," Laban replied. 27 "But wait until the bridal week is over, then we'll give you Rachel, too—provided you promise to work another seven years for me."

28 So Jacob agreed to work seven more years. A week after Jacob had married Leah, Laban gave him Rachel, too. 29 (Laban gave Rachel a servant, Bilhah, to be her maid.) 30 So Jacob slept with Rachel, too, and he loved her much more than Leah. He then stayed and worked for Laban the additional seven years.

Children Born to Leah and Rachel

31 When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he enabled her to have children, but Rachel could not conceive. 32 So Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "The LORD has noticed my misery, and now my husband will love me."

33 She soon became pregnant again and gave birth to another son. She named him Simeon, for she said, "The LORD heard that I was unloved and has given me another son."

34 Then she became pregnant a third time and gave birth to another son. She named him Levi, for she said, "Surely this time my husband will feel affection for me, since I have given him three sons!"

35 Once again Leah became pregnant and gave birth to another son. She named him Judah, for she said, "Now I will praise the LORD!" And then she stopped having children.

30 When Rachel saw that she wasn't having any children for Jacob, she became jealous of her sister. She pleaded with Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

Then Jacob became furious with Rachel. "Am I God?" he asked. "He's the one who has kept you from having children!"

Then Rachel told him, "Take my maid, Bilhah, and sleep with her. She will bear children for me, and through her I can have a family, too." 4 So Rachel gave her servant, Bilhah, to Jacob as a wife, and he slept with her. 5 Bilhah became pregnant and presented him with a son. 6 Rachel named him Dan, for she said, "God has vindicated me! He has heard my request and given me a son."

Then Bilhah became pregnant again and gave Jacob a second son. 8 Rachel named him Naphtali, for she said, "I have struggled hard with my sister, and I'm winning!"

9 Meanwhile, Leah realized that she wasn't getting pregnant anymore, so she took her
servant, Zilpah, and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 18 Soon Zilpah presented him with a son. 19 Leah named him Gad, for she said, “How fortunate I am!” 20 Then Zilpah gave Jacob a second son. 21 And Leah named him Asher, for she said, “What joy is mine! Now the other women will celebrate with me.”

14 One day during the wheat harvest, Reuben found some mandrakes growing in a field and brought them to his mother, Leah. Rachel begged Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.”

15 But Leah angrily replied, “Wasn’t it enough that you stole my husband? Now will you steal my son’s mandrakes, too?” Rachel answered, “I will let Jacob sleep with you tonight if you give me some of the mandrakes.”

16 So that evening, as Jacob was coming home from the fields, Leah went out to meet him. “You must come and sleep with me tonight!” she said. “I have paid for you with some mandrakes that my son found.” So that night he slept with Leah. 17 And God answered Leah’s prayers. She became pregnant again and gave birth to a fifth son for Jacob. 18 She named him Issachar, for she said, “God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband as a wife.” 19 Then Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to a sixth son for Jacob. 20 She named him Zebulun, for she said, “God has given me a good reward. Now my husband will treat me with respect, for I have given him six sons.” 21 Later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

22 Then God remembered Rachel’s plight and answered her prayers by enabling her to have children. 23 She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. “God has removed my disgrace,” she said. 24 And she named him Joseph, for she said, “May the Lord add yet another son to my family.”

Jacob’s Wealth Increases
25 Soon after Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Please release me so I can go home to my own country. 26 Let me take my wives and children, for I have earned them by serving you, and let me be on my way. You certainly know how hard I have worked for you.” 27 “Please listen to me,” Laban replied. “I have become wealthy, for the Lord has blessed me because of you. 28 Tell me how much I owe you. Whatever it is, I’ll pay it.”

29 Jacob replied, “You know how hard I’ve worked for you, and how your flocks and herds have grown under my care. 30 You had little indeed before I came, but your wealth has increased enormously. The Lord has blessed you through everything I’ve done. But now, what about me? When can I start providing for my own family?”

31 “What wages do you want?” Laban asked again.

Jacob replied, “Don’t give me anything. Just do this one thing, and I’ll continue to tend and watch over your flocks. 32 Let me inspect your flocks today and remove all the sheep and goats that are speckled or spotted, along with all the black sheep. Give these to me as my wages. 33 In the future, when you check on the animals you have given me as my wages, you’ll see that I have been honest. If you find in my flock his wages by selective breeding.

30:27 I have become wealthy, for (or I have learned by divination that): God had prospered Laban through Jacob’s presence (see 22:18). Laban may have looked for omens, or simply have perceived what was happening. Since dark-colored sheep (30:32) were rare, a large number of them was considered an omen of God’s blessing.

30:30-33 Jacob agreed that God had blessed Laban through him, so he made a plan to gain something for himself. He proposed for his wages the rare black and multicolored goats and the speckled and spotted sheep that were born.

30:32 As Abraham had done with Lot (13:9), Jacob gave Laban what he valued most. White sheep were more common and more valuable than dark or multicolored sheep; as a man of faith, Jacob was willing to take the rejects (cp. 1 Cor 1:26).
any goats without speckles or spots, or any sheep that are not black, you will know that I have stolen them from you.”

34“All right,” Laban replied. “It will be as you say.” 35But that very day Laban went out and removed the male goats that were streaked and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled and spotted or had white patches, and all the black sheep. He placed them in the care of his own sons, who took them a three-days’ journey from where Jacob was. Meanwhile, Jacob stayed and cared for the rest of Laban’s flock.

37Then Jacob took some fresh branches from poplar, almond, and plane trees and peeled off strips of bark, making white streaks on them. 38Then he placed these peeled branches in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, for that was where they mated. 39And when they mated in front of the white-streaked branches, they gave birth to young that were streaked, speckled, and spotted. 40Jacob separated those lambs from Laban’s flock. And at mating time he turned the flock to face Laban’s animals that were streaked or black. This is how he built his own flock instead of increasing Laban’s.

41Whenever the stronger females were ready to mate, Jacob would place the peeled branches in the watering troughs in front of them. Then they would mate in front of the branches. 42But he didn’t do this with the weaker ones, so the weaker lambs belonged to Laban, and the stronger ones were Jacob’s. 43As a result, Jacob became very wealthy, with large flocks of sheep and goats, female and male servants, and many camels and donkeys.

Jacob Flees from Laban

31 But Jacob soon learned that Laban’s sons were grumbling about him. “Jacob has robbed our father of everything!” they said. “He has gained all his wealth at our father’s expense.” 2And Jacob began to notice a change in Laban’s attitude toward him.

3Then the Lord said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your father and grandfather and to your relatives there, and I will be with you.”

4So Jacob called Rachel and Leah out to the field where he was watching his flock. 5He said to them, “I have noticed that your father’s attitude toward me has changed. But the God of my father has been with me. 6You know how hard I have worked for your father, 7but he has cheated me, changing my wages ten times. But God has not allowed him to do me any harm. 8For if he said, ‘The speckled animals will be your wages,’ the whole flock began to produce speckled young. And when he changed his mind and said, ‘The striped animals will be your wages,’ then the whole flock produced striped young. 9In this way, God has taken your father’s animals and given them to me.

10One time during the mating season, I had a dream and saw that the male goats mating with the females were streaked, speckled, and spotted. 11Then in my dream,

30:34-36 Laban verbally agreed with Jacob’s plan, but he tried to prevent Jacob from accruing wealth by removing animals from the flock that would fulfill the agreement. Laban’s deception with his goats reminds us of Jacob’s deception of Esau (cp. 27:9; see note on 29:14b-30).

30:37-43 God blessed Jacob despite Laban’s duplicity. Not to be outwitted, Jacob used selective breeding to acquire a flock, following the traditional belief that peeled sticks influenced the kind of animal that would be born. The peeled branches seemingly made his animals produce streaked and spotted young; Jacob later acknowledged that God had prospered him (31:7-12). Jacob gained stronger animals for himself and weaker ones for Laban (30:41-42).

30:37 making white streaks: A clever wordplay captures the meaning of this whole section. When Jacob exposed the white (Hebrew laban) streaks of wood underneath, he played the “white” game (the Laban game) and won. As he outwitted Laban (“Whitey”), Jacob’s flocks flourished and Jacob prospered.

30:42 Laban now received due recompense for his treatment of Jacob. Laban’s attempt to defraud Jacob resulted in Jacob’s coming out ahead, because God was at work in his life.


31:1-21 Jacob’s return journey precipitated a confrontation with Laban that set a permanent boundary between Israel (Jacob) and Aram (Laban). God kept his word to Jacob by prospering him in Paddan-aram and protecting him on his journey home.

31:1-2 The animosity of Laban’s sons against Jacob grew because his flocks were multiplying faster than Laban’s. They were jealous of God’s blessing on Jacob and afraid that he would completely overrun them.

31:3 The land of your father and grandfather was the land of Canaan, to which Abraham had previously been called (12:1-7; 17:8). Return . . . I will be with you: See notes on 26:2-5; 28:12-15. God protected Jacob (“Israel,” 32:28) as he brought his family back to the land that was promised to them. God later brought Israel back to Canaan after long years of service in Egypt. That great return had many elements similar to this passage: God defeated foreign gods and beliefs, used dreams for rescue and protection, gave victory over those who threatened them, and established boundaries between nations and tribes (see Deut 32:8).

31:4-13 Jacob explained to his wives how God had blessed him despite Laban’s opposition. He was not sure they would want to leave Laban and go to Canaan. He wanted to take a willing family, so he had to make an effective appeal. He rehearsed God’s leading and provision over the years, and then told them that he had to keep the vow he had made at Bethel (28:20-22).
the angel of God said to me, ‘Jacob!’ And I replied, ‘Yes, here I am.’

129The angel said, ‘Look up, and you will see that only the streaked, speckled, and spotted males are mating with the females of your flock. For I have seen how Laban has treated you. 13I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel, the place where you anointed the pillar of stone and made my vow to me. Now get ready and leave this country and return to the land of your birth.’”

14Rachel and Leah responded, “That’s fine with us! We won’t inherit any of our father’s wealth anyway. 15He has reduced our rights to those of foreign women. And after he sold us, he wasted the money you paid him for us. 16All the wealth God has given you from our father legally belongs to us and our children. So go ahead and do whatever God has told you.”

17So Jacob put his wives and children on camels, 18and he drove all his livestock in front of him. He packed all the belongings he had acquired in Paddan-aram and set out for the land of Canaan, where his father, Isaac, lived. 19At the time they left, Laban was some distance away, shearing his sheep. Rachel stole her father’s household idols and took them with her. 20Jacob outwitted Laban the Aramean, for they set out secretly and never told Laban they were leaving. 21So Jacob took all his possessions with him and crossed the Euphrates River, heading for the hill country of Gilead.

Dispute between Laban and Jacob

22Three days later, Laban was told that Jacob had fled. 23So he gathered a group of his relatives and set out in hot pursuit. He caught up with Jacob seven days later in the hill country of Gilead. 24But the previous night God had appeared to Laban the Aramean in a dream and told him, “I’m warning you—leave Jacob alone!”

25Laban caught up with Jacob as he was camped in the hill country of Gilead, and he set up his camp not far from Jacob’s.

26“Why did you deceive me? And why didn’t you say you wanted to leave? I would have given you a farewell feast, with singing and music, accompanied by tambourines and harps. 27Why didn’t you let me kiss my daughters and grandchildren and tell them goodbye? You have acted very foolishly! 28I could destroy you, but the God of your father appeared to me last night and warned me, ‘Leave Jacob alone!’ 30I can understand your feeling that you must go, and your intense longing for your father’s home. But why have you stolen my gods?”

31“I rushed away because I was afraid,” Jacob answered. “I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. 32But as for your gods, see if you can find them, and let the person who has taken them die! And if you find anything else that belongs to you, identify it before all these relatives of ours, and I will give it back!” But Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the household idols.

33Laban went first into Jacob’s tent to search there, then into Leah’s, and then

31:13 the god who appeared to you at Bethel: As in Greek version and an Aramaic Targum; Hebrew reads the God of Bethel.
31:14-16 The women responded immediately that they would go with Jacob because God had blessed him. They were very willing to leave Laban, who had squandered their wealth [the property that would have provided for them]. They knew that what God had given to Jacob would also be theirs.
31:17-21 Jacob left Laban secretly out of fear of reprisal (31:31).
31:19-20 Rachel stole her father’s household idols: Rachel probably wanted to regain some of the assets Laban had squandered; possibly she also worshiped idols (cp. 35:2-4). To have the idols may have signified claiming the family inheritance, as customs in subsequent periods indicate. Laban apparently felt vulnerable without them.
31:22-23 The theft of the idols (31:19) was probably the main reason that Laban and his men chased Jacob. It was one thing for Jacob to take his family and flocks—Laban probably still believed they were all his—but another matter entirely to take his household gods. Laban may have feared that Jacob would return someday to claim all of Laban’s estate. When he failed to find the gods, he asked for a treaty to keep Jacob away (31:43-53). • It took Laban seven days to catch up with Jacob.
31:24 leave Jacob alone! (literally Do not speak to Jacob either good or evil): God commanded Laban not to take justice into his own hands. When we try to enact our own sense of good and evil apart from God’s command, we always do evil (see note on 2:9).
31:25-30 The dispute between the two men used the language of legal controversies and lawsuits (see also 31:36). In his first argument, Laban presented himself as a wounded party that Jacob had robbed.
31:32 Jacob, so convinced that he didn’t have the gods, used an oath that unwittingly put Rachel under a death sentence.
31:33-35 Laban searched for the idols but found nothing. Laban never
the tents of the two servant wives—but he found nothing. Finally, he went into Rachel's tent. 34But Rachel had taken the household idols and hidden them in her camel saddle, and now she was sitting on them. When Laban had thoroughly searched her tent without finding them, 35she said to her father, "Please, sir, forgive me if I don't get up for you. I'm having my monthly period." So Laban continued his search, but he could not find the household idols.

36Then Jacob became very angry, and he challenged Laban. "What's my crime?" he demanded. "What have I done wrong to make you chase after me as though I were a criminal? 37You have ransacked everything I own. Now show me what you found that belongs to you! Set it out here in front of us, before our relatives, for all to see. Let them judge between us!

38For twenty years I have been with you, caring for your flocks. In all that time your sheep and goats never miscarried. In all those years I never used a single ram of yours for food. 39If any were killed by wild animals, I never showed you the carcass and asked you to reduce the count of your flock. No, I took the loss myself! You made me pay for every stolen animal, whether it was taken in broad daylight or in the dark of night.

40"I worked for you through the scorching heat of the day and through cold and sleepless nights. 41Yes, for twenty years I slaved in your house! I worked for fourteen years earning your two daughters, and then six more years for your flock. And you changed my wages ten times! 42In fact, if the God of my father had not been on my side—the God of Abraham and the fearsome God of Isaac—you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen your abuse and my hard work. That is why he appeared to you last night and rebuked you!"

**Jacob's Treaty with Laban**

43Then Laban replied to Jacob, "These women are my daughters, these children are my grandchildren, and these flocks are my flocks—in fact, everything you see is mine. But what can I do now about my daughters and their children? 44So come, let's make a covenant, you and I, and it will be a witness to our commitment."

45So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a monument. 46Then he told his family members, "Gather some stones." So they gathered stones and piled them in a heap. Then Jacob and Laban sat down beside the pile of stones to eat a covenant meal. 47To commemorate the event, Laban called the place Jegarsahadutha (which means "witness pile" in Aramaic), and Jacob called it Galeed (which means "witness pile" in Hebrew).

48Then Laban declared, "This pile of stones will stand as a witness to remind us of the covenant we have made today." This explains why it was called Galeed—"Witness Pile." 49But it was also called Mizpah (which means "watchtower"), for Laban said, "May the Lord keep watch between us to make sure that we keep this covenant when we are out of each other's sight. 50If you mistreat my daughters or if you marry other wives, God will see it even if no one else does. He is a witness to this covenant between us.

51"See this pile of stones," Laban continued, "and see this monument I have set between us. 52They stand between us as witnesses of our vows. I will never pass this pile of stones to harm you, and you must never pass these stones or this monument to harm me. 53I call on the God of our ancestors—the God of your grandfather Abraham and the

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dreamed that a woman having her monthly period would desecrate the idols by sitting on them (cp. Lev 15:19-24).

31:36-42 Jacob retaliated by accusing Laban of false charges and humiliation. Laban now became the defendant, for his charges were demeaning and apparently groundless.

31:40 Jacob, who preferred domestic life (25:27), had for twenty years endured the rigors of the outdoors that Esau had loved.

31:42 on my side . . . and the fearsome God of Isaac (or and the Fear of Isaac): The God that Isaac feared was with Jacob (31:3), had seen his hard work and faithfulness despite Laban's abuse, and had rewarded Jacob. Laban's dream only proved to Jacob that he was in the right.

31:43-44 Laban pushed for a treaty to settle the dispute—he felt vulnerable, so he wanted to secure the borders. Jacob did not need a treaty, since God had provided for him and protected him.

31:45-48 The stone and the heap of stones were a monument to the border treaty between the two men, as a witness to future generations. Each named the monument witness pile in his native language. It remained the perpetual border between Israel and the kingdom of Aram (Syria), two nations often at war.

31:49 The witness pile was also called watchtower. God would watch over Jacob and Laban and keep them apart, for they could not trust each other.

31:50-53 Laban added some face-saving stipulations to the treaty, using many words to cover up his own untrustworthiness and portray Jacob as the unethical party. He even took credit for the monument Jacob had erected (this monument I have set, 31:51). The women and children would be much safer and better cared for with Jacob than they ever were with Laban.

31:53 the fearsome God of his father, Isaac: Or the Fear of his father, Isaac. See note on 31:42.
32:2

**Jacob must have seen the angels that revealed God’s presence as a sign of protection, as with the earlier vision when he was departing the land (28:10–22).**

*Mahanaim* means “two camps.” Jacob’s company and the company of angels were together in one place.

32:3-5

**Appropriately inspired by the vision of angels (32:1, Hebrew mal’akim), Jacob sent messengers (mal’akim) into Edom to meet Esau.**

32:7-8

**Jacob divided his company into two groups or camps (Hebrew makahnoth, related to “Mahanaim” in 32:2) because he was afraid, remembering Esau’s character and his threat to kill Jacob (see 25:25; 27:41).**

32:9-12

**Jacob’s prayer is a wonderful example of how to address God. He based his appeal on God’s will, reminding God of his relationship with him, his command for him to return to the land, and his promise (32:9). He had a correct attitude of genuine humility and total dependence on God (32:10).**

Finally, he asked that God rescue him from his brother, and he repeated God’s promises (see 22:17).

32:13-21

**Taking a large portion of the wealth God had blessed him with (some 550 animals), Jacob prepared a gift to appease Esau’s anger and gain his favor.**
him in person, perhaps he will be friendly to me.” 21So the gifts were sent on ahead, while Jacob himself spent that night in the camp.

Jacob Wrestles with God and Becomes Israel

22During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two servant wives, and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River with them. 23After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions.

24This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. 25When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob’s hip and wrenched it out of its socket. 26Then the man said, “Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!”

But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” 27“What is your name?” the man asked.

He replied, “Jacob.”

Jacob and Esau Make Peace

33Then Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his 400 men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and

32:22-32 Before Jacob returned to the land God had promised him, God met him, crippled him, and blessed him, changing his name to Israel. This episode was a significant turning point for him.

32:22-24 The Jabbok River flows westward to the Jordan Valley, dividing the region of Bashan on the north from Gilead on the south. Wordsplay on Jacob’s name and character preserve the memory of this encounter. Jacob (Hebrew ya’aqob), while at Jabbok (Hebrew yabbok), wrestled (Hebrew wayye’abeq). Through his fight with an adversary to receive the blessing Jacob’s name would be changed, and his deceptive striving would partially give way to faith as his way of life.

32:24 a man came: The narrative unfolds as the event did for Jacob. No details are given about the assailant, who later refused to identify himself (32:29). • until the dawn: The darkness fit Jacob’s situation and increased the fear and uncertainty that seized him. In the darkness he had no idea who it was—it might have been one of Esau’s men, or Laban’s.

32:25 he touched Jacob’s hip and wrenched it out of its socket: Jacob, the deceitful fighter, could fight no more. When his assailant fought him as man to man, Jacob could hold his own. But like so many of his own rivals, he had now more than met his match.

32:26 At daybreak, the significance of this fight began to dawn on Jacob. He realized who his assailant was, and since it was futile to fight, he held on to obtain God’s blessing.

32:27 What is your name? The Lord’s question was really about Jacob’s character, not his identity (cp. 3:9; 4:9). By giving his name, Jacob confessed his nature, his way of doing things as “Heel-grabber, Deceiver, Usurper.” Before God would bless him, he had to acknowledge who he was, and then God would change his identity.

32:28 Jacob sounds like the Hebrew words for “heel” and “deceiver.” Israel means “God fights.” God first had to fight with him, but now God would fight for him. Jacob’s name was thus full of promise for Jacob and his descendants. • you have fought with God and with men: Through his entire life, Jacob had been seizing God’s blessing by his own abilities and by any means possible. Jacob knew the importance of the blessing, but he was too self-sufficient and proud to let the blessing be given to him. He had been fighting God long before this encounter. • and have won: He had prevailed in his struggles with Esau and with Laban; now he prevailed in obtaining God’s blessing.

32:29 Jacob knew who was with him (32:30); the request was his attempt to regain some control. God would not reveal his name, which cannot be had on demand.

32:30 Peniel (which means “face of God”): The name shows that Jacob recognized the man as a manifestation of God (a theophany). • yet my life has been spared (or and I have been rescued): The saying probably meant that Jacob realized that his prayer to be rescued from Esau (32:11) had been answered, for if he could meet God like this and walk away, he had nothing to fear from Esau. The saying may also reflect an ancient understanding that no one could see God and live (see Exod 33:20).

32:31 Peniel: Hebrew Penuei, a variant spelling of Peniel. • he was limping: God injured Jacob’s hip, thus curtailing his proud self-sufficiency. Since the Lord had restricted his natural strength, Jacob would have to rely on the Lord with greater faith. He had thought that returning to his land would be a matter of outwitting his brother once again (32:23-21), but here at the land’s threshold he met its true proprietor. He would get the land, but only if God fought for him. Self-sufficiency—trying to achieve the blessing by our own strength or by the ways of the world—will not suffice. If we persist, God may have to cripple our self-sufficiency to make us trust him more.

32:32 The story includes a dietary restriction for Israel that became a custom but was not put into law. This custom helped preserve the memory of the story. Observant Jews still refuse to eat the tendons of an animal’s hindquarters.

33:1-17 Jacob’s long-anticipated meeting with his brother Esau turned out far better than he had feared. Esau’s changed heart is an example of how “God fights” (32:28). Earlier, he had cared little about the birthright (25:32-34); now he cared little for old grudges. Jacob recognized that God had intervened.

33:1-2 Jacob’s identity had been changed (32:27-28), but he had not yet learned to live up to the new name; he still showed the favoritism that divides families. He lined up his family and his possessions in the order of their
his two servant wives. 2He put the servant wives and their children at the front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3Then Jacob went on ahead. As he approached his brother, he bowed to the ground seven times before him. 4Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept.

5Then Esau looked at the women and children and asked, “Who are these people with you?”

“These are the children God has graciously given to me, your servant,” Jacob replied. 6Then the servant wives came forward with their children and bowed before him. 7Next came Leah with her children, and they bowed before him. 8Then Jacob bowed forward seven times before his brother.

9“People of my brother, please accept this gift from me. It is like seeing the face of God! I have more than enough.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau finally accepted the gift.

33:3-13 Even though Jacob had nothing to fear, he was afraid and tried to appease his brother. He assumed the role of a servant before royalty by bowing (33:3), using an honorific title (33:8, 13), making introductions (33:6-7), and presenting gifts (33:8). 33:4 Esau’s friendly greeting was an answer to prayer (32:11). God had rescued Jacob from Esau’s revenge. 33:5 your servant: In talking with his brother, Jacob continued to refer to himself as Esau’s servant (also 33:14) and to Esau as his lord (33:8, 13-15); Esau called Jacob “my brother” (33:9). Jacob was cautiously warding off any possible retaliation by reversing the words of the oracle (25:23). 33:7 Among Jacob’s sons, only Joseph is named; he was Jacob’s favorite son and the recipient of the blessing. 33:10 Jacob knew that Esau’s friendly greeting was God’s work, secured at Peniel when he saw God face to face. 33:11 this gift I have brought you (literally my blessing): Jacob perceived Esau as a threat and tried to appease him with a gift (cp. 2 Kgs 17:3-4; 18:7, 14; 2 Chr 28:21), perhaps in a guilty attempt to undo the past. Jacob would not take no for an answer.
12"Well," Esau said, "let's be going. I will lead the way."

13But Jacob replied, "You can see, my lord, that some of the children are very young, and the flocks and herds have their young, too. If they are driven too hard, even for one day, all the animals could die. 14Please, my lord, go ahead of your servant. We will follow slowly, at a pace that is comfortable for the livestock and the children. I will meet you at Seir."

15"All right," Esau said, "but at least let me assign some of my men to guide and protect you."

Jacob responded, "That's not necessary. It's enough that you've received me warmly, my lord!"

16So Esau turned around and started back to Seir that same day. 17Jacob, on the other hand, traveled on to Succoth. There he built himself a house and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place was named Succoth (which means "shelters").

Jacob Moves to Shechem

18Later, having traveled all the way from Paddan-aram, Jacob arrived safely at the town of Shechem, in the land of Canaan. There he set up camp outside the town. 19Jacob bought the plot of land where he camped from the family of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for 100 pieces of silver.

20And there he built an altar and named it El-Elohe-Israel.

The Danger of Intermarriage (34:1-31)

Dinah is Defiled

34 One day Dinah, the daughter of Jacob and Leah, went to visit some of the young women who lived in the area. 2But when the local prince, Shechem son of Hamor the Hitite, saw Dinah, he seized her and raped her. 3But then he fell in love with her, and he tried to win her affection with tender words. 4He said to his father, Hamor, "Get me this young girl. I want to marry her."

5Soon Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter, Dinah. But since his sons were out in the fields herding his livestock, he said nothing until they returned. 6Hamor, Shechem's father, came to discuss the matter with Jacob. 7Meanwhile, Jacob's sons had come in from the field as soon as they heard what had happened. They were shocked and furious that their sister had been raped. Shechem had done a disgraceful thing against Jacob's family, something that should never be done.

Intermarriage with Shechem Negotiated

8Hamor tried to speak with Jacob and his sons. "My son Shechem is truly in love with
11Then Shechem himself spoke to Dinah’s father and brothers. “Please be kind to me, and let me marry her,” he begged. “I will give you whatever you ask. 12No matter what dowry or gift you demand, I will gladly pay it—just give me the girl as my wife.”

But since Shechem had defiled their sister, Dinah, Jacob’s sons responded deceitfully to Shechem and his father, Hamor. 14They said to them, “We couldn’t possibly allow this, because you’re not circumcised. It would be a disgrace for our sister to marry a man like you! 15But here is a solution. If every man among you will be circumcised like we are, 16then we will give you our daughters, and we’ll take your daughters for ourselves. We will live among you and become one people. 17But if you don’t agree to be circumcised, we will take her and be on our way.”

18Hamor and his son Shechem agreed to their proposal. 19Shechem wasted no time in acting on this request, for he wanted Jacob’s daughter desperately. Shechem was a highly respected member of his family, and he went with his father, Hamor, to present this proposal to the leaders at the town gate.

20“These men are our friends,” they said. “Let’s invite them to live here among us and trade freely. Look, the land is large enough to hold them. We can take their daughters as wives and let them marry ours. 21But they will consider staying here and becoming one people with us only if all of our men are circumcised, just as they are. 22But if we do this, all their livestock and possessions will eventually be ours. Come, let’s agree to their terms and let them settle here among us.”

Jacob’s Sons Destroy Shechem
24So all the men in the town council agreed with Hamor and Shechem, and every male in the town was circumcised. 25But three days later, when their wounds were still sore, two of Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, who were Dinah’s full brothers, took their swords and entered the town without opposition. Then they slaughtered every male there, 26including Hamor and his son Shechem. They killed them with their swords, then took Dinah from Shechem’s house and returned to their camp.

27Meanwhile, the rest of Jacob’s sons arrived. Finding the men slaughtered, they plundered the town because their sister had been defiled there. 28They seized all the flocks and herds and donkeys—everything they could lay their hands on, both inside the town and outside in the fields. 29They looted all their wealth and plundered their houses. They also took all their little children and wives and led them away as captives.

30Afterward Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have ruined me! You’ve made me stink among all the people of this land—among all the Canaanites and Perizzites. We are so few that they will join forces and crush us. I will be ruined, and my entire household will be wiped out!”

31“But why should we let him treat our sister like a prostitute?” they retorted angrily.

Jacob’s Return to Bethel (35:1-15)
35Then God said to Jacob, “Get ready and move to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother, Esau.”

Dinah’s brothers responded to the proposal without waiting for Jacob to respond, and they acted deceitfully. They may not have thought that Shechem and his people would ever agree to the rite of circumcision, but they knew what they would do if the Canaanites accepted (34:25).

The Canaanites accepted the stipulation and every male in the town was circumcised. This was not just to allow Shechem to marry Dinah, but to give them the opportunity to acquire everything that Jacob possessed (34:23).

When Simeon and Levi used circumcision to deceive and slaughter the Canaanites, they showed disdain for the sign of the covenant. Their slaughter of all the males and their plunder of the city was not justice, but brutal and excessive revenge. In their moral outrage and desire to right the wrong, they should have demanded compensation (see Exod 22:16-17; Deut 22:28-29). Instead, their passionate act of rage cost them their birthright blessing (49:5-7).

Jacob responded again out of fear of what would happen to him, but God caused the people of this land to fear him instead (35:5).

This chapter highlights God’s promises, Jacob’s vow, and the transition to Jacob’s sons’ carrying on the covenant. Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac all died, marking the end of an era and of the account of Isaac’s family (25:19–35:29). Idols were removed (35:1-4) and pure worship was established (35:6-7). During this transition, the faith had to be revitalized so that the covenant could be carried forward by Jacob’s sons.

Jacob returned to Bethel, about fifteen miles south of Shechem, to complete the vows he had made at Bethel (28:20-22).
So Jacob told everyone in his household, “Get rid of all your pagan idols, purify yourselves, and put on clean clothing. We are now going to Bethel, where I will build an altar to the God who answered my prayers when I was in distress. He has been with me wherever I have gone.”

So they gave Jacob all their pagan idols and earrings, and he buried them under the great tree near Shechem. As they set out, a terror from God spread over the people in all the towns of that area, so no one attacked Jacob’s family.

Eventually, Jacob and his household arrived at Luz (also called Bethel) in Canaan. Jacob built an altar there and named the place El-bethel (which means “God of Bethel”), because God had appeared to him there when he was fleeing from his brother, Esau.

Soon after this, Rebeckah’s old nurse, Deborah, died. She was buried beneath the oak tree in the valley below Bethel. Ever since, the tree has been called Allon-bacuth (which means “oak of weeping”).

Now that Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again at Bethel. God blessed him, saying, “Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel.” So God renamed him Israel.

Then God said, “I am El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty.’ Be fruitful and multiply. You will become a great nation, even many nations. Kings will be among your descendants! And I will give you the land I once gave to Abraham and Isaac. Yes, I will give it to you and your descendants after you.”

Then God went up from the place where he had spoken to Jacob.

Jacob set up a stone pillar to mark the place where God had spoken to him. Then he poured wine over it as an offering to God and anointed the pillar with olive oil. And Jacob named the place Bethel (which means “house of God”), because God had spoken to him there.

**Jacob Moves to Mamre (35:16-29)**

**Rachel Dies in Childbirth**

Leaving Bethel, Jacob and his clan moved on toward Ephrath. But Rachel went into labor while they were still some distance away. Her labor pains were intense. After a very hard delivery, the midwife finally explained, “Don’t be afraid—you have another son!” Rachel was about to die, but with her last breath she named the baby Benjamin (which means “son of my sorrow”). The baby’s father, however, called him Benjamin (which means “son of my right hand”). So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Jacob set up a stone monument over Rachel’s grave, and it can be seen there to this day.

**Reuben’s Transgression**

Then Jacob traveled on and camped beyond Migdal-eder. While he was living there, Reuben had intercourse with Bilhah, his father’s concubine, and Jacob soon heard about it.

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35:11-12 God’s reference to himself as God Almighty assured Jacob that his promise could and would be fulfilled. At Bethel, God had promised that Jacob would have descendants in the land (cp. 28:13-14); here he added that his descendants would include kings (see 17:6).

35:14-15 In fulfilling his vow (28:20-22), Jacob’s actions were almost identical to his actions in the earlier experience at Bethel (cp. 28:16-19).

35:20 It can be seen there to this day: This seems to be a later editorial comment by someone who was living in the land after the conquest and giving directions to the tomb (see Introduction to Genesis: “Composition,” p. 16).

35:21 Jacob: Hebrew Israel; also in 35:22a. The names “Jacob” and “Israel” are often interchanged throughout the Old Testament, referring sometimes to the individual patriarch and sometimes to the nation.

35:22 Reuben had intercourse with Bilhah, thus defiling his father’s marriage bed. Perhaps Reuben, as the oldest son, was trying to replace his father as head of the clan by a pagan procedure (cp. 2 Sam 16:15-22), but by this action he lost his birthright (see 49:3-4). *Jacob soon heard about it, but he again delayed his response (see 49:3-4, cp. 34:3).*
The Twelve Sons of Jacob

These are the names of the twelve sons of Jacob:

23 The sons of Leah were Reuben (Jacob’s oldest son), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.
24 The sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin.
25 The sons of Bilhah, Rachel’s servant, were Dan and Naphtali.
26 The sons of Zilpah, Leah’s servant, were Gad and Asher.

These are the names of the sons who were born to Jacob at Paddan-aram.

Jacob Returns to Isaac; Isaac’s Death

27 So Jacob returned to his father, Isaac, in Mamre, which is near Kiriath-arba (now called Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had both lived as foreigners. 28 Isaac lived for 180 years. 29 Then he breathed his last and died at a ripe old age, joining his ancestors in death. And his sons, Esau and Jacob, buried him.

10. THE ACCOUNT OF ESAU’S DESCENDANTS (36:1–37:1)

Esau’s Life

36 This is the account of the descendants of Esau (also known as Edom).

2 Esau married two young women from Canaan: Adah, the daughter of Elon the Hittite; and Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite. 3 He also married his cousin Basemath, who was the daughter of Ishmael and the

Altars (35:1-15)

The first recorded altar was built by Noah (8:20-21), though Cain and Abel gave the first offerings (4:3-4). The patriarchs built numerous altars (see 8:20-21; 12:7-8; 13:4, 18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 14-15). These altars designated sacred sites of divine revelation and personal land claims in the Promised Land, both north (in Shechem) and south (in Beersheba). Altars were made of stone, earth, brick, or metal and wood. Their table-like form allowed smoke from the fire burning on the altar to rise unhindered. Intended as memorials or places for sacrifice, an altar was the most common image of worship in the OT and in the wider ancient world. The typical altar was on a raised platform accessed by a ramp or stairway; this elevated the sacrificial worship toward heaven. The four horns on the corners of the altar marked off the sacred space of meeting between divine and human realms. Through sacrifice and burning, the offering was transferred from the visible to the invisible world. Altars were both religious monuments and places of refuge where fugitives could find asylum (see Exod 21:14).

Jesus unites the various aspects of the altar imagery in himself as high priest, sacrificial lamb, and altar (see Heb 4:14-15; 7:24, 27; 9:14, 26; 10:10; 13:10, 12). Jesus anticipated his own sacrifice in his reference to the blood of martyrs (see Matt 23:35; Luke 11:51). The enthroned Lamb in Revelation removes the need for temple and altar (Rev 21:22). The cross is the final altar; Jesus’ death is the new covenant memorial and his body is the place of sanctuary (Heb 13:10).

Altars of the Patriarchs (35:1-15). Several of the patriarchs built altars, including Noah (8:20), Abraham (12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9), Isaac (26:25), and Jacob (33:20; 35:7). These altars were probably made of piles of uncut stone, as God later instructed Israel (Exod 20:25; Deut 27:5-6; cp. Josh 8:30-31).

35:23-26 The twelve sons became leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Their names are the firstfruits of the nation.
35:27-29 Esau and Jacob (listed here in ordinary birth order) came together—probably for the first time since they had reconciled (33:16-17)—to bury Isaac in Hebron (see 13:18; 23:1-2, 17-19).
36:1-43 The book turns to the accounts of Isaac’s sons, concluding the unchosen line of Esau (ch 36) before proceeding with the chosen line of Jacob (ch 37).
36:1-8 The account of Esau stresses two points. First, Esau’s sons were born . . . in the land of Canaan (36:5) before he moved to Seir (36:8). Jacob’s children, by contrast, were almost all born outside the land but then moved into it. God was giving the land to Jacob and his descendants and so made room for them by providing for Esau in a different place. Second, Esau’s other name was Edom. Israel often struggled with the Edomites (see 1 Sam 21:7; 22:9-22; Obad 1:1-21; see also “Herod the Great” at Matt 2:1-20, p. 1578).
36:2-3 Esau’s three wives—Adah, Oholibamah, and Basemath—are listed. Two of these wives’ names are different from those listed earlier (26:34; 28:9). Perhaps the others died, or Esau favored these three among a total of six, or these were just different names for the same three. There is not enough information to decide.
36:2 Oholibamah was a great-granddaughter of Seir the Horite, whose descendants lived in Edom when Esau went to live there (36:20, 25).
sister of Nebaioth. 4Adah gave birth to a son named Eliphaz for Esau. Basemath gave birth to a son named Reuel. 5Oholibamah gave birth to sons named Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. All these sons were born to Esau in the land of Canaan.

6Esau took his wives, his children, and his entire household, along with his livestock and cattle—all the wealth he had acquired in the land of Canaan—and moved away from his brother, Jacob. 7There was not enough land to support them both because of all the livestock and possessions they had acquired. 8So Esau (also known as Edom) settled in the hill country of Seir.

**Esau’s Descendants**

9This is the account of Esau’s descendants, the Edomites, who lived 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 descendants of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz.

12Timna, the concubine of Esau’s son Eliphaz, gave birth to a son named Amalek. These are the descendants of Esau’s wife Adah.

13The descendants of Reuel were Nahath, Zerah, Shamhah, and Mizzah. These are the descendants of Esau’s wife Basemath.

14Esau also had sons through Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon. Their names were Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

15These are the descendants of Esau who became the leaders of various clans:

The descendants of Esau’s oldest son, Eliphaz, became the leaders of the clans of Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, Korah, Gatam, and Amalek. These are the clan leaders in the land of Edom who descended from Eliphaz. All these were descendants of Esau’s wife Adah.

17The descendants of Esau’s son Reuel became the leaders of the clans of Nahath, Zerah, Shamhah, and Mizzah. These are the clan leaders in the land of Edom who descended from Reuel. All these were descendants of Esau’s wife Basemath.

18The descendants of Esau and his wife Oholibamah became the leaders of the clans of Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These are the clan leaders who descended from Esau’s wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah.

19These are the clans descended from Esau (also known as Edom), identified by their clan leaders.

**Original Peoples of Edom**

20These are the names of the tribes that descended from Seir the Horite. They lived in the land of Edom: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. These were the Horite clan leaders, the descendants of Seir, who lived in the land of Edom.

22The descendants of Lotan were Hori and Hemam. Lotan’s sister was named Timna.

23The descendants of Shobal were Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam.

24The descendants of Zibeon were Aiah and Anah. (This is the Anah who discovered the hot springs in the wilderness while he was grazing his father’s donkeys.)

25The descendants of Anah were his son, Dishon, and his daughter, Oholibamah.

26The descendants of Dishon were Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Keran.

27The descendants of Ezer were Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.

28The descendants of Dishan were Uz and Aran.

29So these were the leaders of the Horite clans: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. The Horite clans are named after their clan leaders, who lived in the land of Seir.

**Rulers of Edom**

31These are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before any king ruled over the Israelites:
37:1

Gen 17:8; 28:4

37:2

Gen 35:22-26; 41:46

37:3

Gen 37:23, 32; 44:20

37:4

Gen 27:41

37:5

Gen 28:12

Num 12:6

Dan 2:1

Bela son of Beor, who ruled in Edom from his city of Dinhabah.

33 When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah from Bozrah became king in his place.

34 When Jobab died, Husham from the land of the Temanites became king in his place.

35 When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad became king in his place and ruled from the city of Avith. He was the one who defeated the Midianites in the land of Moab.

36 When Hadad died, Samlah from the city of Maresekah became king in his place.

37 When Samlah died, Shaul from the city of Rehbunj-on-the-River became king in his place.

38 When Shaul died, Baal-hanan son of Acbor became king in his place.

39 When Baal-hanan son of Acbor died, Hadad became king in his place and ruled from the city of Pau. His wife was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred and granddaughter of Me-zahab.

40 These are the names of the leaders of the clans descended from Esau, who lived in the places named for them: Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, Kerenaz, Teman, Mibzar, Magdiel, and Iram. These are the leaders of the clans of Edom, listed according to their settlements in the land they occupied. They all descended from Esau, the ancestor of the Edomites.

Recapitulation and Contrast with Jacob

37 So Jacob settled again in the land of Canaan, where his father had lived as a foreigner.

11. THE ACCOUNT OF JACOB’S DESCENDANTS (37:2–50:26)

Joseph’s Dreams of Prominence (37:2–11)

2 This is the account of Jacob and his family. When Joseph was seventeen years old, he often tended his father’s flocks. He worked for his half brothers, the sons of his father’s wives Bilhah and Zilpah. But Joseph reported to his father some of the bad things his brothers were doing.

3 Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe. But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn’t say a kind word to him.

5 One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. “Listen to this dream,” he

probably inserted into the text during Israel’s monarchy (see note on 35:20).

36:39 Hadad: As in some Hebrew manuscripts, Samaritan Pentateuch, and Syriac version (see also 1 Chr 1:50); most Hebrew manuscripts read Hadar.

36:40-43 These chiefs descended from Esau, who was a great and powerful overlord. As father of the Edomites, he ruled over clans and regions, with eleven chiefs descended from him. By separating from Jacob, Esau was beginning to shake Jacob’s yoke from his neck (27:39-40).

37:1 In ch 36, Esau was well on his way to power and prosperity; by contrast, Jacob, still waiting for the promise, settled in the land as a foreigner, like his father. He was still a temporary resident with a single family. Worldly greatness often comes more swiftly than spiritual greatness. Waiting for the promised spiritual blessing while others prosper is a test of patience, faith, and perseverance.

37:2–50:26 The story of Joseph and his brothers comprises a separate unit in Genesis, distinct in tone and emphasis from the preceding material. It traces one continuous series of episodes with Joseph at their center. * Cycles of repeated motifs structure the entire Joseph account. The themes are closely related to those found in wisdom books such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Daniel. Wisdom literature assures the faithful that God brings good out of evil and joy out of pain—if not in this life, then certainly in the life to come. Though the wicked may prosper for a time, the righteous should hold fast to their integrity because a higher, more enduring principle of life is realized through obedience to God. Everyone who aspires to leadership in God’s plan should observe how wisdom led to Joseph’s success. Christ Jesus embodied the life of wisdom portrayed here as no one else could, for he is the wisdom of God. * Judah is also an important character in the story. He began as irresponsible and mean-spirited as his brothers; but he truly repented, put his life on the line to ransom a child for his father, and received a very important inheritance.

37:2 The account of Jacob and his family tells of Joseph and his brothers. Jacob is still prominent, but the focus is on Joseph, who is introduced as an obedient seventeen-year-old son. * Joseph reported . . . the bad things his brothers were doing: Bringing a bad report has never been popular, but it was the right thing to do and shows that Joseph was faithful from the beginning. As the story progresses, we see more of his brothers’ wickedness displayed until, like Cain, they tried to eliminate the brother who pleased God.

37:3 Jacob: Hebrew Israel; also in 37:13. See note on 35:21. * Jacob loved Joseph more because Joseph had been born to him in his old age and because he was the first son of his favorite wife, Rachel. * A beautiful robe (traditionally rendered a coat of many colors; the exact meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain): Jacob gave Joseph this robe to demonstrate that he intended to grant him the largest portion of the inheritance.

37:4 Jacob’s favoritism toward Joseph inflamed his other sons’ hatred of their brother. Just as Isaac’s and Rebekah’s favoritism had separated their family, Jacob’s favoritism would separate him from his son Joseph.

37:5-11 God confirmed his choice of this faithful son as the eventual leader of the whole family through two symbolic dreams. This is the first of three dream sequences in chs 37–50 (see 40:1–41:36; cp. 15:13; 20:3; 28:12-15; 31:24). Dreams carried weight as a form of divine communication, especially if the dream revelation was given twice. Everyone would have taken Joseph’s dreams seriously.
said, “We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!”

8 His brothers responded, “So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them.

9 Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. “Listen, I have had another dream,” he said. “The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!”

10 This time he told the dream to his father as well as to his brothers, but his father scolded him. “What kind of dream is that?” he asked. “Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?” 11 But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father wondered what the dreams meant.

**Joseph Sold into Slavery in Egypt (37:12-36)**

12 Soon after this, Joseph’s brothers went to pasture their father’s flocks at Shechem. 13 When they had been gone for some time, Jacob said to Joseph, “Your brothers are pasturing the sheep at Shechem. Get ready, and I will send you to them.”

“I’m ready to go,” Joseph replied. 14 “Go and see how your brothers and the flocks are getting along,” Jacob said. “Then come back and bring me a report.” So Jacob sent him on his way, and Joseph traveled to Shechem from their home in the valley of Hebron.

15 When he arrived there, a man from the area noticed him wandering around the countryside. “What are you looking for?” he asked.

16 “I’m looking for my brothers,” Joseph replied. “Do you know where they are pasturing their sheep?”

17 “Yes,” the man told him. “They have moved on from here, but I heard them say, ‘Let’s go on to Dothan.’” So Joseph followed his brothers to Dothan and found them there.

18 When Joseph’s brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. 19 “Here comes the dreamer!” they said. 20 “Come on, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, ‘A wild animal has eaten him.’ Then we’ll see what becomes of his dreams!”

21 But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph’s rescue. “Let’s not kill him,” he said. 22 “Why should we shed any blood? Let’s just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he’ll die without our laying a hand on him.” Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father.

23 So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. 24 Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. 25 Then,
just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt.

26 Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain by killing our brother? We’d have to cover up the crime. 27 Instead of hurting him, let’s sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!” And his brothers agreed.

28 So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph’s brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt.

29 Some time later, Reuben returned to get Joseph out of the cistern. When he discovered that Joseph was missing, he tore his clothes in grief. 30 Then he went back to his brothers and lamented, “The boy is gone! What will I do now?”

31 Then the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph’s robe in its blood. 32 They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: “Look at what we found. Doesn’t this robe belong to your son?”

33 Their father recognized it immediately. “Yes,” he said, “it is my son’s robe. A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!” 34 Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time.

35 His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “I will go to my grave mourning for my son,” he would say, and then he would weep.

36 Meanwhile, the Midianite traders arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard.

Judah, Tamar, and the Birth of Judah’s Offspring (38:1-30)

38 About this time, Judah left home and moved to Adullam, where he stayed with a man named Hirah. 2 There he saw a Canaanite woman, the daughter of Shua, and he married her. When he slept with her, 3 she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and he named the boy Er. 4 Then she became pregnant again and gave birth to another son, and she named him Onan. 5 And when she gave birth to a third son, she named him Shelah. At the time of Shelah’s birth, they were living at Kezib.

6 In the course of time, Judah arranged for his firstborn son, Er, to marry a young woman named Tamar. 7 But Er was a wicked man in the Lord’s sight, so the Lord took his life. 8 Then Judah said to Er’s brother Onan, “Go and marry Tamar, as our law requires of the brother of a man who has died. You must produce an heir for your brother.”

37:26 Judah began to exercise leadership that he would continue to develop as events unfolded (see 43:8-10). • cover up the crime: Literally cover his blood.

37:28 the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders (literally the Midianite traders): Ishmaelites were descendants of Abraham through Hagar (16:5), while Midianites were descendants of Abraham through Keturah (25:1-2). The term Ishmaelite may have described bedouin tribes generally. The Midianites might also have been traveling with a separate caravan of Ishmaelite traders (37:27).

• Twenty pieces: Hebrew 20 shekels, about 8 ounces or 228 grams in weight. • Kidnapping (see 40:15) was a capital offense (see Exod 21:16).

37:29-30 When Reuben returned, he tore his clothes in grief. His attempt to restore his relationship with his father by saving Joseph had gone awry.

37:31-35 The old family propensity for deception seized the brothers’ imagination. Jacob had killed a young goat to deceive Isaac (27:5-17); now Jacob’s sons deceived him with a goat (see note on 30:34-36).

37:32 your son: In their cold hatred, the brothers did not refer to Joseph by name or acknowledge him as their brother (see 21:10).

37:33 recognized: Cp. 27:23.

37:34-35 Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap: These were signs of great distress and mourning (see 44:13; Job 1:20; 16:15). Jacob was devastated and refused to be comforted. The treachery thus affected everyone in his family. • go to my grave: Hebrew go down to Sheol.

37:36 the Midianite traders: As in the Greek version; Hebrew reads the Medanites. The relationship between the Midianites and Medanites is unclear; cp. 37:28. See also 25:2. • sold Joseph to Potiphar: Joseph found himself in a place of service that seemed congruent with his rise to authority, yet he still faced more testing.

38:1-30 The story of Judah and Tamar is a carefully placed interlude; it reports what was happening in the family of Judah, who would later rise to prominence, and it shows the beginnings of assimilation with the people of the land to help explain why God sent the family to Egypt (chs 39–47). The Egyptians were strict separatists (43:32); the Israelites would retain their unique identity better in Egypt than in Canaan.

38:7 That Er was a wicked man is not surprising, since his mother was a Canaanite and his father a wayward Israelite.

38:8 as our law requires: . . . You must produce an heir for your brother: The custom that informs this episode is the law for levirate marriage (Latin levir, “husband’s brother”). By this custom, which was later incorporated into God’s law for Israel (Deut 25:5-10), if a man died childless, his brother or nearest relative would marry his widow to produce a child who would carry on the family name of the deceased and inherit his property. Apparently, the near kinsman had a right to refuse, but he would be disgraced in the family for refusing to perpetuate his brother’s name.
But Onan was not willing to have a child who would not be his own heir. So whenever he had intercourse with his brother’s wife, he spilled the semen on the ground. This prevented her from having a child who would belong to his brother. 18 But the Lord considered it evil for Onan to deny a child to his dead brother. So the Lord took Onan’s life, too.

11Then Judah said to Tamar, his daughter-in-law, “Go back to your parents’ home and remain a widow until my son Shelah is old enough to marry you.” (But Judah didn’t really intend to do this because he was afraid Shelah would also die, like his two brothers.) So Tamar went back to live in her father’s home.

12Some years later Judah’s wife died. After the time of mourning was over, Judah and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went up to Timnah to supervise the shearing of his sheep. 13Someone told Tamar, “Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.”

14Tamar was aware that Shelah had grown up, but no arrangements had been made for her to come and marry him. So she changed out of her widow’s clothing and covered herself with a veil to disguise herself. Then she sat beside the road at the entrance to the village of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. 15Judah noticed her and thought she was a prostitute, since she had covered her face. So he stopped and propositioned her. “Let me have sex with you,” he said, not realizing that she was his own daughter-in-law.

“How much will you pay to have sex with me?” Tamar asked.

17“I’ll send you a young goat from my flock,” Judah promised.

“But what will you give me to guarantee that you will send the goat?” she asked.

18“What kind of guarantee do you want?” he replied.

She answered, “Leave me your identification seal and its cord and the walking stick you are carrying.” So Judah gave them to her. Then he had intercourse with her, and she became pregnant. 19Afterward she went back home, took off her veil, and put on her widow’s clothing as usual.

20Later Judah asked his friend Hirah the Adullamite to take the young goat to the woman and to pick up the things he had given her as his guarantee. But Hirah couldn’t find her. 21So he asked the men who lived there, “Where can I find the shrine prostitute who was sitting beside the road at the entrance to Enaim?”

“We’ve never had a shrine prostitute here,” they replied.

22So Hirah returned to Judah and told him, “I couldn’t find her anywhere, and the men of the village claim they’ve never had a shrine prostitute there.”

23“Then let her keep the things I gave her,” Judah said. “I sent the young goat as we agreed, but you couldn’t find her. We’d be the laughingstock of the village if we went back again to look for her.”

24About three months later, Judah was told, “Tamar, your daughter-in-law, has acted like a prostitute. And now, because of this, she’s pregnant.”

“Bring her out, and let her be burned!” Judah demanded.

25But as they were taking her out to kill her, she sent this message to her father-in-law: “The man who owns these things made me pregnant. Look closely. Whose seal and cord and walking stick are these?”

26Judah recognized them immediately and said, “She is more righteous than I am, because I didn’t arrange for her to marry

38:9-10 Onan married Tamar, but was not willing to provide an heir for his brother. He would have sex with Tamar but not fulfill his responsibility to his dead brother (38:8).

38:11 Judah is now presented as the model for his sons’ behavior—he, too, was unfaithful to his levirate responsibility to Tamar as next kinsman (see note on 38:8). Judah and his sons were far too Canaanite in their ways (see note on 38:27-30; contrast Boaz, Ruth 3-4).

38:12-13 Without a marriage, the family’s future was in jeopardy.

* Judah’s wife died: This made Judah available to fulfill the responsibility of providing an heir.

38:14-19 Tamar realized that she would have to take matters into her own hands if the family were to have a future. Tamar acted in keeping with the levirate custom (see note on 38:8) out of loyalty to her deceased husband. She had a legal right to an heir by Judah’s son or by Judah, so she lured her father-in-law into having sex with her. Jacob’s family was deceived again, this time by a Canaanite daughter-in-law.

38:17 It would be normal for Tamar to ask for a pledge if the man did not have the money to pay. A woman in such a position would not trust anyone to send the money.

38:18 Identification seal: A stone or metal cylinder was engraved with distinctive designs and was usually worn around the neck on a cord; when rolled onto clay or wax, it left a distinct impression.

38:20-23 Judah had gone in to Tamar as a regular prostitute (Hebrew zonah, 38:15), whereas Hirah was mistakenly looking for a shrine prostitute (Hebrew qedeshah), of which there were none.

38:24-26 Judah played the hypocrite when he condemned Tamar to death for adultery. When she produced the seal and cord and walking stick that identified him as the father, he withdrew the condemnation.

38:26 She is more righteous than I am: Judah acknowledged that he had shirked his responsibility to provide an
my son Shelah.” And Judah never slept with Tamar again.

27 When the time came for Tamar to give birth, it was discovered that she was carrying twins. 28 While she was in labor, one of the babies reached out his hand. The midwife grabbed it and tied a scarlet string around the child’s wrist, announcing, “This one came out first.” 29 But then he pulled back his hand, and out came his brother! “What!” the midwife exclaimed. “How did you break out first?” So he was named Perez. 30 Then the baby with the scarlet string on his wrist was born, and he was named Zerah.

Joseph’s Rise to Power in Egypt (39:1–41:57)

39 When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar noticed this and realized that the Lord was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. 1 This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned. 2 From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master’s household and property, the Lord began to bless Potiphar’s household for Joseph’s sake. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished. 3 So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn’t worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat!

Potiphar’s Wife
Joseph was a very handsome and well-built young man, 7 and Potiphar’s wife soon began to look at him lustfully. “Come and sleep with me,” she demanded.

8 But Joseph refused. “Look,” he told her, “my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. 9 No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God.”

10 She kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her, and he kept out of her way as much as possible. 11 One day, however, no one else was around when he went in to do his work. 12 She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, “Come on, sleep with me!” Joseph tore himself away, but he left his cloak in her hand as he ran from the house.

13 When she saw that she was holding his cloak and he had fled, 14 she called out to her servants. Soon all the men came running. “Look!” she said. “My husband has brought this Hebrew slave here to make fools of us! He came into my room to rape me, but I screamed. 15 When he heard me scream, he ran outside and got away, but he left his cloak behind with me.”

16 She kept the cloak with her until her husband came home. 17 Then she told him her story. “That Hebrew slave you’ve brought into our house tried to come in and fool around with me,” she said. 18 But when I screamed, he ran outside, leaving his cloak with me!”

heir. It was sinful for Judah to go to a prostitute, but Tamar had a legal right to be the mother of Judah’s child and had acted on that right. In the book of Ruth, the elders analogously blessed the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, praying that God would make Ruth like Tamar (Ruth 4:12; cp. Matt 1:3, 5).

38:27-30 Judah’s line continued because of Tamar. The twins replaced Judah’s two slain sons (38:7, 10); their birth was similar to the birth of Jacob and Esau (25:21-26) in that the “red” one was born first, but the other son pushed past him in later life. Jacob’s gaining the right to rule over his older brother (27:29) seemed to be revived in Judah’s line. The line was carried on through Perez and not through the elder son Shelah, whom he had gone to such lengths to protect (38:11; see 1 Chr 4:21), nor through the elder twin Zerah (see Ruth 4:13-22; Matt 1:3).

38:29-30 Perez means “breaking out.” He pushed past his brother, just as Joseph would soon do in relation to his brothers (chs 39–47). • Zerah means “scarlet” or “brightness.”

39:1–47:31 Joseph was a slave, alienated from his brothers and separated from his father; he ended as Pharaoh’s viceroy. Through the trips to Egypt, the covenant family went from the brink of apostasy, divided by jealousy and deception, to being reconciled and united by Judah’s intercession and Joseph’s forgiveness. • God is mentioned for the first time (apart from 38:7-10) since Jacob built his altar in Bethel (35:1-15); his covenant name, “the Lord,” is used for the first time since Jacob left Laban (31:49).

39:1-23 Joseph’s integrity in Potiphar’s service contrasts with Judah’s moral failure (ch 38). God was with Joseph (39:2-3, 21, 23) and enabled him to prosper and be a blessing (see notes on 12:1-9; 28:16-22) despite his slavery and imprisonment.

39:5 God began to bless Egypt through Joseph (see 22:18).

39:6-10 One of the major motifs of wisdom literature (see note on 37:2–50:26) is to warn young people that immorality will lead them to disaster (cp. Prov 5–7). Joseph was able to resist temptation because he had godly wisdom—he was guided by the fear of the Lord (Prov 1:7; 9:10).

39:14 Though Potiphar’s wife was addressing slaves, she appealed to them as fellow Egyptians (us) to entice them as witnesses against the despised Hebrew (see 43:32) who had won Potiphar’s trust.
Joseph Put in Prison

19 Potiphar was furious when he heard his wife's story about how Joseph had treated her. 20 So he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king's prisoners were held, and there he remained. 21 But the Lord was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love. And the Lord made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden.

22 Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison.

23 The warden had no more worries, because Joseph took care of everything. The Lord was with him and caused everything he did to succeed.

Joseph Interprets Two Prisoners’ Dreams

Some time later, Pharaoh’s chief cup-bearer and chief baker offended their royal master. 2 Pharaoh became angry with these two officials, 3 and he put them in the prison where Joseph was, in the palace of the captain of the guard. 4 They remained in prison for quite some time, and the captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, who looked after them.

While they were in prison, Pharaoh’s cup-bearer and baker each had a dream one night, and each dream had its own meaning. 6 When Joseph saw them the next morning, he noticed that they both looked upset. 7 “Why do you look so worried today?” he asked them.

8 And they replied, “We both had dreams last night, but no one can tell us what they mean.”

“Interpreting dreams is God’s business,” Joseph replied. “Go ahead and tell me your dreams.”

9 So the chief cup-bearer told Joseph his dream first. “In my dream,” he said, “I saw a grapevine in front of me. 10 The vine had three branches that began to bud and bloss-om, and soon it produced clusters of ripe grapes. 11 I was holding Pharaoh’s wine cup in my hand, so I took a cluster of grapes and squeezed the juice into the cup. Then I placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.”

12 “This is what the dream means,” Joseph said. “The three branches represent three days. 13 Within three days Pharaoh will lift you up and restore you to your position as his chief cup-bearer. 14 And please remember me and do me a favor when things go well for you. Mention me to Pharaoh, so he might let me out of this place. 15 For I was kidnapped from my homeland, the land of the Hebrews, and now I’m here in prison, but I did nothing to deserve it.”

16 When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given the first dream such a positive interpretation, he said to Joseph, “I had a dream, too. In my dream there were three baskets of white pastries stacked on my head. 17 The top basket contained all kinds of pastries for Pharaoh, but the birds came and ate them from the basket on my head.”

18 “This is what the dream means,” Joseph told him. “The three baskets also represent three days. 19 Three days from now Pharaoh will lift you up and impale your body on a pole. Then birds will come and peck away at your flesh.”

20 Pharaoh’s birthday came three days later, and he prepared a banquet for all his officials and staff. He summoned his chief cup-bearer and chief baker to join the other officials. 21 He then restored the chief cup-bearer to his former position, so he could again hand Pharaoh his cup. 22 But Pharaoh impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had predicted when he interpreted his dream.

These dreams were not trivial; they were ominous warnings from God about what everyone was going to face. These two dreams prepared for Pharaoh’s two dreams, which revealed the periods of life and death that the nation would soon experience.

Because he knew that the chief cup-bearer was going back into Pharaoh’s personal service, Joseph saw an opportunity to seek his own release from prison.

The interpretations Joseph gave the prisoners proved true. The death of the chief baker speaks of the harsh realities of life in ancient Egypt, with a king whose word was his land’s highest law. *He summoned:* Literally He lifted up the head of.
Pharaoh's chief cup-bearer, however, forgot all about Joseph, never giving him another thought.

**Pharaoh's Dreams**

Two full years later, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing on the bank of the Nile River. In his dream he saw seven fat, healthy cows come up out of the river and begin grazing in the marsh grass. Then he saw seven more cows come up behind them from the Nile, but these were scrawny and thin. These cows stood beside the fat cows on the riverbank. Then the scrawny, thin cows ate the seven healthy, fat cows! At this point in the dream, Pharaoh woke up.

But he fell asleep again and had a second dream. This time he saw seven heads of grain, plump and beautiful, growing on a single stalk. Then seven more heads of grain appeared, but these were shriveled.

Pharaoh's Dreams

**40:23** The cup-bearer... forgot all about Joseph, but God did not forget him. Joseph's faith was about to be rewarded (ch 41).

**41:5-6** God had used two dreams to identify Joseph as a leader among his brothers (37:5-11). He used two dreams to test Joseph's faith in prison (40:5-14). Now he would use two dreams to elevate Joseph from prison to preeminence. Joseph had repeatedly proven faithful in small matters; now he would be put in charge of great things.

**41:1-4** Pharaoh's first dream was about cows. Cows liked to stand half-submerged among the reeds in the Nile River to take refuge from the heat and flies. They would come out of the water to find pasture. The second cows disturbed Pharaoh because they were scrawny yet able to swallow the fat cows.

**41:5-7** Pharaoh's second dream carried a similar message. Seven plump heads of grain on a single stalk were swallo...
and withered by the east wind. And these thin heads swallowed up the seven plump, well-formed heads! Then Pharaoh woke up again and realized it was a dream.

8The next morning Pharaoh was very disturbed by the dreams. So he called for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. When Pharaoh told them his dreams, not one of them could tell him what they meant.

9Finally, the king’s chief cup-bearer spoke up. “Today I have been reminded of my failure,” he told Pharaoh. 10Some time ago, you were angry with the chief baker and me, and you imprisoned us in the palace of the captain of the guard. 11One night the chief baker and I each had a dream, and each dream had its own meaning. 12There was a young Hebrew man with us in the prison who was a slave of the captain of the guard. 13And everything happened just as he had predicted. I was restored to my position as cup-bearer, and the chief baker was executed and impaled on a pole.”

Joseph’s Interpretation and Counsel

14Pharaoh sent for Joseph at once, and he was quickly brought from the prison. After he shaved and changed his clothes, he went in and stood before Pharaoh. 15Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream last night, and no one here can tell me what it means. But I have heard that when you hear about a dream you can interpret it.”

16“It is beyond my power to do this,” Joseph replied. “But God can tell you what it means and set you at ease.” 17So Pharaoh told Joseph his dream. “In my dream,” he said, “I was standing on the bank of the Nile River, and I saw seven fat, healthy cows come up out of the river and begin grazing in the marsh grass. 18But then I saw seven sick-looking cows, scrawny and thin, come up after them. I’ve never seen such sorry-looking animals in all the land of Egypt. 19These thin, scrawny cows ate the seven fat cows. 20But afterward you wouldn’t have known it, for they were still as thin and scrawny as before! Then I woke up.

21”Then I fell asleep again, and I had another dream. This time I saw seven heads of grain, full and beautiful, growing on a single stalk. 22Then seven more heads of grain appeared, but these were blighted, shriveled, and withered by the east wind. 23And the shriveled heads swallowed the seven healthy heads. I told these dreams to the magicians, but no one could tell me what they mean.”

24Joseph responded, “Both of Pharaoh’s dreams mean the same thing. God is telling Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do. 25The seven healthy cows and the seven healthy heads of grain both represent seven years of prosperity. 26The seven thin, scrawny cows that came up later and the seven thin heads of grain, withered by the east wind, represent seven years of famine.

27“This will happen just as I have described it, for God has revealed to Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do. 28The next seven years will be a period of great prosperity throughout the land of Egypt. 29But afterward there will be seven years of famine so great that all the prosperity will be forgotten in Egypt. Famine will destroy the land. 30This famine will be so severe that even the memory of the good years will be erased. 31As for having two similar dreams, it means that these events have been decreed by God, and he will soon make them happen.

32Therefore, Pharaoh should find an intelligent and wise man and put him in charge of the entire land of Egypt. 33Then
Pharaoh should appoint supervisors over the land and let them collect one-fifth of all the crops during the seven good years. Have them gather all the food produced in the good years that are just ahead and bring it to Pharaoh's storehouses. Store it away, and guard it so there will be food in the cities. That way there will be enough to eat when the seven years of famine come to the land of Egypt. Otherwise this famine will destroy the land.

Pharaoh Promotes Joseph to Power
Joseph's suggestions were well received by Pharaoh and his officials. So Pharaoh asked his officials, "Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are. You will be in charge of my court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours."

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the entire land of Egypt."

Then Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand and placed it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in fine linen clothing and hung a gold chain around his neck. Then he had Joseph ride in the chariot reserved for his second-in-command. And wherever Joseph went, the command was shouted, "Kneel down!" So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all Egypt. And Pharaoh said to him, "I am Pharaoh, but no one will lift a hand or foot in the entire land of Egypt except you."

Then Pharaoh gave Joseph a new Egyptian name, Zaphenath-paneah. He also gave him a wife, whose name was Asenath. She was the daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On. So Joseph took charge of the entire land of Egypt. He was thirty years old when he began serving in the court of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. And when Joseph left Pharaoh's presence, he inspected the entire land of Egypt.

God Provides through Joseph and for Joseph
As predicted, for seven years the land produced bumper crops. During those years, Joseph gathered all the crops grown in Egypt and stored the grain from the surrounding fields in the cities. He piled up huge amounts of grain like sand on the seashore. Finally, he stopped keeping records because there was too much to measure.

During this time, before the first of the famine years, two sons were born to Joseph and his wife, Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On. Joseph named his older son Manasseh, for he said, "God has made me forget all my troubles and everyone in my father’s family." Joseph named his second son Ephraim, for he said, "God has made me fruitful in this land of my grief."

The Beginning of the Famine
At last the seven years of bumper crops throughout the land of Egypt came to an end. Then the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had predicted. The famine also struck all the surrounding countries, but throughout Egypt there was plenty of food. Eventually, however, the famine spread throughout the land of Egypt as well. And when the people cried out to Pharaoh for food, he told them, "Go to Joseph, and do whatever he tells you." So with severe famine everywhere, Joseph opened up...
the storehouses and distributed grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout the land of Egypt. And people from all around came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph because the famine was severe throughout the world.

Israel Moves to Egypt (42:1—47:31)  
Joseph's Brothers Go to Egypt

42 When Jacob heard that grain was available in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why are you standing around looking at one another? I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there, and buy enough grain to keep us alive. Otherwise we'll die."

So Joseph's ten older brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain. But Jacob wouldn't let Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin, go with them, for fear some harm might come to him. So Jacob's sons arrived in Egypt along with others to buy food, for the famine was in Canaan as well.

Since Joseph was governor of all Egypt and in charge of selling grain to all the people, it was to him that his brothers came. When they arrived, they bowed before him with their faces to the ground. Joseph recognized his brothers instantly, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where are you from?" he demanded.

"From the land of Canaan," they replied. "We have come to buy food."

Joseph Accuses His Brothers to Have Benjamin Brought

Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they didn't recognize him. And he remembered the dreams he'd had about them many years before. He said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become."

No, my lord!" they exclaimed. "Your servants have simply come to buy food. We are all brothers—members of the same family. We are honest men, sir! We are not spies!"

"Yes, you are!" Joseph insisted. "You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become."

Sir," they said, "there are actually twelve of us. We, your servants, are all brothers, sons of a man living in the land of Canaan. Our youngest brother is back there with our father right now, and one of our brothers is no longer with us."

But Joseph insisted, "As I said, you are spies! This is how I will test your story. I swear by the life of Pharaoh that you will never leave Egypt unless your youngest brother comes here! One of you must go and get your brother. I'll keep the rest of you here in prison. Then we'll find out whether or not your story is true. By the life of Pharaoh, if it turns out that you don't have a younger brother, then I'll know you are spies."

So Joseph put them all in prison for three days. On the third day Joseph said to them, "I am a God-fearing man. If you do as I say, you will live. If you really are honest men, choose one of your brothers to remain in prison. The rest of you may go home with grain for your starving families. But you must bring your youngest brother back to me. This will prove that you are telling the truth, and you will not die." To this they agreed.

Speaking among themselves, they said, "Clearly we are being punished because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his anguish when he pleaded for his life, but we wouldn't listen. That's why we're in this trouble."

" Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy?" Reuben asked. "But you wouldn't...

42:1—47:31 God used the famine to bring Israel to Egypt under Joseph's rule, thus fulfilling two prophecies (15:13; 37:7-11).

42:1—44:34 Joseph did several unusual things to his brothers when they came looking for grain. The last time Joseph had been with them, they were filled with jealousy, hatred, and anger; they attempted to destroy their brother, and they deceived their father. Joseph put them through various tests, similar to the trying situations they had put him through, to see if they had changed.

42:4 Jacob may have believed that Benjamin would not be safe with his brothers.

42:5 Jacob’s: Hebrew Israel’s. See note on 35:21.

42:6-7 Joseph’s first dream (37:5-11) was partially fulfilled when his brothers bowed down to him without recognizing him (see also 43:26; 44:14). It was totally fulfilled in 50:18. Joseph recognized his brothers immediately, but he could not reveal himself because he did not yet trust them to be the honest men they claimed to be (42:10).

42:8 they didn’t recognize him: Joseph was a grown man, not a boy. He was not wearing a beard, was dressed in Egyptian clothes, and was in an unexpected position, speaking to them through an interpreter (42:23).

42:9 You are spies! The brothers had considered Joseph’s spy for their father and had treated him roughly (37:2, 14, 18-28). Joseph was putting them in a similar situation to see how they would respond.

42:11 Joseph knew that they had not always been the honest men they claimed to be.

42:15-17 Joseph put the brothers in jail for three days to see if they had a conscience functioning about what they had done (42:21-23). The brothers had similarly thrown Joseph into a cistern-prison while they decided what to do with him (37:24).

42:18-20 Rather than keep all but one, Joseph would release all but one to take grain home to their starving families.

42:21-23 Clearly we are being punished: The brothers sensed that having to bring Benjamin back to Egypt against their
listen. And now we have to answer for his blood!"

23 Of course, they didn't know that Joseph understood them, for he had been speaking to them through an interpreter. 24 Now he turned away from them and began to weep. When he regained his composure, he spoke to them again. Then he chose Simeon from among them and had him tied up right before their eyes.

25 Joseph then ordered his servants to fill the men's sacks with grain, but he also gave secret instructions to return each brother's payment at the top of his sack. He also gave them supplies for their journey home. 26 So the brothers loaded their donkeys with the grain and headed for home.

27 But when they stopped for the night and one of them opened his sack to get grain for his donkey, he found his money in the top of his sack. 28 "Look!" he exclaimed to his brothers. "My money has been returned; it's here in my sack!" Then their hearts sank. Trembling, they said to each other, "What has God done to us?"

The Broth ers Re port to Jacob
29 When the brothers came to their father, Jacob, in the land of Canaan, they told him everything that had happened to them.
30 "The man who is governor of the land spoke very harshly to us," they told him. "He accused us of being spies scouting the land. 31 But we said, 'We are honest men, not spies. 32 We are twelve brothers, sons of father's wishes was God's punishment for their having sold Joseph to the traders. The sense of divine retribution began to awaken feelings of remorse that Joseph's cries for mercy and their father's tears (37:34-35) had failed to arouse.

42:22 you wouldn't listen: Reuben had lost the reins of leadership (see notes on 42:37; 49:3-4).
42:24 Joseph turned away from them and began to weep (cp. 43:30; 45:2, 14; 50:1, 17); perhaps he was hearing part of the story that he had never known (Reuben's attempt to save him, 37:21-22, 29), or his brothers' remorse moved him to forgiveness.
42:25-28 Joseph cared for his brothers' needs; he had forgiven them (see note on 42:24) and was fulfilling his role to provide for them. God used Joseph's care to convict the brothers even more fully of their sin.
42:25 return each brother's payment: He was now testing them to awaken their conscience and make them face their past guilt; once again, they were going home with silver instead of a brother (37:28-35).
42:28 What has God done to us? They knew that God was behind everything that had been happening, so they faced a day of reckoning for their sins.
42:29-34 The brothers' account focused on the accusation that they were spies and on the need to take Benjamin back to Egypt with them. They omitted their growing realization of divine retribution for their crime against Joseph.

Famine (41:56-57)
Famine occurred early in the lives of Abraham (12:10) and Isaac (26:1). When famine affected Jacob's family (41:56-57), God had already placed Joseph in Egypt to provide for his people through the disaster (45:5, 7). This famine was particularly severe, but famines were not uncommon in the ancient world (see 12:10; 26:1; see also Ruth 1:1; 2 Sam 21:1; 1 Kgs 18:1-2; Hag 1:1-11; Acts 11:28). Dependence on rainfall caused some people to stockpile food against possible famine. In Egypt, Joseph implemented a grain ration that saved the people, supplied seed, and filled Pharaoh's royal storerooms (41:33-36; 47:23-24). Israel's temple also contained storerooms (1 Chr 26:15; 2 Chr 31:11; Neh 10:37-39).

Famine was a devastating catastrophe in an agrarian society. Caused by drought, crop failure, or siege (Ruth 1:1-2; 2 Kgs 25), it was often accompanied by disease or war that brought adversity at many levels of society (Jer 14:12), even for animals (Job 38:41; Joel 1:20). Famines had far-reaching results in price inflation, robbery, social exploitation, agricultural collapse, migration, and even cannibalism (12:10; 26:1; 2 Kgs 6:24-29; Neh 5:1-3; Jer 19:9; Lam 2:20-21; 4:8-10). Therefore, faithfulness to God was a particularly vivid need (Ps 33:18-19; 37:19), and God's blessings on the nation included protection from famine (Ezek 34:29; 36:29-30). God sometimes used famine as divine judgment on the Israelites (Lev 26:14-20; Deut 11:16-17; 28:33; Jer 29:17-18).

Jesus relived Israel's experience in his own wilderness testing and refused to make bread just for himself (Matt 4:3-4; cp. Deut 8:3). His success showed that scarcity and hunger can develop humility and trust in divine providence (Matt 4:2), something that Israel did not learn very well. Jesus fed 5,000 to draw them to himself as the bread of life, God's true manna (John 6:32-35), but the crowds followed Jesus more for the food than for himself (John 6:26-27). Without ignoring physical food, Jesus highlighted spiritual hunger and thirst (Luke 6:21; John 4:34). Eating provides both a context and a metaphor for fellowship (43:34; Luke 22:15-16; Rev 19:9). Heaven will remove the desperation of hunger altogether (Rev 7:16).
one father. One brother is no longer with us, and the youngest is at home with our father in the land of Canaan.’

33Then the man who is governor of the land told us, ‘This is how I will find out if you are honest men. Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take grain for your starving families and go on home. 34But you must bring your youngest brother back to me. Then I will know you are honest men and not spies. Then I will give you back your brother, and you may trade freely in the land.’ ”

35As they emptied out their sacks, there in each man’s sack was the bag of money he had paid for the grain! The brothers and their father were terrified when they saw the bags of money. 36Jacob exclaimed, “You are robbing me of my children! Joseph is gone! Simeon is gone! And now you want Benjamin, too. Everything is going against me!”

37Then Reuben said to his father, “You may kill my two sons if I don’t bring Benjamin back to you. I’ll be responsible for him, and I promise to bring him back.”

38But Jacob replied, “My son will not go down with you. His brother Joseph is dead, and he is all I have left. If anything should happen to him on your journey, you would send this grieving, white-haired man to his grave.”

The Brothers Return to Egypt with Benjamin

43But the famine continued to ravage the land of Canaan. 2When the grain they had brought from Egypt was almost gone, Jacob said to his sons, “Go back and buy us a little more food.”

3But Judah said, “The man was serious when he warned us, ‘You won’t see my face again unless your brother is with you.’ 4If you send Benjamin with us, we will go down and buy more food. 5But if you don’t let Benjamin go, we won’t go either. Remember, the man said, ‘You won’t see my face again unless your brother is with you.’ ”

6“Why were you so cruel to me?” Jacob moaned. “Why did you tell him you had another brother?”

7The man kept asking us questions about our family,” they replied. “He asked, ‘Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?’ So we answered his questions. How could we know he would say, ‘Bring your brother down here?’”

8Judah said to his father, “Send the boy with me, and we will be on our way. Otherwise we will all die of starvation—and not only we, but you and our little ones. 9I personally guarantee his safety. You may hold me responsible if I don’t bring him back to you. Then let me bear the blame forever. 10If we hadn’t wasted all this time, we could have gone and returned twice by now.”

11So their father, Jacob, finally said to them, “If it can’t be avoided, then at least do this. Pack your bags with the best products of this land. Take them down to the man as gifts—balm, honey, gum, aromatic resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. 12Also take double the money that was put back in your sacks, as it was probably someone’s mistake. 13Then take your brother, and go back to the man. 14May God Almighty give you mercy as you go before the man, so that he will release Simeon and let Benjamin return. But if I must lose my children, so be it.”

15So the men packed Jacob’s gifts and double the money and headed off with Benjamin. They finally arrived in Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. 16When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the manager of his household, “These

42:36 Filled with grief over two sons lost already, Jacob feared that he would also lose Benjamin if he went to Egypt.

• You are robbing me of my children! He did not realize the full truth of his words, but they must have stung his sons’ guilty consciences.

42:37 Reuben tried to take the lead; perhaps he thought he could get back into his father’s good favor (see 35:22), first by rescuing Joseph from certain death (37:21–22, 29–30) and now by keeping Benjamin safe.

42:38 Jacob was resolute in his favoritism toward Rachel’s remaining son. Benjamin would not go to Egypt even if it meant that Leah’s son Simeon never returned. Jacob’s grief apparently weighed heavily on the brothers’ conscience (44:18–34). • to his grave: Hebrew to Sheol.

43:1–7 As the famine continued, Jacob’s family needed more grain, but they could not return to Egypt without Benjamin (42:16, 20). Jacob realized that he was in a bind; he needed more food, but was loath to lose Benjamin.


43:8–10 Judah broke the deadlock by taking responsibility for Benjamin’s well-being, thus succeeding where Reuben failed. His action was fitting, since it had been his idea to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites (37:26–27) instead of killing him. Now he would secure Benjamin’s safety with his own life (see 44:18–34).

43:11–13 Jacob provided everything he could to ensure a favorable reception from the Egyptian governor (the man; cp. 32:13–21).

43:13–14 Jacob finally entrusted his family’s future to God Almighty (Hebrew El-Shaddai), the divine title that stresses God’s power (see also 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 48:3; 1 Kgs 19:10, 14; Rev 21:22).

43:16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them: Joseph now knew that Benjamin was well (see note on 42:1–44:34). The feast was both a celebration and a test.
men will eat with me this noon. Take them inside the palace. Then go slaughter an animal, and prepare a big feast.” 17 So the man did as Joseph told him and took them into Joseph's palace.

18 The brothers were terrified when they saw that they were being taken into Joseph's house. “It's because of the money someone put in our sacks last time we were here,” they said. “He plans to pretend that we stole it. Then he will sell us, make us slaves, and take our donkeys.”

A Feast at Joseph's Palace

19 The brothers approached the manager of Joseph's household and spoke to him at the entrance to the palace. 20 “Sir,” they said, “we came to Egypt once before to buy food. 21 But as we were returning home, we stopped for the night and opened our sacks. Then we discovered that each man's money—the exact amount paid—was in the top of his sack! Here it is; we have brought it back with us. 22 We also have additional money to buy more food. We have no idea who put our money in our sacks.”

23 “Relax. Don't be afraid,” the household manager told them. “Your God, the God of your father, must have put this treasure into your sacks. I know I received your payment.” Then he released Simeon and brought him out to them.

24 The manager then led the men into Joseph's palace. He gave them water to wash their feet and provided food for their donkeys. 25 They were told they would be eating there, so they prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon.

26 When Joseph came home, they gave him the gifts they had brought him, then bowed low to the ground before him. 27 After greeting them, he asked, “How is your father, the old man you spoke about? Is he still alive?”

28 “Yes,” they replied. “Our father, your servant, is alive and well.” And they bowed low again.

29 Then Joseph looked at his brother Benjamin, the son of his own mother. “Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?” Joseph asked. “May God be gracious to you, my son.” 30 Then Joseph hurried from the room because he was overcome with emotion for his brother. He went into his private room, where he broke down and wept. 31 After washing his face, he came back out, keeping himself under control. Then he ordered, “Bring out the food!”

32 The waiters served Joseph at his own table, and his brothers were served at a separate table. The Egyptians who ate with Joseph sat at their own table, because Egyptians despise Hebrews and refuse to eat with them. 33 Joseph told each of his brothers where to sit, and to their amazement, he sat them according to age, from oldest to youngest. 34 And Joseph filled their plates with food from his own table, giving Benjamin five times as much as he gave the others. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

Joseph’s Silver Cup in Benjamin’s Sack

44 When his brothers were ready to leave, Joseph gave these instructions to his palace manager: “Fill each of their sacks with as much grain as they can carry, and put each man's money back into his sack. 2 Then put my personal silver cup at the top of the youngest brother’s sack, along with the money for his grain.” So the manager did as Joseph instructed him.

3 The brothers were up at dawn and were sent on their journey with their loaded donkeys. 4 But when they had gone only a short distance and were barely out of the city, Joseph said to his palace manager, “Chase after them and stop them. When you catch up
with them, ask them, ‘Why have you repaid my kindness with such evil? 5 Why have you stolen my master’s silver cup, which he uses to predict the future? What a wicked thing you have done!’”

6When the palace manager caught up with the men, he spoke to them as he had been instructed.

7“What are you talking about?” the brothers responded. “We are your servants and would never do such a thing! 8 Didn’t we repay the money we found in our sacks? We brought it back all the way from the land of Canaan. Why would we steal silver or gold from your master’s house? 9 If you find his cup with any one of us, let that man die. And all the rest of us, my lord, will be your slaves.”

10“That’s fair,” the man replied. “But only the one who stole the cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go free.”

11They all quickly took their sacks from the backs of their donkeys and opened them. 12 The palace manager searched the brothers’ sacks, from the oldest to the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack! 13 When the brothers saw this, they tore their clothing in despair. Then they loaded their donkeys again and returned to the city.

14Joseph was still in his palace when Judah and his brothers arrived, and they fell to the ground before him. 15 “What have you done?” Joseph demanded. “Don’t you know that a man like me can predict the future?” 16 Judah answered, “Oh, my lord, what can we say to you? How can we explain this? How can we prove our innocence? God is punishing us for our sins. My lord, we have all returned to be your slaves—all of us, not just our brother who had your cup in his sack.”

17“No,” Joseph said. “I would never do such a thing! Only the man who stole the cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go back to your father in peace.”

Judah Intercedes for Benjamin

18Then Judah stepped forward and said, “Please, my lord, let your servant say just one word to you. Please, do not be angry with me, even though you are as powerful as Pharaoh himself.

19“No, my lord, previously you asked us, your servants, ‘Do you have a father or a brother?’

20And we responded, ‘Yes, my lord, we have a father who is an old man, and his youngest son is a child of his old age. His full brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother’s children, and his father loves him very much.’

21“And you said to us, ‘Bring him here so I can see him with my own eyes.’ 22 But we said to you, ‘My lord, the boy cannot leave his father, for his father would die.’ 23 But you told us, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes with you, you will never see my face again.’

24“So we returned to your servant, our father, and told him what you had said. 25 Later, when he said, ‘Go back again and buy us more food,’ 26 we replied, ‘We can’t go unless you let our youngest brother go with us. We will never get to see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’

27“Then my father said to us, ‘As you know, my wife had two sons, 28 and one of them went away and never returned. Doubtless he was torn to pieces by some wild animal. I have never seen him since. 29 Now if you take his brother away from

44:5 This description would make the brothers understand that the ruler knew things that others could not. • silver cup: As in Greek version; Hebrew lacks this phrase. Hydromancy (pouring water into oil) and aenomancy (pouring wine into other liquids) were methods of divination used in the ancient Near East that would have required such a cup. Joseph was continuing his ruse (see 42:7; cp. 30:27; see also Lev 19:26; Num 23:23; Deut 18:10-11)—he knew that only God grants revelation (see 37:5-9; 40:8; 41:16).

44:9-10 The punishment that the brothers proposed was harsher than necessary; it was normal in antiquity to stake your life on what you said. The palace manager was agreeable but enforced a punishment that matched Joseph’s intentions (44:17).

44:11-12 The palace manager knew where the cup was, but he created more anxiety by beginning with the oldest.

44:13 they tore their clothing in despair: They knew what it would do to Jacob to lose Benjamin (42:38).

44:14 This time, the brothers did not bow politely (see 42:6-7; 43:26); they fell to the ground in desperation, fulfilling Joseph’s first dream for the third time (see 37:10).

44:16 Judah again spoke for the group. • God is punishing us for our sins: God was completing the work of repentance in their hearts. Judah again proposed that they all be punished. Benjamin was seemingly guilty of this theft, but all of the others were guilty of sin against Joseph. They preferred not returning to Jacob at all versus seeing his grief at the loss of Benjamin (44:34).

44:18-34 Judah made good on his promise to pay for Benjamin’s safety (43:8-10). His lengthy plea to be imprisoned in place of the lad (44:33) is one of the most moving acts of intercession in Scripture. It demonstrated Judah’s concern for his father and his willingness to give up everything for the sake of his brother. With this kind of integrity (see John 15:13), Judah showed himself to be a true leader, qualified to receive the blessing of the firstborn, through whom the kings of Israel would come (see 49:10). • The brothers had fully repented, as expressed by Judah’s intercession. Because of their change, Joseph could make himself known to them (45:1-15) and arrange for the family to join him in Egypt where there was food (45:16; 47:12).

44:29 to his grave: Hebrew to Sheol; also in 44:31.
me, and any harm comes to him, you will send this grieving, white-haired man to his grave.’

30“And now, my lord, I cannot go back to my father without the boy. Our father’s life is bound up in the boy’s life. 31If he sees that the boy is not with us, our father will die. We, your servants, will indeed be responsible for sending that grieving, white-haired man to his grave. 32My lord, I guaranteed to my father that I would take care of the boy. I told him, ‘If I don’t bring him back to you, I will bear the blame forever.’

33“So please, my lord, let me stay here as a slave instead of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. 34For how can I return to my father if the boy is not with me? I couldn’t bear to see the anguish this would cause my father!”

Joseph Reveals His Identity and God’s Plan

Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, “Out, all of you!” So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. 2Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh’s palace.

3“I am Joseph!” he said to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. 4“Please, come closer,” he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. 5But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.

6This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. 7God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. 8So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.

9“Now hurry back to my father and tell him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately!’

JUDAH (44:14-34)

Judah is remembered most often as the ancestor of King David and of Jesus Christ. Despite his indiscretions and his birth as a middle child, God chose Judah to carry the line of King David (1 Chr 2:1-16; 3:1-24) and of the Messiah (49:8-12; Matt 1:2-3; Luke 3:33).

Judah was the fourth of Jacob’s twelve sons (35:23; 1 Chr 2:1). Leah, overjoyed to have borne her fourth son, named him Judah, meaning “praise” (29:35). Judah fathered five sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah by Bathshua, a woman from Canaan (38:3-5; 1 Chr 2:3); and the twins, Perez and Zerah, by his daughter-in-law Tamar (38:29-30; 1 Chr 2:4). God killed his first two sons, Er and Onan, in Canaan for disobedience (46:12). Judah eventually settled his family in Egypt with his father and brothers (Exod 1:2).

Though reckless in his behavior with Tamar (38:6-30), Judah took personal responsibility for Benjamin’s safety in Egypt and interceded with Joseph for his brothers (44:14-18). When Jacob gave his dying blessing, he granted Judah the position of leadership; the future kings of Israel would come through Judah’s offspring (see note on 49:10).

44:32-34 Judah was willing to give up his family, his future, and his freedom for others.

45:1-15 In one of the most dramatic scenes of the book, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, bringing the process of reconciling with them to a climax (see also 50:14-21).

45:2 This is the third of five times in the story that Joseph wept over his brothers (see also 42:24; 43:30; 45:14; 50:17; cp. 50:1).

45:3 The brothers were stunned at the news, unable to speak from amazement and fear (45:5; cp. 50:15).

45:5-8 God...sent me is the central message of the account of Jacob’s family (37:2). As the Lord had told Abraham, he was leading the Israelites into Egypt (15:13). God had sent Joseph to Egypt to prepare for his family’s rescue during the famine. In what has become a classic statement of God’s sovereignty, Joseph explained that God had been working through all of the circumstances and human acts to bring about his plan. The certainty of God’s will is the basis for forgiveness and reconciliation with those who do wrong, cause hurt, or bring harm. If people do not believe that God is sovereign, then they will blame others and retaliate. Those who are spiritual will trust that God is at work even through human wickedness (see also Rom 8:28-30).

45:7 to preserve many survivors: Or and to save you with an extraordinary rescue. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

45:8 an adviser: Literally a father.

45:9-13 Joseph instructed his brothers to inform Jacob. The whole family was to move to Egypt and live in Goshen, a fertile region in the Nile delta (see 47:1-12). If they did not come to Egypt, they would not survive the five years of famine ahead.
10You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own. 11I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve.’”

12Then Joseph added, “Look! You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph! 13Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly.” 14Weeping with joy, he embraced Benjamin, and Benjamin did the same.

15Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.

Pharaoh Invites Jacob to Egypt

16The news soon reached Pharaoh’s palace: “Joseph’s brothers have arrived!” Pharaoh and his officials were all delighted to hear this.

17Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Tell your brothers, ‘This is what you must do: Load your pack animals, and hurry back to the land of Canaan. 18Then get your father and all of your families, and return here to me. I will give you the very best land in Egypt, and you will eat from the best that the land produces.”’”

19Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Tell your brothers, ‘Take wagons from the land of Egypt to carry your little children and your wives, and bring your father here. 20Don’t worry about your personal belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’”

21So the sons of Jacob did as they were told. Joseph provided them with wagons, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he gave them supplies for the journey. 22And he gave each of them new clothes—but to Benjamin he gave five changes of clothes and 300 pieces of silver. 23He also sent his father ten male donkeys loaded with the finest products of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other supplies he would need on his journey.

24So Joseph sent his brothers off, and as they left, he called after them, “Don’t quarrel about all this along the way!” 25And they left Egypt and returned to their father, Jacob, in the land of Canaan.

26“Joseph is still alive!” they told him. “And he is governor of all the land of Egypt!” Jacob was stunned at the news—he couldn’t believe it. 27But when they repeated to Jacob everything Joseph had told them, and when he saw the wagons Joseph had sent to carry him, their father’s ‘spirits revived.

28Then Jacob exclaimed, “It must be true! My son Joseph is alive! I must go and see him before I die.”

Jacob and His Family Move to Egypt

46So Jacob set out for Egypt with all his possessions. And when he came to Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the

45:10 The region of Goshen was in the northeast corner of Egypt, only a few days’ walk from Canaan. Jacob’s family stayed there because there was food and water for themselves and their flocks; later, they were kept there by Egyptians who put them to slave labor.

45:14-15 Joseph was reunited with his brothers—first with Benjamin and then with the rest. Their previous hatred and jealousy of Joseph (37:4-11) had come to an end. The brothers experienced forgiveness from God and from Joseph. Far from commanding his brothers to bow down to him (see 42:6-7), Joseph welcomed them. Joseph held no grudge because he accepted what had happened as God’s work and saw the good that had resulted (see 50:14-21). This is how wisdom rules: The wise leader will forgive and restore (see note on 37:2-50:26).

45:10-47:12 This section is transitional, as the family moved from Canaan to Goshen, where they would live for the next four centuries.

45:16-25 Joseph sent his brothers with instructions to bring Jacob and the entire family to Egypt. Out of gratitude for Joseph’s having saved all of Egypt (45:18; see 47:20), Pharaoh promised the best of all the land of Egypt, and Joseph gave them the finest products of Egypt.


45:22 300 pieces: Hebrew 300 shekels, about 7.5 pounds or 3.4 kilograms in weight.

45:24 Don’t quarrel about all this along the way! When they were away from Joseph, they might begin to accuse one another about the past or argue about how to explain what had happened to Jacob. It was now time to put the past behind them and enjoy the reunion.

45:26-28 As might be expected, Jacob was stunned when he heard that his son Joseph was still alive and ruling all the land of Egypt. As he heard the details of their story and saw all that Joseph had sent him, he was convinced that it was true. He immediately prepared to move to Egypt and reunite with his son Joseph, whom he had not seen for twenty-two years.

45:27 their father’s spirits revived: This royal invitation to Jacob, an old man near the end of his life, to cross the Red Sea and to the lands of the Philistines was a turning point in their lives. It was also a fulfillment of God’s prediction (15:13-16) that they would go into seclusion in a foreign country and there become a great nation without losing their identity. The joyful news about Joseph changed the lives of everyone in this family for the good.

46:1-4 God reassured Jacob about his move to Egypt.


46:1-2 Abraham, who had died at the age of 175 years (Gen 25:7), was buried in the cave at Machpelah near Hebron, while Sarah rested in Abraham’s mausoleum. During a famine in Canaan (12:10), God had protected him there. *Jacob’s first stop was at Beersheba, where Abraham had sacrificed to the Lord and worshiped him after settling his land and water rights with the Philistines (21:31-33). This was where Isaac had
God of his father, Isaac. 2During the night God spoke to him in a vision. "Jacob! Jacob!" he called.

"Here I am," Jacob replied.

3"I am God, the God of your father," the voice said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make your family into a great nation. 4I will go with you down to Egypt, and I will bring you back again. You will die in Egypt, but Joseph will be with you to close your eyes."

5So Jacob left Beer sheba, and his sons took him to Egypt. They carried him and their little ones and their wives in the wagons Pharaoh had provided for them. 6They also took all their livestock and all the personal belongings they had acquired in the land of Canaan. So Jacob and his entire family went to Egypt—

7sons and grandsons, daughters and granddaughters—all his descendants.

8These are the names of the descendants of Israel—the sons of Jacob—who went to Egypt:

Reuben was Jacob's oldest son. 9The sons of Reuben were Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

The sons of Simon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar, and Shaul. (Shaul's mother was a Canaanite woman.)

The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

The sons of Judah were Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (though Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan). The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul.

The sons of Issachar were Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron.

The sons of Zebulun were Sered, Elon, and Jahleel.

These were the sons of Leah and Jacob who were born in Paddan-aram, in addition to their daughter, Dinah. The number of Jacob's descendants (male and female) through Leah was thirty-three.

The sons of Gad were Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli.

The sons of Asher were Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah. Their sister was Serah. Beriah's sons were Heber and Malkiel.

lived, and where Jacob had lived before he fled from Esau's anger (28:10). • all his possessions: See 46:5-7.

46:2-4 In a night vision, the Lord repeated his promise to go with Jacob and make his family into a great nation in Egypt. The same God who led the family into Egypt promised to bring them out of Egypt to live once again in the land of Canaan.

46:3 I am God: Hebrew I am El.

46:4 you will die: He would have a peaceful death, surrounded by his family and many blessings from God (49:33).

46:8-27 This genealogy of the sons of Jacob shows that all the tribes of Israel went together to the land of Egypt; they would all leave together as well (see the book of Exodus).

46:13 Puah: As in Syriac version and Samaritan Pentateuch (see also 1 Chr 7:1); Hebrew reads Puvah. • Jashub: As in some Greek manuscripts and Samaritan Pentateuch (see also Num 26:24; 1 Chr 7:1); Hebrew reads Job.

46:16 Zephon: As in Greek version and Samaritan Pentateuch (see also Num 26:15); Hebrew reads Ziphon.
18These were the sons of Zilpah, the servant given to Leah by her father, Laban. The number of Jacob’s descendants through Zilpah was sixteen.

19The sons of Jacob’s wife Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin.

20Joseph’s sons, born in the land of Egypt, were Manasseh and Ephraim. Their mother was Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On.

21Benjamin’s sons were Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard.

22These were the sons of Rachel and Jacob. The number of Jacob’s descendants through Rachel was fourteen.

23The son of Dan was Hupham.

24The sons of Naphtali were Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.

25These were the sons of Bilhah, the servant given to Rachel by her father, Laban. The number of Jacob’s descendants through Bilhah was seven.

26The total number of Jacob’s direct descendants who went with him to Egypt, not counting his sons’ wives, was sixty-six. In addition, Joseph had two sons who were born in Egypt. So altogether, there were seventy members of Jacob’s family in the land of Egypt.

Jacob’s Family Arrives in Goshen

28As they neared their destination, Jacob sent Judah ahead to meet Joseph and get directions to the region of Goshen. And when they finally arrived there, 29Joseph prepared his chariot and traveled to Goshen to meet his father, Jacob. When Joseph arrived, he embraced his father and wept, holding him for a long time. 30Finally, Jacob said to Joseph, “Now I am ready to die, since I have seen your face again and know you are still alive.”

31And Joseph said to his brothers and to his father’s entire family, “I will go to Pharaoh and tell him, ‘My brothers and my father’s entire family have come to me from the land of Canaan. 32These men are shepherds, and they raise livestock. They have brought with them their flocks and herds and everything they own.’ ”

33Then he said, “When Pharaoh calls for you and asks you about your occupation, 34you must tell him, ‘We, your servants, have raised livestock all our lives, as our ancestors have always done.’ When you tell him this, he will let you live here in the region of Goshen, for the Egyptians despise shepherds.”

Jacob Blesses Pharaoh and Setstle in Goshen

47Then Joseph went to see Pharaoh and told him, “My father and my brothers have arrived from the land of Canaan. They have come with all their flocks and herds and possessions, and they are now in the region of Goshen.”

Joseph took five of his brothers with him and presented them to Pharaoh. And Pharaoh asked the brothers, “What is your occupation?”

They replied, “We, your servants, are shepherds, just like our ancestors. 4We have come to live here in Egypt for a while, for there is no pasture for our flocks in Canaan. The famine is very severe there. So please, we request permission to live in the region of Goshen.”

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Now that your father and brothers have joined you here, 6choose any place in the entire land of Egypt for them to live. Give them the best land of Egypt. Let them live in the region Egyptians detested Semitic shepherds out of a sense of ethnic superiority and observed a strict segregation (see 43:32). When Jacob’s family settled in Egypt, this separation would allow the people to grow into a great nation without losing their identity.

47:1-6 Pharaoh responded as Joseph hoped by giving Jacob’s family the best part of the land; he even gave some of the brothers oversight of his own livestock (47:6).

47:1 Goshen (see note on 45:10) is not referred to in ancient Egyptian texts; the name it bore in later Egyptian writings was “the region of Rameses” (47:11; see Exod 1:11). It was fertile and near to Joseph at court, which suggests that it was on the eastern side of the Nile delta.
of Goshen. And if any of them have special skills, put them in charge of my livestock, too."
7Then Joseph brought in his father, Jacob, and presented him to Pharaoh. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh.
8"How old are you?" Pharaoh asked him.
9Jacob replied, "I have traveled this earth for 130 hard years. But my life has been short compared to the lives of my ancestors." 10Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh again before leaving his court.
11So Joseph assigned the best land of Egypt—the region of Rameses—to his father and his brothers, and he settled them there, just as Pharaoh had commanded.
12And Joseph provided food for his father and his brothers in amounts appropriate to the number of their dependents, including the smallest children.

Joseph’s Leadership in the Famine
13Meanwhile, the famine became so severe that all the food was used up, and people were starving throughout the lands of Egypt and Canaan. 14By selling grain to the people, Joseph eventually collected all the money in Egypt and Canaan, and he put the money in Pharaoh’s treasury. 15When the people of Egypt and Canaan ran out of money, all the Egyptians came to Joseph. "Our money is gone!" they cried. "But please give us food, or we will die before your very eyes!"
16Joseph replied, "Since your money is gone, bring me your livestock. I will give you food in exchange for your livestock."
17So they brought their livestock to Joseph in exchange for food. In exchange for their horses, flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and donkeys, Joseph provided them with food for another year.
18But that year ended, and the next year they came again and said, "We cannot hide the truth from you, my lord. Our money is gone, and all our livestock and cattle are yours. We have nothing left to give but our bodies and our land. 19Why should we die before your very eyes? Buy us and our land in exchange for food; we offer our land and ourselves as slaves for Pharaoh. Just give us grain so we may live and not die, and so the land does not become empty and desolate."
20So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold him their fields because the famine was so severe, and soon all the land belonged to Pharaoh. 21As for the people, he made them all slaves, from one end of Egypt to the other. 22The only land he did not buy was the land belonging to the priests. They received an allotment of food directly from Pharaoh, so they didn’t need to sell their land.
23Then Joseph said to the people, "Look, today I have bought you and your land for Pharaoh. I will provide you with seed so you can plant the fields. 24Then when you harvest it, one-fifth of your crop will belong to Pharaoh. You may keep the remaining four-fifths as seed for your fields and as food for you, your households, and your little ones."
25"You have saved our lives!" they exclaimed. "May it please you, my lord, to let us be Pharaoh’s servants."
26Joseph then issued a decree still in effect in the land of Egypt, that Pharaoh should receive one-fifth of all the crops grown on his land. Only the land belonging to the priests was not given to Pharaoh.
27Meanwhile, the people of Israel settled in the region of Goshen in Egypt. There they acquired property, and they were fruitful, and their population grew rapidly. 28Jacob lived for seventeen years after his arrival in Egypt, so he lived 147 years in all.

Joseph Promises to Bury Jacob in Canaan
29As the time of his death drew near, Jacob called for his son Joseph and said to him,
“Please do me this favor. Put your hand under my thigh and swear that you will treat me with unfailing love by honoring this last request: Do not bury me in Egypt. 30When I die, please take my body out of Egypt and bury me with my ancestors.”

So Joseph promised, “I will do as you ask.”

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Jacob gathered his strength and sat up in his bed.

Jacob Blesses His Children (48:1–50:26)

48 One day not long after this, word came to Joseph, “Your father is failing rapidly.” So Joseph went to visit his father, and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

When Joseph arrived, Jacob was told, “Your son Joseph has come to see you.” So Jacob gathered his strength and sat up in his bed.

Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me. He said to me, ‘I will make you fruitful, and I will multiply your descendants. I will make you a multitude of nations. And I will give this land of Canaan to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.’

Now I am claiming as my own sons these two boys of yours, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born here in the land of Egypt before I arrived. They will be my sons, just as Reuben and Simeon are. But any children born to you in the future will be your own, and they will inherit land within the territories of their brothers Ephraim and Manasseh.

7“Long ago, as I was returning from Paddan-aram, Rachel died in the land of Canaan. We were still on the way, some distance from Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). So with great sorrow I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath.”

8Then Jacob looked over at the two boys. “Are these your sons?” he asked.

9“Yes,” Joseph told him, “these are the sons God has given me here in Egypt.” And Jacob said, “Bring them closer to me, so I can bless them.”

10Jacob was half blind because of his age and could hardly see. So Joseph brought the boys close to him, and Jacob kissed and embraced them. Then Jacob said to Joseph, “I never thought I would see your face again, but now God has let me see your children, too!”

12Joseph moved the boys, who were at their grandfather’s knees, and he bowed with his face to the ground. Then he positioned the boys in front of Jacob. With his right hand he directed Ephraim toward Jacob’s left hand, and with his left hand he put Manasseh at Jacob’s right hand. But Jacob crossed his arms as he reached out to lay his hands on the boys’ heads. He put his right hand on the head of Ephraim, though he was the younger boy, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, though he was the firstborn. Then he blessed Joseph and said,

“May the God before whom my grandfather Abraham and my father, Isaac, walked—the God who has been my shepherd all my life, to this very day,
16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm—
may he bless these boys.
May they preserve my name and the names of Abraham and Isaac.
And may their descendants multiply greatly throughout the earth.”

17 But Joseph was upset when he saw that his father placed his right hand on Ephraim’s head. So Joseph lifted it to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. “No, my father,” he said. “This one is the firstborn. Put your right hand on his head.”

18 But his father refused. “I know, my son; I know,” he replied. “Manasseh will also become a great people, but his younger brother will become even greater. And his descendants will become a multitude of nations.”

20 So Jacob blessed the boys that day with this blessing: “The people of Israel will use your names when they give a blessing. They will say, ‘May God make you as prosperous as Ephraim and Manasseh.’” In this way, Jacob put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

21 Then Jacob said to Joseph, “Look, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will take you back to Canaan, the land of your ancestors. And beyond what I have given your brothers, I am giving you an extra portion of the land that I took from the Amorites with my sword and bow.”

Jacob Blesses His Sons

49 Then Jacob called together all his sons and said, “Gather around me, and I will tell you what will happen to each of you in the days to come.

Blessing (48:8-20)

Jacob adopted Joseph’s sons and blessed them (48:3-7), just as his father Isaac had blessed him (27:27-29). Blessing enables, enhances, and enriches life, whereas a curse diminishes it (Lev 26:14-39). Blessing is issued publicly by a benefactor and provides power for prosperity and success. Blessing is essential to covenant relationships in that it guides and motivates the parties to obey the covenant’s stipulations (Lev 26:13–14; Deut 28:1-14). Obedience leads to blessing, whereas rebellion brings a curse.

The initial realm of blessing is creation, in which God as Creator is the ultimate granter of blessing for animals (1:22) and humans (1:28; see Ps 104; 128:3-4). Humans also serve as channels of divine blessing. Abraham was called to be a blessing to the nations (12:2-3). The institutions of family (27:27-29), government (1 Kgs 8:14, 44, 52, 66), and religion (14:19; Lev 9:22) are nurtured, commissioned, and purified through blessing. Israel’s priests mediated God’s blessing to Israel (Num 6:24-26; Deut 10:8).

Three basic characteristics can be observed in OT blessings: (1) They are conveyed from a greater party to a lesser one (32:26; Heb 7:6-7); (2) They are signs of favor that result in well-being and productivity (Deut 28:3-7); and (3) They acknowledge that all power and blessing stems from the Creator. All blessings have their source in God’s love (Deut 7:7-8, 12-15).

God’s blessings in Genesis are in striking contrast with the pagan religions of antiquity. For pagan religions, fortunes and fertility of flock, family, and fields came about through sympathetic magic in cultic observances at their shrines—profane customs that were designed to induce the deities to act on their behalf so that the cycle of life could be maintained. In Genesis, all of life, fertility, and blessing came by God’s decree, for he is the only true and living God.

In the NT, the emphasis of blessing shifts from the material to the spiritual, from the nation to the church, and from the temporal to the eternal (Matt 6:25; Eph 1:3, 1 Pet 3:9). In his death, Jesus bore the consequences of sin’s curse (Gal 3:13), established God’s kingdom (Matt 3:2; 5:3-20; John 3:3-5), and blessed its citizens with forgiveness of sin (Rom 4:6-25). Now believers are called to bless the world (Luke 6:27-28; Rom 12:14; see also Isa 19:24; Zech 8:13).
2 “Come and listen, you sons of Jacob; listen to Israel, your father.
3 “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength, the child of my vigorous youth. You are first in rank and first in power.
4 But you are as unruly as a flood, and you will be first no longer. For you went to bed with my wife; you defiled my marriage couch.
5 Simeon and Levi are two of a kind; their weapons are instruments of violence.
6 May I never join in their meetings; may I never be a party to their plans. For in their anger they murdered men, and they crippled oxen just for sport.
7 A curse on their anger, for it is fierce; a curse on their wrath, for it is cruel. I will scatter them among the descendants of Jacob; I will disperse them throughout Israel.
8 Judah, your brothers will praise you. You will grasp your enemies by the neck. All your relatives will bow before you.
9 Judah, my son, is a young lion—like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?
10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor.
11 He ties his foal to a grapevine, the colt of his donkey to a choice vine. He washes his clothes in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.
12 His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth are whiter than milk.
13 Zebulun will settle by the seashore and will be a harbor for ships; his borders will extend to Sidon.
14 Issachar is a sturdy donkey, resting between two saddlebags.
15 When he sees how good the countryside is and how pleasant the land, he will bend his shoulder to the load and submit himself to hard labor.
16 Dan will govern his people, like any other tribe in Israel.
17 Dan will be a snake beside the road, a poisonous viper along the path; like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor. He ties his foal to a grapevine, the colt of his donkey to a choice vine. He washes his clothes in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth are whiter than milk. Zebulun will settle by the seashore and will be a harbor for ships; his borders will extend to Sidon. Issachar is a sturdy donkey, resting between two saddlebags. When he sees how good the countryside is and how pleasant the land, he will bend his shoulder to the load and submit himself to hard labor. Dan will govern his people, like any other tribe in Israel. Dan will be a snake beside the road, a poisonous viper along the path; like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?

**Death (49:29-33)**

As Jacob lay dying in Egypt, he considered two promises regarding his death: that he would die peacefully (46:4) and that he would join his ancestors (49:29, 33). Humans are mortal, and death is the natural end of earthly life (Ps 90:1-6). Human identity began with the earth's dust being animated by the breath of God (2:7). This passive state returns at death as God withdraws his breath and the human body collapses again into dust (3:19; Job 4:19-21; Isa 40:6-8). Human life depends entirely and continuously on the Creator of life—his breath is a gift that sustains us in life for as long as he grants it (Ps 104:29).

Death entered the human race by sin and brought ruin to it; death comes suddenly, bringing mourning and an apparent end to hopes and dreams. Death is the severest penalty in human justice. In the OT, the death penalty was a punishment for murder (9:6; Exod 21:12) or blasphemy (Lev 24:16; John 10:30-31)—violations that threatened the living community.

In the OT, the opposite of “the land of the living” (Ps 27:13) was Sheol, the realm of the dead that was shrouded in darkness and silence (Job 10:21-22; Ps 94:17; Jon 2:6). Yet even in death, believers cannot be separated from God’s presence (Ps 17:15; 49:15; Prov 14:32). God is sovereign and rules over death (Deut 32:39).

The OT mentions the fact of resurrection (see Job 19:25-27; Isa 25:6-9; 26:19; Dan 12:2). Eventually, God’s redeemed people will triumph over death (1 Cor 15:54-55), the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor 15:26). Death results from sin (Rom 5:12), and sinners will be punished in the lake of fire, called the second death (Rev 21:8). Christ’s death defeated death, making his resurrection the paradigm for all believers (Col 1:18). He is the Lord of the living and of the dead (Rom 14:9).

In Gen 49:29-33, death is joined with hope by faith. In life, the patriarchs were sojourners; in death, they were heirs of the promise and the occupied land. The patriarchs died without having received the promises (Heb 11:39-40), but that was not the end of the story. God’s promises to people are not exhausted in this life, for God makes promises that necessitate a resurrection (see Matt 22:21-32 // Mark 12:26-27). The time of death—when the natural inclination is to mourn—should also be the time of the greatest demonstration of faith, for the recipient of God’s promises has a hope beyond the grave.

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49:18 At this point, Jacob interjected an expression of hope. He may have been indirectly reminding his sons of their need for dependence on the Lord or expressing his hope in the Messiah’s reign, when he and his descendants would be rescued from all trouble, grief, and human treachery.

49:19 Three of the six Hebrew words in this verse are wordplays on the name God (“attack”). Gad will be attacked by marauding bands (attackers), but he will attack. The tribes that settled east of the Jordan River frequently experienced border raids (see Josh 13; 2 Kgs 10:32-33; 1 Chr 5:18-19).

49:20 Asher would be fertile and productive, providing rich foods. That tribe settled along the rich northern coast of Canaan.

49:21 Naphtali, like a doe, would be a free mountain people (cp. Judg 5:18). The tribe settled in the hilly region northwest of the Sea of Galilee.

49:22-26 This oracle treats Joseph more expansively than any of the others, for here the main blessing lay (see 1 Chr 5:1-2). Jacob lavished promises of victory and prosperity on Joseph’s two tribes. Ephraimites recorded as victorious in battle include Joshua (Josh 6, 8, 10, 12) and Deborah (Judg 4). Victorious descendants of Manasseh include Gideon (Judg 6-8) and Jephthah (Judg 11:1–12:7).

49:22 Or Joseph is a fruitful tree, / a fruitful tree beside a spring. / His branches reach over the wall. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

49:24-26 Five names for God introduce five blessings; God is the giver of all good things.

49:25 The blessings of the heavens above meant rain for crops. The blessings of the watery depths were streams and wells of water. The blessings of the breasts and womb were abundant offspring.
with the blessings of the heavens above, and blessings of the watery depths below, and blessings of the breasts and womb.

26 May the blessings of your father surpass the blessings of the ancient mountains, reaching to the heights of the eternal hills. May these blessings rest on the head of Joseph, who is a prince among his brothers.

27 "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, devouring his enemies in the morning and dividing his plunder in the evening."

28 These are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said as he told his sons good-by. He blessed each one with an appropriate message.

Jacob’s Death and Burial

29 Then Jacob instructed them, "Soon I will die and join my ancestors. Bury me with my father and grandfather in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite. 30 This is the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a permanent burial site. 31 There Abraham and his wife Sarah are buried. There Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, are buried. And there I buried Leah. 32 It is the plot of land and the cave that my grandfather Abraham bought from the Hittites."

33 When Jacob had finished this charge to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and joined his ancestors in death.

50 Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him and kissed him. 2 Then Joseph told the physicians who served him to embalm his father’s body; so Jacob was embalmed. 3 The embalming process took the usual forty days. And the Egyptians mourned his death for seventy days.

4 When the period of mourning was over, Joseph approached Pharaoh’s advisers and said, “Please do me this favor and speak to Pharaoh on my behalf. 5 Tell him that my father made me swear an oath. He said to me, ‘Listen, I am about to die. Take my body back to the land of Canaan, and bury me in the tomb I prepared for myself.’ So please allow me to go and bury my father. After his burial, I will return without delay.”

6 Pharaoh agreed to Joseph’s request. “Go and bury your father, as he made you promise,” he said. 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father. He was accompanied by all of Pharaoh’s officials, all the senior members of Pharaoh’s household, and all the senior officers of Egypt. 8 Joseph also took his entire household and his brothers and their households. But they left their little children and flocks and herds in the land of Goshen. 9 A great number of chariots and charioteers accompanied Joseph.

10 When they arrived at the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan River, they held a very great and solemn memorial service, with a seven-day period of mourning for Joseph’s father. 11 The local residents, the Canaanites, watched them mourning at the threshing floor of Atad. Then they renamed that place (which is near the Jordan) Abel-mizraim, for they said, “This is a place of deep mourning for these Egyptians.”

49:26 of the ancient mountains: Or of my ancestors. • Joseph . . . is a prince among his brothers: A reflection of both his character and his position.

49:27 The oracle about Benjamin describes a violent tribe (see Judg 20; 1 Sam 9:1-2; 19:10; 22:17).

49:28 These prophecies are broad in scope, foretelling the future of the different tribes in general terms. Individuals, by faith and obedience, could find great blessing from God regardless of what happened to their clan.

49:29-33 Bury me with my father: This grave in the land of Canaan represented hope for the future (cp. 47:29-30). Others buried at the cave of Machpelah near Hebron were Sarah (23:19), Abraham (25:7-9), Isaac (35:27-29), Rebekah, and Leah.

49:33 Jacob died at the age of 147 (47:28), bringing his life of struggle and sorrow to an end. Jacob had always had an unquenchable desire for God’s blessing. He had a deep piety that habitually relied on God despite all else. In the end, he died a man of genuine faith. He learned where real blessings come from, and through his faith would be able to hand these on to his sons (Heb 11:21).

50:1-6 As with his father and grandfather, Jacob’s death brought the end of an era.

50:2: Jacob: Hebrew Israel; see note on 35:21. His body was embalmed for burial in typical Egyptian fashion.

50:3 The Egyptians mourned for Jacob for seventy days, just two days short of the mourning period for a pharaoh. This showed the great respect that the Egyptians had for Joseph.

50:4-6 Joseph needed Pharaoh’s permission to leave his post temporarily to bury his father in Canaan. Pharaoh readily granted this freedom to the former slave.

50:7-9 This was Joseph’s first return to his homeland in thirty-nine years. The trip was temporary. Centuries later, the family of Israel would permanently leave Egypt, taking Joseph’s bones with them for burial in the land of promise (see 50:25).

50:10-13 This journey into Canaan was made in sorrow to bury a man; the next journey into the land would be to live there. • Abel-mizraim means “mourning of the Egyptians.”
The brothers were afraid that God planned to fulfill the promised blessing (see Exod 13:19; Josh 24:32; Heb 11:22).

12 So Jacob’s sons did as he had commanded them. 13 They carried his body to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre. This is the cave that Abraham had bought as a permanent burial site from Ephron the Hittite.

Joseph Reassures His Brothers

14 After burying Jacob, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had accompanied him to his father’s burial. 15 But now that their father was dead, Joseph’s brothers became fearful. “Now Joseph will show his anger and pay us back for all the wrong we did to him,” they said.

16 So they sent this message to Joseph: “Before your father died, he instructed us to say to you: ‘Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly.’ So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive our sin.” When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept.

17 Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. “Look, we are your slaves!” they said.

18 But Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. 21 No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.” So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.

The Death of Joseph

22 So Joseph and his brothers and their families continued to live in Egypt. Joseph lived to the age of 110. 23 He lived to see three generations of descendants of his son Ephraim, and he lived to see the birth of the children of Manasseh’s son Makir, whom he claimed as his own.

24 “Soon I will die,” Joseph told his brothers, “but God will surely come to help you and lead you out of this land of Egypt. He will bring you back to the land he solemnly promised to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath, and he said, “When God comes to help you and lead you back, you must take my bones with you.” 26 So Joseph died at the age of 110. The Egyptians embalmed him, and his body was placed in a coffin in Egypt.
The Lord Jesus and the apostles loved the book of Psalms and quoted from it; beyond that, they lived out of it. These ancient prayers and praises of Israel are also God’s inspired word. The psalms provide a bridge to cross between the Old and New Testaments, and the themes addressed in the psalms find further development in the NT. Jesus connects with the dynasty of David in its mission, its disappointments, and its failures. Where David’s dynasty has failed, Jesus gives hope. His sinlessness, his identification with the suffering of the members of David’s dynasty, his perfect obedience, and his exaltation open up new perspectives on the many questions raised in the Psalter. Yet we are still living by faith; the hope of the book of Psalms, that God’s people will completely fulfill his purposes and that all nations will submit to the Messiah, still remains for the future (see 1 Cor 15:25-27).

BACKGROUND
The psalms, like all Scripture, are inspired and given by God (2 Tim 3:16). And yet, each psalm originated with a human author as a prayer or praise to the Lord. The psalms are diverse, composed as the responses of God’s people to him. The psalms include laments, psalms of praise, wisdom, thanksgiving, reflections on God’s mighty acts, celebrations of God’s revelation, and worship.

The book of Psalms reflects a long process of collection. For a thousand years, poets wrote these poems while people recited and collected them. The Temple liturgy encouraged both the collection and the writing of psalms. Gradually editors incorporated smaller collections into larger collections, shaping five collections into the one book of Psalms.

SUMMARY
The first two psalms serve as an introduction to the entire Psalter (the book of Psalms). Psalm 1 introduces the Lord’s instruction in wisdom, while Ps 2 introduces God’s rule over a rebellious, sinful world. In Ps 1, the person of God’s choice is godly and wise, delights in God, lives by divine instruction, and is not influenced by evildoers. Psalm 2 speaks of the rebellion of the nations and of the wicked, the judgment of rebellious nations, and the protection of the godly.

Reading Ps 1 in the context of the entire Psalter raises three questions: (1) Is there forgiveness for sins? (2) Why do the godly suffer? and (3) Why do the wicked prosper? Reading Ps 2 in the context of the Psalter raises two similar questions: (1) Why do the nations prosper? and (2) Why were the
kings of David’s line not victorious? The psalmists wrestle with these questions and offer different perspectives. Some of the poets quietly accept their problems, while others wrestle with God, question him, or become exasperated. New questions and issues develop out of their dialogues with God.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE PSALMS
The process of editing the Psalter into one book took place over time and was completed following the exile to Babylon. There are several markers of editorial activity:

1. The editors placed Pss 1 and 2 as an introduction to the whole book of Psalms. Both psalms give an idealized portrayal: Psalm 1 is a portrayal of the ideal godly person who lives by God’s instruction. Psalm 2 portrays the Messiah, the ideal king of Israel. The rest of the Psalter develops and deepens these portrayals, while at the same time expressing how neither the people of God nor their king were able to fulfill God’s ideals and bring about the happiness and peace of God’s kingdom. The Psalter therefore testifies to Jesus as the ideal godly man and king of Israel, the Messiah who alone has pleased God and by whom alone redemption, happiness, and peace are secure.

2. Individual psalms were collected in units. The editors arranged these smaller groupings of psalms into five larger collections: Book One (Pss 1–41, with a doxology and double Amen in 41:13), Book Two (Pss 42–72, with a doxology and double Amen in 72:19), Book Three (Pss 73–89, with a doxology and double Amen in 89:52), Book Four (Pss 90–106, with a doxology and Amen in 106:48), and Book Five (Pss 107–150, without a doxology).

3. Books One (Pss 1–41) and Two (Pss 42–72) form the first stage of the collection. The shift from David (Pss 3–32, 34–41) in Book One to collections of psalms in Book Two (the sons of Korah, Pss 42–49; Asaph, Ps 50; David, Ps 51–65, 68–70; Solomon, Ps 72) reveals a thematic shift from David as the sole model and teacher to other perspectives opened by these psalms. At the end of Book Two, the editor comments, “This ends the prayers of David son of Jesse” (72:20). This comment remained in place even when Books Three, Four, and Five (with additional psalms of David) were added to the collection.

4. The addition of Book Three (Pss 73–89) marks the second stage. Book Three shares with Book Two its preference of the name Elohim for God (Pss 42–83) and its diversity of collections (Asaph, Pss 73–83; sons of Korah, Pss 84–85, 87–88; David, Ps 86). Psalm 73 breaks the spell cast by the magnificent vision of the messianic kingdom in Ps 72, as it questions God’s justice and power. This issue comes to a head again in Ps 89, the last psalm of Book Three.
5. The psalms of Book Four (Pss 90–106) wrestle with questions raised at the time of the Exile, when it seemed that God’s covenant with David had been dissolved (see Ps 89). Several psalms encourage individual growth in character and godliness (Pss 91–92) in response to the crisis. Most psalms in this collection present God as the true and faithful king whose kingdom extends to every part of creation (Pss 93–100). He still loves the people, the flock of his pasture (Ps 100), but they have to listen to him (Pss 95, 100). He is the source of forgiveness, and his compassion assures the exilic community that the Lord still cares for his people. The review of redemptive history from creation to the Exile (Pss 104–106) explains both God’s wisdom and Israel’s folly as a framework for understanding the Exile. The benediction of Ps 106:48 is included in 1 Chr 16:36 and might indicate that Book Four was completed in the postexilic era (when Chronicles was compiled).

6. Book Five (Pss 107–150) was then added to the Psalter. It includes a number of smaller collections: the Egyptian Hallel (Pss 111–118, including three hallelujah hymns, Pss 111–113, and the Great Hallel, Pss 114–118), the Torah psalm (Ps 119), the Songs of Ascents (Pss 120–134), eight psalms of David (Pss 138–145), and five concluding hallelujah hymns (Pss 146–150). Book Five sets out the thematic progression of affliction, lament, God’s rescue, and praise. The opening psalm (Ps 107) begins this pattern, and its final verse (107:43) points to the importance of wisdom in discerning God’s ways. Psalm 119, the longest psalm, celebrates the wisdom of God and the word of God. The Lord’s historic care for Israel in the wilderness (Pss 114–118, 135–136) prepares exilic and postexilic Israel to read David’s final prayers (Pss 138–145) in a new way: David looks forward to the full coming of God’s kingdom (Ps 145). The hallelujah psalms affirm the truthfulness of this hope (Ps 146–150).

7. Additions appear to have been made to already-existing psalms. This may explain the prayer for the restoration of Zion (51:18-19) and for God’s blessing on Jerusalem (69:34-36). Changes in the circumstances of God’s people may have occasioned the addition of new lines in each case.

8. The available manuscripts reveal some flexibility in the organization and titles of the psalms. Both the Hebrew and Greek editions of the Psalter contain 150 psalms, but with differing divisions and numbering as well as differences regarding which psalms have titles. The Greek text combines both Pss 9–10 and Pss 114–115 into one psalm each, but it splits both Pss 116 and 147 into two. Differences between the Hebrew and English numbering are indicated in the notes.

By the time of Jesus Christ, the Psalter was well known as the book of Psalms (Luke 20:42; Acts 1:20). It was part of the third section of the Hebrew canon, called the Writings (Luke 24:44; see Old Testament Introduction, “The Canon of the Old Testament,” p. 4).

AUTHORS

Many of the psalms are associated with David, but not all of them; less than half (seventy-three of them) are connected with him. Others are connected with Asaph (Pss 50, 73–83), the sons of Korah (Pss 42–49, 84–85, 87), Solomon (Pss 72, 127), Heman (Ps 88), Ethan (Ps 89), and Moses (Ps 90).
Of the 116 psalms with a title (see “Psalm Titles,” below), most identify a person. The person named may be the author, but not necessarily. The Hebrew preposition le before the name (often translated “of”) can mean “for,” “dedicated to,” “concerning,” “to,” or “by.” So, ledawid (often translated “of David”) could be interpreted as “for David,” “dedicated to David,” “concerning David,” or “by David.” While many psalms “of David” may have been written by him, there are several reasons for caution. The titles occasionally have two names, such as David and Jeduthun or Asaph (Pss 39, 62, 77). It is possible that the other individual was the actual author of the psalm. Furthermore, the psalms whose titles connect them with an episode of David’s life (Pss 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142) provide little or no specific connection with those episodes. For example, the title in Ps 51 connects the psalm with David’s sin and Nathan’s rebuke. The psalm speaks of sin, forgiveness, and a broken spirit, but any mention of the specifics of the sin is notoriously absent. In addition, several psalms “of David” seem to assume the existence of the Temple, which was not constructed until after David’s death (see Ps 5:7; 122:title; 138:2). Similarly, the title of Ps 30 connects David with the dedication of the Temple, and Ps 69 does not seem to fit with what is known of David’s life. Finally, some textual traditions vary in the mention of David in the heading (e.g., Pss 122, 124). It is possible, therefore, that ledawid should be understood in many cases as meaning “for/dedicated to/concerning David” rather than “by David.” Such psalms evoke his persona as the chief representative of the dynasty of David without implying that he himself was the author of the psalm. Still, there are many psalms that could have been authored by David himself.

LITERARY ISSUES

The title Psalms for the collection comes from the Greek word psalmos (“song”; see Luke 24:44; 20:42), which translates the Hebrew mizmor, a word frequently found in the titles of individual psalms (e.g., see Ps 3:title, “psalm”). The word mizmor is related to a verb meaning “to play a stringed instrument.” The psalms were originally accompanied by instruments and were part of the oral tradition of Israel before they were collected into groupings. The Hebrew title of the Psalter is tehillim (“praises”), a word that is related to the expression hallelujah (“praise Yahweh”).

Psalm Titles. The psalm titles, or short superscriptions accompanying most of the psalms, give information such as the author (see above), the type of psalm (e.g., song, prayer), a musical notation, a notation on the use of the psalm, a historical context, or a dedication. Much of the information is not well understood. As a result, many scholars do not place much emphasis on the psalm titles in the interpretation of the psalms.

In the Hebrew text, the psalm titles are typically numbered as verse 1. As a result, the verse numbers through the entire psalm differ from the numbers in the NLt and most English translations.

Interlude (Hebrew Selah). This word is found seventy-one times in the book of Psalms. The meaning of the word is uncertain, though it is probably a musical or literary term. In the NLt it is consistently rendered Interlude.
Groupings of the Psalms. The psalms can be grouped in a number of ways:

- By the names they use for God: Yahweh ("the LORD," Pss 1–41) and Elohim ("God," Pss 42–72).
- By the names in the titles: David (Pss 3–32, 34–41, etc.), the sons of Korah (Pss 42–49, 84–85, 87–88), and Asaph (Pss 50, 73–83).
- By genre (see below).
- Many of the psalms are in collections within the Psalter: e.g., the Songs of Ascents (Pss 120–134). Other collections were recognized in Jewish tradition, such as the Egyptian Hallel (Pss 113–118) and the hallelujah hymns (Pss 146–150).
- By thematic connections, such as God’s kingship (Pss 93–100), or the storyline from creation to the Exile (Pss 104–106).

Genres of the Psalms. The psalm titles often designate the genre of a psalm. The most frequent genre designation in a psalm’s title is “psalm” (Hebrew mizmor), a song originally accompanied by stringed instruments. Less frequent are the words maskil ("psalm, a chant": Pss 32, 42, 44–45, 52–55, 74, 88, 89), miktam ("psalm, a chant": Pss 16, 56–60), shir ("song": Pss 45, 120–135), shiggayon ("psalm," a generic or musical term: Ps 7), tepillah ("prayer": Pss 17, 86, 90) and tehillah ("psalm of praise": Ps 145), higgayon ("meditation," meaning unknown: Ps 9:16), and todah (psalm of thanksgiving: Ps 100).

In addition to the genre identifications that are found in the Hebrew text, the psalms may also be divided into three main categories:

1. Wisdom or instructional psalms (Pss 1, 15, 24, 33, 34, 37, 73, 90, 107);
2. Psalms of lament (most psalms in books I—III), which can be subdivided into individual laments and community laments;
3. Hymns of praise or thanksgiving (Pss 8, 19, 29, 65, 67, 114), which can similarly be divided into individual and community hymns.

The psalms of praise include several subgenres, including “royal” psalms about the king (Pss 2, 45, 72, 89, 110); psalms ascribing kingship to the Lord (Pss 93, 95–99); hymns about creation (Pss 19, 29, 104); and hymns about Zion (Pss 46, 48, 84, 87).

Another way of reading the psalms is based on the movement in many psalms from instruction to a problem and from a problem to a renewal in commitment and character. The Psalter as a collection of five books is largely instructional in nature. It is “instruction” (torah, “law,” 1:2) and has the purpose of teaching God’s people how to live.

THE PSALMS IN ISRAEL’S WORSHIP

The collection of 150 lyric poems known as the Psalter contains much information on music-making in ancient Israel. The majority of psalms are songs of praise, thanksgiving, prayer, and repentance. There are also historic odes that relate great national events (for example, Ps 30, “a song at the dedication of the Temple,” and Ps 137, which portrays the sufferings of the Jews in captivity). Such psalms played a role in the life of the community; however, the exact nature of that role is uncertain.

MEANING AND MESSAGE

The psalms provide windows into the souls of the ancient saints who wrote them. Their theological reflections are not easy or simple-
minded, but the psalmists’ faith, when tried, is purified. The psalms model depth of character, wisdom, honesty, and authenticity. They prepare God’s people for the coming of Jesus Christ as the perfect Adam (human) and as the king, the descendant of David who has absolute integrity.

The prayers in the Psalter are more than models to be imitated: They are God’s instructions for righteous living, part of his torah (“instruction”; see Pss 1, 19, 119). God teaches who he is, what he has done, and what he expects from his people. The psalms are God-centered, instructing God’s people to be like God, to receive his correction, and to discern error in themselves. Through the psalms, God encourages his people individually and as communities to worship him vibrantly. The psalms and their musical accompaniments bear witness about God to the world.

The psalmists reflected on the transitory nature of life, on suffering, and on the many kinds of adversity that human beings experience. As the psalmists faced alienation and pain, they longed for God’s presence, provision, and protection (e.g., Ps 23), and for a lasting glory. Even the psalms connected with David often reveal a humble, rather than a victorious, David—a humiliated David more often than a glorious and royal David. The psalmists lived in a world full of alienation, and they longed for redemption. They experienced shame, and they trusted in the Lord to vindicate them with his glorious presence.

The Psalter illustrates the failures of Israel and of David’s dynasty. The best of the godly Israelites and of the Davidic kings were unable to bring in the condition of happiness and peace that Pss 1 and 2 speak of (see also Ps 72). The psalms are God’s exhortation to each person to cultivate wisdom, to trust in him, to live by grace, and to have hope in the coming one who would bring God’s blessings to a needy world.

Jesus and the apostles understood Jesus’ life and ministry in light of the psalms (see Matt 13:34-35; 21:16, 42; 23:39; John 2:17; 15:25; 19:24, 28, 36; Acts 2:22-35; 4:11; 13:32-38; Rom 15:3; 1 Cor 15:25-27; Eph 4:7-10; 1 Pet 2:7). Jesus entered the world of humans and lived out the patterns found in the psalms, including humiliation, suffering, death, vindication, and glory. He is the only human being who has completely pleased God (Ps 1). He is the Messiah and King (Ps 2) who has become our means of redemption, happiness, and peace.

FURTHER READING

LESLIE C. ALLEN

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE
Psalms (1994)

PETER C. CRAIGIE
Psalms 1–50 (1983)

MARK D. FUTATO
Psalms in Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol. 7 (2009)

DEREK KIDNER
Psalms 1–72, 73–150 (1973, 1975)

MARVIN E. TATE
Psalms 51–100 (1990)

GERALD H. WILSON
Psalms, Volume 1 (2002)
Book One (Pss 1–41) Book One reveals God’s purpose in the world, God’s order in creation, and the significance of wisdom. It issues an invitation to dwell on the mountain of the Lord and gives insights into the psalmist’s life and struggles.

1. BOOK ONE (PSS 1–41)

PSALM 1

1 Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.
2 But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night.
3 They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.
4 But not the wicked! They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.

5 They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place among the godly.
6 For the Lord watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.

PSALM 2

1 Why are the nations so angry? Why do they waste their time with futile plans?
2 The kings of the earth prepare for battle; the rulers plot together against the Lord and against his anointed one.

1:3-5 The future belongs to the godly.
1:3 Well-watered trees endure and bear abundant fruit (cp. Jer 17:8).
1:4 The coming time of judgment (1:5) will carry off the wicked and their deeds (35:5; 83:13; Isa 17:13; see note on Jer 13:24).
1:5 The wicked cannot abide the scrutiny of the Lord’s judgment; they are already condemned (see 5:5; 7:6; 101:7).
1:6 The Lord’s care for the righteous and the demise of the wicked both demonstrate the Lord’s principle of retribution (see Gal 6:7-10). The brief and futile lives of the wicked will end, whereas the Lord and his saints will triumph (see 9:5, 6; 18; 10:16; 37:20; 73:27; 92:9; cp. 142:4; Isa 57:1). The godly (see 5:12; 14:5) are joyful (1:1) because they are the friends of the Lord and his saints who triumph (see 9:5, 6; 18; 10:16; 37:20; 73:27; 92:9; cp. 142:4; Isa 57:1). * Mockers hate the Lord, scorn his wisdom, and insult anyone who attempts to correct them (Prov 9:7-8). They seek only the “wisdom” that justifies their actions. These brash people have little regard for the Lord, his plans, or his children (see 86:14; 119:51, 69, 78, 85, 122). These three terms (wicked, sinners, mockers) apply to all kinds of ungodly people.
1:2 The law (Hebrew torah) of the Lord is the full revelation of God’s instructions (see note on Deut 4:44). * Meditating is a process of inner reflection that can be positive (1:2; 63:6; 77:12; 143:5) or negative (see 2:1; 38:12). The Lord’s word is the object of godly meditation (119:48). * Day and night includes all times, whether one is walking, standing, sitting, or sleeping (see Deut 6:7).

1:1 Ps 26:5
Ps 4:14
*ashrey (0835)
Ps 32:1
1:2 Ps 25:5; 119:13-16
*torah (8451)
Ps 19:7
*hugah (897)
Ps 35:28
1:3 Jer 17:7-8
1:4 Ps 35:4-5
Isa 17:12-13
1:5 Ps 5:5; 9:7-8; 89:5, 7
1:6 Ps 9:5-6; 11:6
2 Tim 2:19
2:1 Ps 21:11; 46:6
Acts 4:25-26
3 “Let us break their chains,” they cry, “and free ourselves from slavery to God.”

4 But the one who rules in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them.

5 Then in anger he rebukes them, terrifying them with his fierce fury.

6 For the Lord declares, “I have placed my chosen king on the throne in Jerusalem, on my holy mountain."

7 The king proclaims the Lord’s decree: “The Lord said to me, ‘You are my son. Today I have become your Father."

8 Only ask, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the whole earth as your possession.

9 You will break them with an iron rod and smash them like clay pots.’ ”

10 Now then, you kings, act wisely! Be warned, you rulers of the earth!

Royal Psalms (Ps 2)

The royal psalms all have some reference to the king, the nature of his rule, and his relationship to God. Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 61, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, and 144 are usually regarded as the royal psalms. Belief in God’s kingship is the foundation of the royal psalms (Ps 2). Each king in David’s dynasty served as messianic agent—i.e., he represented God’s kingship. As God’s representative, the Davidic king was expected to uphold the qualities of justice, righteousness, faithfulness, and peace (72:1-3).

The royal psalms express the hope and aspirations of the dynasty of David. But with its corruption and failure, the dynasty came to an apparent end (89:38-45). Yet hope remained alive for the future of a king descended from David who would serve as God’s agent. The royal psalms maintain this hope for a king whose perfect obedience would guarantee the continuity of David’s dynasty and the perpetual benefits of his reign. In this sense, the royal psalms may also be called messianic psalms in that they express hope in messianic agent, an ideal king descended from David. Jesus stated that the psalmists wrote of him (Luke 24:44), and other NT writers affirmed the identification of Jesus as the Messiah. Some of the most significant links are as follows:

- Psalm 2 is associated with Israel’s king, the descendant of David. Nevertheless, it speaks of a universal vindication and rule that far transcends even David’s or Solomon’s reigns (see Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5).

- Psalm 45 is a marriage psalm for one of the Davidic kings, possibly Solomon, yet it speaks of a permanent rule (45:6).

- Psalm 110 is the most frequently quoted messianic psalm (see Matt 22:43-45; Acts 2:34-35; Heb 1:13; 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:21). It speaks of the privileges, universal victory, and continuing priesthood of David and his successors. Such language would be hyperbole, and possibly misleading, except for its fulfillment in Jesus. In contrast to the angels who are privileged to stand in God’s presence (Luke 1:19), Christ the Son sits in the place of power and authority over all things at God’s right hand (Heb 1:13).

one (or his messiah); the Lord chose the kings of David’s dynasty to establish his kingdom throughout the earth. The NT confirms that Jesus, the appointed and anointed Son of God (Acts 4:26; 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5), fulfills the role in which these earlier kings failed.

2:3 break their chains: These kings believe that acknowledging the true God and his chosen ruler will result in their enslavement (Isa 28:22; 52:2; cp. Lam 3:7; Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 7:22; Titus 1:1).

2:4-6 The Lord finds the human threat insignificant. He provided a solution long before their rebellion. He will end their agitation through the appointment of a human agent, a descendant of David’s line who will rule the nations.

2:4 rules in heaven: The Lord’s place in the universe is so certain that he scoffs at humans who boast that they can rebel against his power and authority (see 37:13; 59:8).

2:6 my chosen king: The Lord establishes his anointed ruler. *in Jerusalem: Hebrew on Zion. See “Mount Zion, the City of God” at Ps 48, p. 947.

2:7-9 The Lord adopted the king of David’s dynasty to conquer rebellious nations by force (see 89:26-27).

2:7 my son (or Son). Today I have become your Father (or Today I reveal you as my son): People in the ancient Near East commonly accepted a father-son relationship between gods and kings. In Israel, the Lord adopted kings as his sons. God set David apart as his most excellent and exalted son (89:27). All descendants of David were the Lord’s representatives or agents. As an eternal member of the Godhead (John 1:1) and a descendant of David (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5), Jesus is the true Son of God.

2:8 In an example of the suzerain-vassal relationship between the Lord and Israel’s king (see Deuteronomy Introduction, “Literary Form,” p. 314), the Lord invites the king to ask for favors (see 21:2, 4). *All nations will be subject to David’s descendant, the Messiah.


2:10 It pleases the Lord when his people submit to him and seek his protection. The wise accept the Lord’s rebuke and desire to repent.
11 Serve the Lord with reverent fear, and rejoice with trembling.
12 Submit to God's royal son, or he will become angry, and you will be destroyed in the midst of all your activities— for his anger flares up in an instant. But what joy for all who take refuge in him!

PSALM 3
A psalm of David, regarding the time David fled from his son Absalom.
1 O Lord, I have so many enemies; so many are against me.
2 So many are saying, “God will never rescue him!”
3 But you, O Lord, are a shield around me; you are my glory, the one who holds my head high.
4 I cried out to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy mountain.
5 I lay down and slept, yet I woke up in safety, for the Lord was watching over me.
6 I am not afraid of ten thousand enemies who surround me on every side.
7 Arise, O Lord! Rescue me, my God! Slap all my enemies in the face! Shatter the teeth of the wicked!
8 Victory comes from you, O Lord. May you bless your people.

Interlude

PSALM 4
For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by stringed instruments.
1 Answer me when I call to you, O God who declares me innocent. Free me from my troubles. Have mercy on me and hear my prayer.
2 How long will you people ruin my reputation? How long will you make groundless accusations? How long will you continue your lies?
3 You can be sure of this: The Lord set apart the godly for himself. The Lord will answer when I call to him.
4 Don’t sin by letting anger control you. Think about it overnight and remain silent.
5 Offer sacrifices in the right spirit, and trust the Lord.

Interlude

2:11-12 rejoice: Rulers must welcome the Son as their true and only King. • Submit to God's royal son (or Submit to God's royal Son, or kiss the son; the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain): Kissing was an expression of submission (Hos 13:2). • The Lord gives joy to all who fear him (1:1-2) and trust him (18:30; 34:22; 119:1-3).

Ps 3 This group of psalms moves readers from the orderly world of Ps 1–2 to a disoriented one. The Lord’s anointed cries out while facing enemies, ferocious opposition, evil schemes, and the Lord’s apparent distance.

Ps 3:1-2 This psalm laments that the expectations raised by Ps 1–2 have not been met. But even when beset by enemies, godly people need not question the Lord’s just dealings. Rather, they can confidently trust his goodness and expect God to rescue them.

Ps 3:1-2 This sad episode in David’s life (see 2 Sam 15–18) helps readers keep the promises of Ps 2 in perspective. The Lord granted victory to his anointed king (Ps 2), but the manner and timing of this victory remained in God’s hands.

Ps 3:1-2 The psalmist’s many enemies speak brashly (4:6; 40:15; see notes on 2:3; 12:4) and question the Lord’s ability to rescue (10:11; 22:7-8; 71:10). Their words haunt him because it seems that the Lord will not answer his prayer. These enemies wield great power (cp. 2:1-3); unlike Ps 2, this psalm does not resolve the crisis.

Ps 3:3-4 The psalmist’s eyes turn from his enemies to the Lord.

Ps 3:3-4 The psalmist contrasts the content of his enemies’ (3:2) with the Lord’s provision. The Lord is a shield for his people; he turns their defeat and shame into victory and glory (see notes on 4:2; 27:6; 140:7).

Ps 3:5 By refocusing on the Lord (3:3-4) in the midst of his crisis, the psalmist can rest, confident of his safety (see note on 4:8). The Lord cares for his servant; he protects him and keeps his mind and heart from fear (37:17; 54:4; 119:116; 145:14; see note on 121:4).

Ps 3:6 The psalmist’s peaceful confidence in the Lord’s protection and care shields him from evil and gives him a new sense of reality (23:4; 27:1, 3; 46:1; 56:4, 11; 91:5-6; 118:6).
6 Many people say, “Who will show us better times?”
   Let your face smile on us, Lord.
7 You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine.
8 In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe.

PSALM 5
For the choir director. A psalm of David, to be accompanied by the flute.
1 O Lord, hear me as I pray; pay attention to my groaning.
2 Listen to my voice in the morning, Lord; rescue me, and I will go to your presence.
3 Each morning I bring my requests to you; I long to be directed by you.
4 O God, you take no pleasure in evil; those who rebel against you do not endure.
5 Many people say, “Who will show us better times?”
   Let your face smile on us, Lord.
6 You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine.
7 In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe.

Title of the Messiah | Reference in Psalms | Applied to Jesus
---|---|---
Messiah (Anointed One) | 2:2 | Matt 16:16; Acts 4:24-30; 13:33
Son of God | 2:7, 12 | Matt 3:17; 17:5; Acts 13:33; Rom 1:4; Heb 1:5; 5:5
Sovereign King | 8:4-6 | 1 Cor 15:27; Heb 2:8
Victorious King | 22:131 | Matt 27:35, 46; Mark 15:34; John 19:24
Faithful Servant | 40:6-8; 69:1-36 | John 2:17; Rom 15:3; Heb 10:7
Royal High Priest | 68:18 | Eph 4:8
Precious Stone | 110:4 | Heb 5:6; 7:17, 21

Messiah in the Psalms (2:2). In the NT, the writers of the Gospels, Acts, the Letters, and the book of Revelation strongly connect Jesus with the Psalter. Jesus completes David’s dynasty. Although the earlier kings failed, there is now hope. Jesus’ sinlessness, his identification with Israel’s kings, his perfect obedience, and his exaltation open up new perspectives on the many questions raised in the Psalter. We are still living by faith. The hope of the Psalter is that all nations will submit to God’s king, the Messiah (cp. 1 Cor 15:25-27).

4:6 your face (or the light of your face): The psalmist seeks God’s favor and peace (Num 6:25-26), which can transform darkness into light (see 27:1). Confident trust in the Lord is an antidote to anger, resentment, jealousy, and materialism.
4:8 Peace comes from God’s blessing and protection (4:6; see 37:11).
Ps 5 This morning prayer (5:3) expresses unwavering confidence in the Lord’s help and protection. The psalmist asks for and awaits God’s response (5:1-3). He describes the schemes of the wicked in detail but does not get lost in his circumstances. The psalmist also knows that the wicked cannot coexist with God (5:4-6; 9; see 1:5). He keeps returning to the Lord (5:7-8; 10; see 5:1-3), and then he prays for the godly community (5:10-12; see 3:8b).
5:1-2 The request hear me appears in several prayers as a call for God’s attention during a time of trouble (39:12; 84:8; 143:1), as does pay attention (17:1; 54:2; 130:2). The needy ask their God, “Are you listening?”
5:3 The psalmist begins and ends each day with prayer, awaiting new expressions of God’s fidelity and goodness (143:8). • wait expectantly: The psalmist does not demand God’s grace but places hope in it (see Mic 7:7; Hab 2:1).
5:5 the proud: Mockers (see note on 1:1), the wicked (73:3; 75:4), and the arrogant (10:2) use their mouths to twist truth and challenge the faith of the godly. • The Lord allows only the godly into his presence (see 1:5). His holiness and justice do not tolerate oppression or those who do evil. • you hate: The Lord rejects proud sinners (see also 11:5).
5:7 God promises his unfailing love—his covenant goodness and faithfulness—to his people (see 25:6; 69:16; Lam 3:32). • your house: The godly long to come into God’s presence with reverence and awe (see Heb 12:28).
5:8 God guides those who are obedient, submissive, and patient in waiting for him to lead, provide, and protect them (27:11; 43:3; 143:10), not those who expect God simply to endorse their own decisions. • Following the right path of wisdom leads to the Lord (27:11; 61:2; 139:24).
5:9-10 The psalmist again describes the vile acts of the wicked, who cannot stand in God’s presence.
5:9 with flattery: Greek version reads with lies. Cp. Rom 3:13, where Paul quotes from this verse in his description of the depravity of all people.
PSALM 5:10

5:10 The psalmist prays for the justice and retribution that God promised against the wicked (1:6)—those who have rebelled against the Lord. • The wicked lay traps to kill (38:12) or deceive (140:4-5).

PSALM 6

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by an eight-stringed instrument.

1 O Lord, don’t rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your rage.
2 Have compassion on me, Lord, for I am weak.
3 I am sick at heart.
4 Return, O Lord, and rescue me.
5 For the dead do not remember you. Who can praise you from the grave?
6 I am worn out from sobbing.
7 My vision is blurred by grief; my eyes are worn out because of all my enemies.
8 Go away, all you who do evil, for the Lord has heard my weeping.
9 The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord will answer my prayer.
10 May all my enemies be disgraced and terrified.

May they suddenly turn back in shame.

PSALM 7

A psalm of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush of the tribe of Benjamin.

1 I come to you for protection, O Lord my God.
2 If you don’t, they will maul me like a lion, tearing me to pieces with no one to rescue me.
3 O Lord my God, if I have done wrong or am guilty of injustice,
4 if I have betrayed a friend or plundered my enemy without cause,

5:11 A blessing rests on all who take refuge in God (see 18:30). • Joy and praise make good companions. The godly rejoice when they see evidence of God’s rescue. They sing joyful praises as a new song (see 33:3). When the Lord restores peace to this world, puts down evil, and rewards the righteous, they will have lasting joy (9:2-4; 53:6; 90:14-15; 118:24). • The children of God, who find refuge in him, love his name. To love his name is to love his very character.

5:12 The psalmist extends his concern beyond himself to all the godly. • A shield, here an image of God’s protection, reflects spears and arrows from its bearer.

Ps 6 The occasion for this lament might have been sickness or a mental or spiritual depression from which the psalmist sought healing.

6:1-3 The psalmist asks for God’s favor and restoration at a difficult time.
6:1:3 The psalmist does not explicitly connect God’s discipline with sin here (cp. 39:8-11), but it might be implied.
6:2-3 In his longing for God’s response to his prayer, the psalmist grew physically weak (6:6; see 77:3; 119:81; 142:1-3; see also Ps. 101). Fasting might have played a part in his agony, but this is not mentioned.
6:4-5 The experience was so painful that the psalmist might as well have been dead, or perhaps he feared for his life.
6:5 from the grave? Hebrew from Sheol? In the OT, Sheol is the abode of the dead. It is not necessarily associated with punishment.
6:6-7 The psalmist is exhausted to the depths of his being from the anguish of his spiritual distance from the Lord (31:9; 22:1; 31:10; 102:5). • When eyes dim, the body is failing (see 13:3; 31:9; 38:10; Matt 6:22).
6:8-10 In a closing note of triumph, the psalmist reasserts his confidence in the Lord.

Ps 7 This psalm consists of a lament (7:1-2), an oath of innocence (7:3-5), an appeal to God’s justice (7:6-9), an affirmation of God’s just kingship (7:10-16), and a concluding hymn of praise (7:17).

7:1-2 Persecutors (a common term for “enemies”) intentionally seek out people in order to destroy them (31:15; 56:1-2; 71:11; 143:3).
7:2 Like a lion, a wicked enemy relentlessly and violently pursues its prey (10:9; 17:12; 22:13, 21; 35:17; 57:4), but God promises victory (91:13).
7:3-5 The psalmist swears to his innocence, making himself vulnerable to scrutiny (7:9).
7:3 The psalmist does not claim to be without sin, but he knows that he does not deserve the brutal attacks of his opponents (see 35:7).
5 then let my enemies capture me. Let them trample me into the ground and drag my honor in the dust. Interlude

6 Arise, O Lord, in anger! Stand up against the fury of my enemies! Wake up, my God, and bring justice!
7 Gather the nations before you. Rule over them from on high.
8 The Lord judges the nations. Declare me righteous, O Lord, for I am innocent, O Most High!
9 End the evil of those who are wicked, and defend the righteous.
10 For you look deep within the mind and heart, O righteous God.
11 God is my shield, saving those whose hearts are true and right.
12 God is an honest judge. He is angry with the wicked every day.

Notation References*

Interlude (Selah)
3:2, 4, 8; etc.
Accompanied by stringed instruments
Pss 4, 6, 54, 55, 61, 67, 76 Ps 5
Accompanied by the flute
Pss 6, 12
An eight-stringed instrument
Pss 8, 81, 84 Ps 9
Accompanied by a stringed instrument
Ps 22
Sung to the tune “Death of the Son”
Pss 45, 69
Sung to the tune “Doe of the Dawn”
Ps 56
Sung to the tune “Lilies”
Ps 57–59, 75
Sung by soprano voices (alamoth)
Ps 60
Sung to the tune “Dove on Distant Oaks”
Ps 80
Sung to the tune “Do Not Destroy!”
Ps 88
Sung to the tune “Lily of the Testimony”
Sung to the tune “Doe of the Dawn”
Sung to the tune “Lilies of the Covenant”
Sung to the tune “The Suffering of Affliction”

* All full-psalm listings refer to Psalm titles

**Musical Notations in the Psalms (Ps 5). These musical notations are not well understood.**

7:5 *trumpele*: Cp. 44:5; 60:12; 91:13; 108:13. *into the ground . . . in the dust*: Disgrace and shame can lead to death and the grave (143:3; see 13:3-4).
7:6 With this appeal to God for justice in the world, the psalmist also submits to God’s examination.
7:6 God’s judgment brings justice, despite the chaos created by adversaries (see 7:11).
7:8 The judgment is against the defendants (the nations) and in favor of the righteous plaintiff (the psalmist; see 43:1). *Although not innocent of all sin, the psalmist is a person of authentic integrity* (see 15:2; 25:21; 41:12; 78:72; cp. Job 1:1, 8; 9:20, 22).
7:9 God examines the mind and heart of each person (see 11:3-4; 26:2; 139:1, 23).
7:10-13 The psalmist moves from his own situation (7:1-9) to speak for all the godly who long for redemption (7:10-16). He depicts God as the righteous King who vindicates his subjects when they cry out for rescue.
7:11 The honest Lord cannot be bought or bribed, nor does he abuse his power (9:4; cp. 82:1-8).
7:12-13 sword . . . bow . . . deadly weapons . . . flaming arrows: As the Divine Warrior, God (literally he) takes the offensive on behalf of himself and his people.
7:14 Evil begins with small words or steps, and gives birth to increasingly worse deeds as time goes on (see Isa 59:4-5).
7:17 I will thank . . . sing praise: The laments in Ps 3–7 usually move from lament to praise, as does the Psalter as a whole. *Most High:* This is an ancient designation for God (see note on 91:1). *God is just and reliable, so his order prevails in this world.*

Ps 8 Psalm 8 opens the second segment of Book One (Pss 8–14). The psalmist celebrates God’s creation and the dignity of the ideal human being (see Ps 1). Instead of the world of enemies, wicked people, and distorted justice that is presented in Pss 3–7, this psalm promotes an image of the world as God originally created it. A weary person can envision a place of dignity in God’s world.

8:8 **title to be accompanied by a stringed instrument**: Hebrew according to the gittith.
8:1 The Lord (Hebrew Yahweh), the covenant God of Israel (Exod 3:15), also holds the title of Lord (Hebrew ’adonay), the king of the earth. *The word translated majestic (sometimes translated "mighty") can describe kings (136:18), heroes (16:3), mountains (76:4), or waves breaking on the seashore (93:4).
Psalm 8:2

2 You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you.

3 When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—

4 what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?

5 Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.

6 You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—

7 the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents.

8 O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!

Psalm 9

9:1 I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all the marvelous things you have done.

9:2 I will be filled with joy because of you. I will sing praises to your name, O Most High.

9:3 My enemies retreated; they staggered and died when you appeared.

9:4 For you have judged in my favor; from your throne you have judged with fairness.

9:5 I will sing praises to your name, O Most High.

While all are awe-inspiring and mighty, the created order pales in comparison with the Lord. • A person’s name embodies his reputation. • The earth and the heavens reveal the Lord’s splendor. All creation worships and praises the Lord (66:4; 113:3; 145:21).

8:2 to tell of your strength: Greek version reads to give you praise. Cp. Matt 21:16. • silencing: The loud noise of the oppressors contrasts with the praise of God. In the end, the praise of God will overwhelm the sound of evil (31:18; 63:11; 101:5; 143:12). • Those who oppose God seeth with vindictive anger (1:1-3; 44:16; cp. 149:6-7).

8:3-5 In light of God’s awesome glory, it might seem that people would be insignificant to him. However, he has crowned them with glory and honor and placed them over all creation.

8:3 The nations around Israel worshiped heavenly objects as deities. The sun, moon, and stars are indeed immense and glorious, but they are merely the work of your fingers, a reason to praise the Almighty.

8:4 what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Literally what is man that you should think of him, the son of man (or son of Adam) that you should care for him? See also 144:3. • human beings (literally son of Adam): The Hebrew idiom son of man (or son of Adam) means a human being. Through the influence of Dan 7:13-14, it became a title with divine overtones in the NT. See Heb 2:6-8, where this passage is quoted.

8:5 Yet you made them only a little lower than God: Or Yet you made them only a little lower than the angels; Hebrew reads Yet you made him [i.e., man] a little lower than Elohim. Humans bear God’s image; the Lord has endowed humans with dignity and charged them to rule (Gen 1:26-27). Hebrews 2:6-8 applies these words to Jesus Christ, the ideal human who fully realized God’s purposes. • them: Literally him (i.e., man).

8:6 gave them (literally him, i.e., man) charge of everything: The psalmist is still referring to humans in general. Paul applies these words to Jesus as the perfect man who has made the created order—even death (1 Cor 15:25-27)—subject to God and his glory. The NT connects these themes of creation and salvation with Jesus Christ (John 1:1-2, 14; Col 1:16).

8:7-8 Wild animals, including birds and fish, remind readers of God’s creation of the animal world in Gen 1. Contrary to beliefs among Israel’s neighbors in the ancient Near East, animals are not sacred.

Psalm 9-10 This hymn celebrates the Lord’s kingship and victory over evil. It might also serve as a response to the laments of Pss 3–7. Some believe that Pss 9 and 10 should be read together as one psalm in two parts because Ps 9 includes a title and Ps 10 does not, and although several letters are missing or inverted, the two psalms connect as an acrostic of the Hebrew alphabet (see note on Ps 25; other such alphabetic acrostics are Pss 25, 34, 37, 111–112, 119, 145). The ancient Greek and Latin translations treat Pss 9 and 10 as one.

9:5 I will tell: These stories educate the next generation (78:4; 145:4); when they are not remembered, a generation might easily depart from the Lord (78:11, 32). • The marvelous things include the Lord’s judgments on the enemies of his people (9:4) and his care for the oppressed (9:9). The wonders in creation, in redemption, and in revelation reveal his character and show his power (89:5; 114:4; 119:18, 27). His powerful manifestations evoke public praise (9:1; 26:7; 75:1).

9:2 filled with joy . . . sing praises: The psalmist often connects joy with praises, as one leads to the other (5:11-12; 32:11; 67:4; 90:14; 92:4).• Most High: See note on 91:1.

9:3-6 The psalmist celebrates God’s judgment of the wicked, which is a testimony to the Lord’s reliable promise to establish his kingdom on earth (1:6; Ps 2).

9:3 retreated . . . staggered: The Lord overpowers even powerful enemies (see 27:2). Israel also experienced judgment when it resisted the Lord (107:12).

9:4 The throne represents the Lord’s royal authority.
You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; you have erased their names forever.

The enemy is finished, in endless ruins; the cities you uprooted are now forgotten.

But the Lord reigns forever, executing judgment from his throne.

He will judge the world with justice and rule the nations with fairness.

The Lord is a shelter for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

Those who know your name trust in you, for you, O Lord, do not abandon those who search for you.

Sing praises to the Lord who reigns in Jerusalem.

Tell the world about his unforgottable deeds.

For he who avenges murder cares for the helpless.

He does not ignore the cries of those who suffer.

Lord, have mercy on me. See how my enemies torment me.

Snatch me back from the jaws of death.

Save me so I can praise you publicly at Jerusalem's gates,

so I can rejoice that you have rescued me.

The nations have fallen into the pit they dug for others. Their own feet have been caught in the trap they set.

The Lord is known for his justice. The wicked are trapped by their own deeds.

The wicked will go down to the grave. This is the fate of all the nations who ignore God.

But the needy will not be ignored forever; the hopes of the poor will not always be crushed.

Arise, O Lord! Do not let mere mortals defy you! Judge the nations!

Make them tremble in fear, O Lord.

Let the nations know they are merely human.

**Quiet Interlude**

**PSALM 10**

1 O Lord, why do you stand so far away? Why do you hide when I am in trouble?

2 The wicked arrogantly hunt down the poor.

5 God created the heavens and the earth with a word (Gen 1), and he can bring nations to an end with a word (see 2:5). Evil and those who do evil will come to an absolute end (109:13; Rev 21:4; see note on 69:28).

7-10 The godly do not put their hope in corruptible human government but in God's everlasting rule of justice and fairness (see Ps 96–100).

9 The Lord provides shelter in dangerous circumstances and refuge from powerful and oppressive people. The Psalter includes many similar images of the Lord, such as fortress (18:2; 31:2), refuge (59:16-17), rock (18:2; 42:9), strength (18:1), and strong tower (144:2). These images occur frequently in the royal prayers (see 9:9; 18:30). • Even oppressed, afflicted, and marginalized people (10:17; 74:21) can enjoy divine protection. • The times of trouble (10:1; 20:1) stand in contrast with appointed times when the Lord openly bestows his favor upon the afflicted (69:13; 102:13; see 107:6).

10 Alienation from the Lord might be part of an individual's experience (22:1; 42:9; 119:8), yet the psalms affirm that the Lord will not abandon his people (16:10; 37:25, 28).

11-12 Recognition that the Lord's judgment falls on some of the wicked (9:3-6) and that God promises to judge all evil (9:7-10) motivates praise. The psalmist calls on the godly community to join him.

11 The psalm writers often connect the idea that God reigns (or sits, or is enthroned) with a place, such as heaven (2:4; see 47:9), Jerusalem (Hebrew Zion; also in 9:14), “between the cherubim” (80:1; 99:1), “on high” (113:5), or “at the right hand” (110:1). Since the Lord rules the world, all people must know of his unforgottable deeds of salvation (see 9:1; 64:9; 66:16; 105:1).

12 The Lord avenges and saves his servants (18:46) by righteously judging his enemies on earth (58:11). The godly do not seek revenge; they wait for the Lord to vindicate them (94:1-2; Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19).

12 Lord and save his servants (18:46) by righteously judging his enemies on earth (58:11). The godly do not seek revenge; they wait for the Lord to vindicate them (94:1-2; Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19).

13 The psalmist returns from a vision of the glorious future to the reality of facing his enemies (9:3). • The jaws (literally gates) are a vivid image of the powerful grip of death (see 13:3-4).

14 Jerusalem's gates provide an intentional contrast to “the gates of death” (see note on 9:13).

16 Quiet Interlude: Hebrew Higgayon Selah. The meaning of this phrase is uncertain.

17 to the grave: Hebrew to Sheol. See note on 6:5.

18 Hope requires waiting for the Lord's rescue or justice (25:3, 5, 21). The godly find hope, rest, and quietness as they await the Lord (see 1:6; 27:14).

19-20 The psalmist ends his lament with a prayer for the Lord's intervention and divine vengeance. • mere mortals . . . merely human: Humans who have received authority and glory sometimes become oppressive and assume glory for themselves (see 8:4; 10:18).

Ps 10 The lament of Ps 9:13-20 continues in Ps 10 (see note on Ps 9:10), but the mood changes from confident assertion to anguished questioning. The psalmist prays for rescue, believing that the Lord, as a just king, takes care of the needy.

1: The opening questions set the mood. The Lord does not seem to hear the prayers of his people (22:1, 19; see 2 Kgs 4:27; Isa 1:15).

2-11 Wicked and oppressive people might prosper, leaving ugly consequences. Evil can be as dramatic as the psalmist portrays it here, or it could be more subtle.

2 The wicked brazenly defy God with their acts and speech (17:10; 31:18;
Let them be caught in the evil they plan for others.
3 For they brag about their evil desires; they praise the greedy and curse the Lord.
4 The wicked are too proud to seek God. They seem to think that God is dead.
5 Yet they succeed in everything they do. They do not see your punishment awaiting them. They sneer at all their enemies.
6 They think, “Nothing bad will ever happen to us! We will be free of trouble forever!”
7 Their mouths are full of cursing, lies, and threats. Trouble and evil are on the tips of their tongues.
8 They lurk in ambush in the villages, waiting to murder innocent people. They are always searching for helpless victims.
9 Like lions crouched in hiding, they wait to pounce on the helpless. Like hunters they capture the helpless and drag them away in nets.
10 Their helpless victims are crushed; they fall beneath the strength of the wicked.
11 The wicked think, “God isn’t watching us! He has closed his eyes and won’t even see what we do!”
12 Arise, O Lord! Punish the wicked, O God! Do not ignore the helpless!
13 Why do the wicked get away with despising God?

They think, “God will never call us to account.”
14 But you see the trouble and grief they cause. You take note of it and punish them. You defend the orphans.
15 Break the arms of these wicked, evil people! Go after them until the last one is destroyed.
16 The Lord is king forever and ever! The godless nations will vanish from the land.
17 Lord, you know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them.
18 You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed, so mere people can no longer terrify them.

**PSALM 11**

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 I trust in the Lord for protection. So why do you say to me, “Fly like a bird to the mountains for safety!”
2 The wicked are stringing their bows and fitting their arrows on the bowstrings. They shoot from the shadows at those whose hearts are right.
3 The foundations of law and order have collapsed. What can the righteous do?”
4 But the Lord is in his holy Temple; the Lord still rules from heaven.

59:12; 73:8; 123:4). Although the Lord will deal with them (31:23), they disturb the righteous (see 5:4-6) prior to their condemnation and judgment.

**10:3** Unlike those who have evil desires, the godly wait for justice (10:17).

**10:4 God is dead:** See 10:11; 14:1.

**10:6-7** Despite their evil ways (5:9; 28:3; Rom 3:14), the wicked expect a future free of trouble such as the righteous will enjoy. *cursing, lies, and threats:* Greek version reads cursing and bitterness. Cp. Rom 3:14.

**10:8** The wicked rely on outright violence (11:5; 37:32) and deception (Prov 12:6; 23:27-28).

**10:12-15** With confidence that the wicked will be held responsible for their deeds and that the Lord will care for the helpless, the psalmist prays intensely for rescue from evil.

10:14 Because the Lord cares for the afflicted, he will take note and punish evildoers (see 72:14; 116:15).

10:15 The psalmist strongly invokes a curse as he prays (see “Prayers for Vengeance” at Ps 137, p. 1017). *Arms* represent an ability to wage war (18:34; 44:3).

10:16 As the true and just king, God will bring the wicked to an end, as he promises (1:6).

10:17-18 The psalmist expresses his confidence in the Lord.

10:18 Mere people (see note on 8:4) misuse their power and enslave the very people God wants them to serve (see 9:19-20; Luke 22:25-26).

Ps 11 The psalmist affirms his faith in the righteous God. Even though the world appears hopelessly chaotic, both the godly and the wicked can count on God’s justice. The godly can depend on him as a refuge and shelter.

11:1 God provides protection (or refuge; see 5:11; 9:9; 25:20) when the foundations of justice collapse. *The mountains* provide another place of refuge (see 121:1; see note on 30:6-7).

11:2-3 In the inevitable battle between the evil and the godly, the wicked cannot tolerate the righteous, so they victimize them. This seems to leave the godly with nothing but questions.

11:2 The wicked live in the shadows and create gloom for the godly (82:5; 139:11; 143:3; Prov 4:19).

11:3 The wicked create a world of darkness (see 82:5).

11:4 The righteous King rules from heaven, where his throne is untouched by human corruption (see
The Poor and Needy (Ps 10)

The poor and needy are oppressed, persecuted people. They hunger and thirst for righteousness, but are deprived of it by the structures of society or the rapacious people around them (14:6; 37:14; 109:16). In their distress, they take refuge in the Lord (see 107:4-9), and they cry out to the Lord (25:16-18; 74:19; 76:9), who has promised to care for them (1:6). They have faith in him and wait hopefully for the Lord to appear and bring justice (1:18; 70:5).

One psalmist confessed that he had cried out to the Lord all his life (88:15). Much of life might be lived in anguish (90:15; see Ps 102). Affliction might be a form of discipline that gives training in righteousness (119:71, 75). The psalms testify that the Lord hears the cry of the poor (10:17-18; 12:5; 22:24; 34:6; 35:10; 74:21-23; 86:1; 107:41; 109:22, 31; 113:5-7; 140:12) and that they will be satisfied (22:26; 132:15). Then the godly will rejoice (34:2; 69:32).

Like the Lord, the messianic king brings justice to his afflicted people (72:2, 4, 12), yet he confesses that he, too, is needy (40:17). The Davidic kings before Christ did not bring ultimate justice. Jesus identifies with our human situation (Isa 53:4, 7); he is the hope of those who recognize their poverty and their need (see Matt 5:3-12).
with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand?

3 Turn and answer me, O Lord my God! Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.

4 Don’t let my enemies gloat, saying, “We have defeated him!” Don’t let them rejoice at my downfall.

5 But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me.

6 I will sing to the Lord because he is good to me.

PSALM 14
For the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 Only fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.”
2 They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!

3 The Lord looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if anyone is truly wise, if anyone seeks God.

4 But no, all have turned away; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not a single one!

5 Will those who do evil never learn? They eat up my people like bread and wouldn’t think of praying to the Lord.

6 Terror will grip them, for God is with those who obey him.

7 The wicked frustrate the plans of the oppressed, but the Lord will protect his people.

8 Who will come from Mount Zion to rescue Israel?
When the Lord restores his people, Jacob will shout with joy, and Israel will rejoice.

PSALM 15
A psalm of David.

1 Who may worship in your sanctuary, Lord?
Who may enter your presence on your holy hill?

2 Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts.

3 Those who refuse to gossip or harm their neighbors or speak evil of their friends.

4 Those who despise flagrant sinners, and honor the faithful followers of the Lord, and keep their promises even when it hurts.

5 Those who lend money without charging interest, and who cannot be bribed to lie about the innocent.

6 Such people will stand firm forever.

13
Ps 14:1-7 */Ps 53:1-6

//Ps 9:9; 40:17

14
Job 42:10
Ps 53:6, 85:1-2

15
Ps 24:3; 27:5-6

12
Ps 24:4
Eph 4:25
*Ps 18:25

13
Exod 23:1
Ps 28:3

14
Judg 11:35
Acts 28:10

15
Exod 22:25; 23:8
Deut 16:19

Ps 15 In this wisdom poem, the psalmist contrasts the lifestyle of the godly with the actions of fools (Ps 14). The questions in this psalm invite readers to examine themselves and to look away from problems with the wicked. The question of who dwells in God’s presence leads into a description of godly character qualities (cp. 24:3-6; Isa 33:14-16).

15:1 Only the godly may reside in the Lord’s presence (5:4). As his guests, they experience his hospitality and protection. *sanctuary (or tent): In David’s time, God’s sanctuary was a tent (the Tabernacle; see 1 Sam 21:6; 2 Sam 6:17; 7:6; 12:20; 1 Chr 6:32).

15:2 The godly speak truthfully and act faithfully in their relationships. Unlike the wicked, they are open and transparent (12:2-4).

15:5 The Lord prohibited Israel from charging interest to people in need (Exod 22:25-27). *The assurance of
PSALM 16
A psalm of David.

1 Keep me safe, O God, for I have come to you for refuge.
2 I said to the Lord, “You are my Master! Every good thing I have comes from you.”
3 The godly people in the land are my true heroes! I take pleasure in them!
4 Troubles multiply for those who chase after other gods. I will not take part in their sacrifices of blood or even speak the names of their gods.
5 Lord, you alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing.
You guard all that is mine.
You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.

PSALM 17
A prayer of David.

1 O Lord, hear my plea for justice. Listen to my cry for help. Pay attention to my prayer, for it comes from honest lips.
2 Declare me innocent, for you see those who do right.
3 You have tested my thoughts and examined my heart in the night. You have scrutinized me and found nothing wrong. I am determined not to sin in what I say.
4 I have followed your commands, which keep me from following cruel and evil people.
5 My steps have stayed on your path; I have not wavered from following you.
6 I am praying to you because I know you will answer, O God. Bend down and listen as I pray.
7 Show me your unfailing love in wonderful ways.

God’s presence keeps the godly from destruction (16:8; 46:5; 125:1). Their circumstances might shake them temporarily, but they ultimately stand firm (30:6; 94:18; 112:6).

Ps 16 In this psalm of confidence, the poet moves quickly from a short petition (16:1), to expressions of passionate commitment to God and his people (16:2-6), to a conclusion of confident praise (16:7-11).

16:title A psalm: Hebrew miktam. This may be a literary or musical term.
16:1 The psalmist feels safe because the Lord alone offers security (16:5-6), guidance (16:7-8), and the joy of his presence (16:9-11).
16:2 I said to the Lord: The various writers of the psalms pray, lament, and praise the Lord throughout the Psalter, and the Lord answers them (see 12:5-6).
16:4 The psalmist dissociates himself from ungodly worship, rituals, and words (see 15:3-5).
16:5 The cup of blessing represents God’s provision for all the psalmist’s needs (23:5; see 116:13; cp. 75:8; Isa 51:17).
16:6 The land is God’s gift for his people (Deut 18:8).
16:7-8 God’s instruction brings life (16:11; see 5:8; 23:1-3; 32:8; 73:24).
16:9-10 The psalmist so deeply depends on the Lord for strength and joy that he senses that God is right beside him (16:11; see 73:23; 109:31; 110:1, 5; 121:5). • Peter quoted 16:8-11 in his sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:25-28).
16:10 Knowing that not even death can separate him from the Lord strengthens the psalmist’s confidence. He fears a separation (see 13:3-4), but he remains confident of seeing the Lord (see 11:7).
16:11 O Lord, hear my plea for justice. Listen to my cry for help. Pay attention to my prayer, for it comes from honest lips.
17:1 comes from honest lips: Deception characterizes the wicked. The godly reject such deceit as a failure of character and pray for rescue from such people (5:6; 43:1; 120:2). They love honesty, truth, and integrity (15:2-3; 24:4; 101:7).
17:3-5 The psalmist declares his innocence (17:1) and commits himself to integrity by being open to God’s examination.
17:10 The psalmist expresses his confidence that life continues beyond death. The apostles applied this text to the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:25-33; 13:35).
17:11 You will show me the way of life, or allow your holy one to rot in the grave.
17:11 You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.
By your mighty power you rescue those who seek refuge from their enemies.
8 Guard me as you would guard your own eyes.
9 Protect me from wicked people who attack me, from murderous enemies who surround me.
10 They are without pity. Listen to their boasting!
11 They track me down and surround me, watching for the chance to throw me to the ground.
12 They are like hungry lions, eager to tear me apart—like young lions hiding in ambush.
13 Arise, O Lord! Stand against them, and bring them to their knees!
14 By the power of your hand, O Lord, destroy those who look to this world for their reward.
But satisfy the hunger of your treasured ones.
May their children have plenty, leaving an inheritance for their descendants.
15 Because I am righteous, I will see you. When I awake, I will see you face to face and be satisfied.

17:8 as you would guard your own eyes (literally as the pupil of your eye): This metaphor expresses God's care and affection for the psalmist (see Deut 32:10). The shadow of God's wings is a place of his protection from enemies and adversity (36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4).

17:13-14 The psalmist confidently prays for the Lord's victory, knowing that God possesses more power than the evildoers. The psalmist finds his joy in the Lord's inheritance (16:5), whereas the wicked search for joy in this world.

17:15 see you face to face: The psalmist does not allow temporary concerns raised by adversaries to stand in the way of his experiencing a real and lasting relationship with the Lord.

Ps 18 This royal drama of divine rescue (also found with minor variations in 2 Sam 22) encourages readers who are following the laments and requests for rescue in Ps 16 and 17. The psalmist describes the dramatic nature of God's rescue in three different ways (18:7-15, 16-19, 30-36). The psalm also extends hope that a future Son of David will be totally victorious over evil (18:43-50; cp. Ps 2).

18:1-50 // 2 Sam 22:1-51
For the choir director: A psalm of David, the servant of the Lord. He sang this song to the Lord on the day the Lord rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul. He sang:

1 I love you, Lord; you are my strength.
2 The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection.
He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety.
3 I called on the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and he saved me from my enemies.
4 The ropes of death entangled me; floods of destruction swept over me.
5 The grave wrapped its ropes around me; death laid a trap in my path.
6 But in my distress I cried out to the Lord; yes, I prayed to my God for help. He heard me from his sanctuary; my cry to him reached his ears.
7 Then the earth quaked and trembled. The foundations of the mountains shook; they quaked because of his anger.
8 Smoke poured from his nostrils; fierce flames leaped from his mouth. Glowing coals blazed forth from him.
9 He opened the heavens and came down; dark storm clouds were beneath his feet.
10 They are without pity. Listen to their boasting!
11 They track me down and surround me, watching for the chance to throw me to the ground.
12 They are like hungry lions, eager to tear me apart—like young lions hiding in ambush.
13 Arise, O Lord! Stand against them, and bring them to their knees!
14 By the power of your hand, O Lord, destroy those who look to this world for their reward.
But satisfy the hunger of your treasured ones.
May their children have plenty, leaving an inheritance for their descendants.
15 Because I am righteous, I will see you. When I awake, I will see you face to face and be satisfied.

18:8 as you would guard your own eyes: This metaphor expresses God's care and affection for the psalmist (see Deut 32:10). The shadow of God's wings is a place of his protection from enemies and adversity (36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4).

18:13-14 The psalmist confidently prays for the Lord's victory, knowing that God possesses more power than the evildoers. The psalmist finds his joy in the Lord's inheritance (16:5), whereas the wicked search for joy in this world.

18:15 see you face to face: The psalmist does not allow temporary concerns raised by adversaries to stand in the way of his experiencing a real and lasting relationship with the Lord.

Ps 18 This royal drama of divine rescue (also found with minor variations in 2 Sam 22) encourages readers who are following the laments and requests for rescue in Ps 16 and 17. The psalmist describes the dramatic nature of God's rescue in three different ways (18:7-15, 16-19, 30-36). The psalm also extends hope that a future Son of David will be totally victorious over evil (18:43-50; cp. Ps 2).

18:1 Cite (also found with minor variations in 2 Sam 22). The psalmist likens sin to an angry person or a fierce creature (see Job 41:12-22).
18:2 A shield is an image of protection, salvation, and victory (7:10; 18:2, 30, 35; 84:11; 91:4; 115:9; 10, 11; 119:114; 144:2). It evokes a response of trust, waiting, and godly confidence.
18:3 God deserves praise for his greatness and faithfulness (48:1; 96:4; 145:3).
18:6 God dwells in his sanctuary, the heavenly temple (102:19; see 14:2-3). He knows everything, sees everyone, and will vindicate the godly (see 11:3-7).

18:7 The psalmist depicts the Lord's descent from heaven to earth with phenomena such as earthquakes, flames, smoke, darkness, and rain. Creation shudders at God's marvelous coming as the Divine Warrior (see 97:2-5) and Judge (see 50:1-6).

18:8-9 The destabilization of the whole earth will be a means of God's judgment (77:17-18; 96:5; 97:4; 99:1; 104:32; Isa 29:6; Mic 1:3-4; Nah 1:2-6; Hag 2:7, 11). The terrifying images of smoke, flames, and glowing coals express God's wrath against sin.

18:9-11 The Lord's sovereignty extends over all of nature (see 104:2-4; 148:5-6).
Salvation in the Psalms (Ps 18)

The psalmists experienced God’s salvation (see 32:1-5) as rescue from evil in the world. They were well acquainted with grief (69:18). It seemed to them that God had abandoned them and that the wicked took advantage of the apparent injustice to ridicule the godly (3:2; 71:11).

While waiting for rescue, the psalmists had faith that the Lord was with them, keeping guard over them (Pss 46, 121), and would not abandon them (16:10; 94:14; see also 7:10; 31:2; 62:6-7; 144:2). The psalmists cried out for rescue, knowing that they were completely dependent on the Lord (31:15; 35:17; 69:13).

The Psalter encourages the godly to identify themselves with these stories of salvation. For example, in Ps 18 the psalmist describes his anguish, his lament, and the Lord’s salvation (18:17, 19, 20, 43, 48) in such a manner that all the humble are invited to look to the Lord in their hour of judgment, but he will not rescue them (18:27; 50:22; 78:22). Hope in God’s salvation requires a life of faith (119:123) and love of the Lord’s rescue (22:8). They may call to the Lord in their hour of judgment, but he will not rescue them.

Salvation in the Psalms


18:10 a mighty angelic being (Hebrew a cherub): See notes on 1 Chr 28:18; 2 Chr 3:10-13.
18:12 and burning coals: Or and lightning bolts; also in 18:13.
18:19 Because God loves and delights in the psalmist (see 18:1), he will save him (37:23; 41:11; 91:14-16).
18:20-24 The psalmist affirms that loyalty is rewarded. He puts his trust in the Lord (see 16:1) and commits himself to living with integrity (see Ps 1, 15, 24; see also 19:12-14).
18:21 kept the ways of the Lord: The psalmist faithfully obeys God’s instructions (see 25:8-10). * not turned ... to follow evil: The psalmist rejects the way of folly (see Ps 1, 14) and chooses the way of wisdom (see Ps 1, 15).
25 To the faithful you show yourself faithful; to those with integrity you show integrity.

26 To the pure you show yourself pure, but to the wicked you show yourself hostile.

27 You rescue the humble, but you humiliate the proud.

28 You light a lamp for me. The Lord, my God, lights up my darkness.

29 In your strength I can crush an army; with my God I can scale any wall.

30 God's way is perfect. All the Lord's promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to him for protection.

31 For who is God except the Lord? Who but our God is a solid rock?

32 God arms me with strength, and he makes my way perfect.

33 He makes me as surefooted as a deer, enabling me to stand on mountain heights.

34 He trains my hands for battle; he strengthens my arm to draw a bronze bow.

35 You have given me your shield of victory. Your right hand supports me; your help has made me great.

36 You have made a wide path for my feet to keep them from slipping.

37 I chased my enemies and caught them; I did not stop until they were conquered.

38 I struck them down so they could not get up; they fell beneath my feet.

39 You have armed me with strength for the battle; you have subdued my enemies under my feet.

40 You placed my foot on their necks. I have destroyed all who hated me.

41 They called for help, but no one came to their rescue. They even cried to the Lord, but he refused to answer.

42 I ground them as fine as dust in the wind. I swept them into the gutter like dirt.

43 You gave me victory over my accusers. You appointed me ruler over nations; people I don't even know now serve me.

44 As soon as they hear of me, they submit; foreign nations cringe before me.

45 They all lose their courage and come trembling from their strongholds.

46 The Lord lives! Praise to my Rock! May the God of my salvation be exalted!

47 He is the God who pays back those who harm me; he subdues the nations under me and rescues me from my enemies.

48 You hold me safe beyond the reach of my enemies; you save me from violent opponents.

49 For this, O Lord, I will praise you among the nations; I will sing praises to your name.

50 You give great victories to your king; you show unfailing love to your anointed, to David and all his descendants forever.

18:25-29 The faithful God remains true to his character. He loves faithfulness, blamelessness, and purity, and he hates the perverse (see 1:6).

18:26 The pure have clean hands (see 18:20-24). To the wicked you show yourself hostile: The Lord knows each person’s character, and he justly responds to them in kind.


18:28 Light a lamp: The Lord renews the psalmist’s life, helping him overcome the darkness of adversity (see 112:4; 119:105).

18:29 Scale any wall: God helps his servants fight their battles.

18:30-36 The psalmist experiences God’s rescue and provision of victory.

18:30 Perfect: God’s character has integrity (see 18:26). God promises to protect his people, and he does so. Seeking God’s protection entails trust and faith. Regardless of his feelings or external circumstances, the psalmist makes a deep commitment to the Lord. He experiences joy (5:11; 64:10) as he awaits the Lord’s rescue (57:1).

18:32-34 The psalmist’s victories come from the Lord. He completely depends on God.

18:35 A wide path represents freedom and safety (see 4:8; 119:35).

18:37 With help from the Divine Warrior, the psalmist experienced victory over his enemies.

18:40 Placing a foot on the necks of the enemy represents total victory (see Josh 10:23-26).

18:43-45 With God’s victorious help, the psalmist achieved military and political success, thus fulfilling the history of David’s dynasty (Ps 2). The previous laments find some resolution in this psalm.

18:46-50 The psalmist again reflects on the Lord’s victories. God’s marvelous rescue and the king’s victory are cause for celebration.

18:47 God vindicates his servant and so fulfills his mission (Ps 2; see 47:3; 144:2).

18:49 The psalmist’s vision of praise among the nations motivated Paul in his mission to the Gentiles (Rom 15:9).

18:50 God appointed David, his anointed ruler, to bring order to God’s world (see Ps 2). Both David and his descendants received this responsibility.
Psalm 19

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship.  
2 Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known.  
3 They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard.  
4 Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world.

God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.  
5 It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race.  
6 The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. Nothing can hide from its heat.

7 The instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul.  
8 The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy, giving insight for living.  
9 Reverence for the Lord is pure, lasting forever.

Psalm 20

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 In times of trouble, may the Lord answer your cry.  
2 May he remember all your gifts and look favorably on your burnt offerings.  
3 May he send you help from his sanctuary and receive you triumphantly.  
4 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

20:3 Gifts and burnt offerings express submission to the Lord (cp. 40:6).
PSALM 20:4

May he grant your heart's desires and make all your plans succeed.
May we shout for joy when we hear of your victory and raise a victory banner in the name of our God.
May the Lord answer all your prayers.
Now I know that the Lord rescues his anointed king.
He will answer him from his holy heaven and rescue him by his great power.
Some nations boast of their chariots and horses, but we boast in the name of the Lord our God.
Those nations will fall down and collapse, but we will rise up and stand firm.
Give victory to our king, O Lord! Answer our cry for help.

PSALM 21

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

How the king rejoices in your strength, O Lord! He shouts with joy because you give him victory.
For you have given him his heart's desire; you have withheld nothing he requested.
You welcomed him back with success and prosperity. You placed a crown of finest gold on his head.
He asked you to preserve his life, and you granted his request.

The days of his life stretch on forever.
Your victory brings him great honor, and you have clothed him with splendor and majesty.
You have endowed him with eternal blessings and given him the joy of your presence.
For the king trusts in the Lord. The unfailing love of the Most High will keep him from stumbling.
You will capture all your enemies. Your strong right hand will seize all who hate you.
You will throw them in a flaming furnace when you appear. The Lord will consume them in his anger; fire will devour them.
You will wipe their children from the face of the earth; their evil schemes will never succeed.
For they will turn and run when they see your arrows aimed at them.
Rise up, O Lord, in all your power. With music and singing we celebrate your mighty acts.

Interlude

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be sung to the tune "Doe of the Dawn."

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

20:4 Ps 21:2; 145:19
20:5 Ps 1 Sam 1:17; Ps 9:14; 60:4
20:6 Ps 28:8; 41:11; Isa 58:9
20:7 2 Chr 32:8; Ps 33:16-17
20:9 Ps 17:6
21:1 Ps 59:16-17
21:2 Ps 37:4
21:4 Ps 61:6; 91:16; 133:3
21:5 Ps 8:5; 96:6
21:7 Ps 112:6; 125:1
21:8 Isa 10:10
21:9 Lam 2:2; Mal 4:1
21:11 Ps 2:1-3
21:12 Ps 7:12-13; 18:40
21:13 Ps 59:16; 81:1
22:1 *Matt 27:46
22:2 *Mark 15:34
22:3 *Azariah (5880)
22:10 Ps 27:10

20:4-5 make all your plans succeed . . . answer all your prayers: These requests could be those stated in 21:3-6 (cp. 27:4).
20:5 Troops carried a victory banner to battle, under which they gathered and roused one another to action (see Isa 11:10, 12).
20:6-8 An individual member of the community (20:1-5) responds with a word of assurance and confidence in God's help.
20:8 God chose his anointed king to be his ruler (see 2:7).
20:7 chariots and horses: These were instruments of war (see 33:16-17; 76:6; 147:10; Isa 30:16; 31:1-3).
Psalms 21 God's people thank him for giving victory to the king.
21:2 The king has experienced his heart's desire—God's protection and blessing (see 20:5; see also 2:8).
21:3-6 The king returned victorious from battle and received honor from the people. His greatest honor came from God, who gave him blessings, life, and his presence.
21:4 God offers a rich quality of life (61:6-7; 91:14-16; 128:4-6) characterized by his presence (16:11; 23:6; 27:4; 36:9), joy (16:11), goodness (23:6; 34:14-15), and protection (41:2; 61:7).
21:5 God's eternal blessings also bring fullness of life in the present (see Ps 133).
21:7 The king enjoyed victory not because of his strength or intrinsic goodness but because God honored his faith.
21:8-12 As long as even a single enemy opposed the king's authority, God's kingdom was not fully present. This prayer requests victory over all evil in the world.
21:9 The flaming furnace and fire portray the severity of God's judgment on the wicked. In the OT, this image often refers to hell (11:6; 18:8; 50:3; 68:2; 78:21; 79:5; 80:16; 89:46; 97:3; 104:4; 140:10; see Isa 66:24).
21:13 Rise up (or be exalted, as in 57:5, 11; 108:5) expresses communal praise and joy in God's greatness and power.
Psalm 22 All previous laments pale in comparison with this outcry against the enemy and God's abandonment. The psalm contains two main sections: the lament (22:1-21) and praise for
Ps 22:1-2, 6-8). His trouble comes from a deep sense of alienation from God's created world (22:2); he lives like a lowly animal (22:9). He vividly describes his anguish and suffering (see 22:1-21; 27:24-36). Jesus recited part of Ps 22 when he was on the cross (22:1; see Matt 27:46). The psalm has other noteworthy connections with the crucifixion (e.g., 22:6-8, 14-18).

The four psalms of suffering (also called "Passion Psalms"; Pss 16, 22, 40, 69) address the deep distress experienced by God's servant.

Psalm 22 is the most remarkable of the psalms of suffering. In this psalm, God's servant suffers though he is righteous. There is no suggestion of any sin, so the psalmist's suffering appears completely unjustified. There is no prayer for vengeance (see Ps 137) despite bitter persecution, like the sinless Christ (2 Cor 5:21) who even prayed for his executioners (Luke 23:34). Jesus recited part of Ps 22 when he was on the cross (22:1; see Matt 27:46), and the psalm has other noteworthy connections with the crucifixion (e.g., 22:6-8, 14-18).

The psalms of suffering are also associated with Jesus Christ. Psalm 16:10 anticipates Christ's triumph over death (cp. Acts 2:24-31). Psalm 40:6-8 foreshadows the self-giving, redemptive work of Christ (Heb 10:5-10). Psalm 60 refers to isolation as resulting from commitment to God's cause (69:8-9). It anticipates the part Judas played in what was fundamentally God's work in Christ (69:25-26; 109:8; Isa 53:10; Acts 1:20).

Psalm 22 is a remarkable psalm of suffering that expresses the deep distress of God's servant in an unjust world. It is a powerful expression of faith in God's deliverance and vindication.

Why are you so far away when I groan for help? 2 Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night you hear my voice, but I find no relief.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. Our ancestors trusted in you, and you rescued them. They cried out to you and were saved. They trusted in you and were never disgraced.

But I am a worm and not a man. I am scorned and despised by all! Everyone who sees me mocks me. They sneer and shake their heads, saying, “Is this the one who relies on the Lord? Then let the Lord save him! If the Lord loves him so much, let the Lord rescue him!”

Yet you brought me safely from my mother’s womb and led me to trust you at my mother’s breast. I was thrust into your arms at my birth. You have been my God from the moment I was born.

Do not stay so far from me, for trouble is near, and no one else can help me. My enemies surround me like a herd of bulls; fierce bulls of Bashan have hemmed me in!

Like lions they open their jaws against me, roaring and tearing into their prey. My life is poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, melting within me.

My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.
16 My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; 
an evil gang closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and feet.
17 I can count all my bones. My enemies stare at me and gloat.
18 They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing.
19 O Lord, do not stay far away! You are my strength; come quickly to my aid!
20 Save me from the sword; spare my precious life from these dogs.
21 Snatch me from the lion's jaws and from the horns of these wild oxen.
22 I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assemblage of people.
23 Praise the Lord, all you who fear him! Honor him, all you descendants of Jacob! Show him reverence, all you descendants of Israel!
24 For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy. He has not turned his back on them, but has listened to their cries for help.

I will praise you in the great assembly. I will fulfill my vows in the presence of those who worship you.
The poor will eat and be satisfied. All who seek the Lord will praise him. Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy.

The whole earth will acknowledge the Lord and return to him. All the families of the nations will bow down before him.
For royal power belongs to the Lord. He rules all the nations.

Let the rich of the earth feast and worship. Bow before him, all who are mortal, all whose lives will end as dust.
Our children will also serve him. Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord.
His righteous acts will be told to those not yet born. They will hear about everything he has done.

**PSALM 23**
A psalm of David.

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.
God’s Presence (Ps 24:3-6)

Scripture writers often express the desire to experience God’s close presence. In the experience of intimacy, God’s rich goodness and love (21:6; 44:3) are all that people need (4:6). The absence of God’s presence is distressing and damaging.

The poets of Israel often spoke of God’s face as a way of expressing his presence or absence. They sought his face (24:6; 27:8; 105:4; 119:58). When his face shone or was turned toward his people, they experienced his presence in blessing, provision, and protection (67:1).

God’s hiding his face from his people was a picture of divine abandonment (13:1; 27:9; 44:24; 69:17; 88:14; 89:46; 102:2; 104:29; 143:7), as if God were not seeing or hearing them (10:11; 11:1; 42:3). The absence of God creates dismay, shame, and chaos, and may cause death (30:7; 44:24; 104:29).

The psalmists prayed for God’s presence as they requested a change in their circumstances (31:16; 67:1; 69:17; 80:3, 7, 19) or as they reflected on answers to prayer (see 44:3). The godly long to be invited into God’s presence (11:7; 16:9-11; 17:15). His presence alone satisfies their deepest longing (17:15; see Prov 16:15) and gives them lasting pleasure (1:2; 111:2; see also 22:8; 37:4; 40:6, 8; 43:4; 73:25). Everything about God delights them.

God’s favor and goodness are experienced in his presence (23:6). God is the true good of the godly (16:2; 73:1), and he protects them (84:11). Hence, God’s goodness and his Temple are closely linked (65:4). God shows his goodness by manifesting his presence (27:13; 31:19; 34:8, 10; 86:17; 103:5), and he satisfies his needy people (107:9; 116:7, 12). Goodness may be synonymous with God’s unfailing love (23:6; 25:7; 69:16). In connection with the land or crops, goodness is understood as blessing, abundance, and prosperity (4:6; 21:3; 65:11; 68:10; 85:12; 106:5; 122:9; 128:2). God’s goodness and presence promote health and vitality in his people (34:12-22).

23:2 Sheep rest after they have eaten their fill (Zeph 3:13; see Isa 11:7; cp. Isa 13:20; 27:10). • The Lord leads the sheep for their own benefit (see 5:8). Sheep only drink from still water, so the shepherd seeks out peaceful streams for his flock.

23:3 Cp. 19:7: The Lord’s word renews my strength. • The Lord guides by rescuing his people from evil (23:4-5; see 31:3), bringing them back to himself (5:8; 61:2), caring (48:14; 139:10), ruling (67:4), counseling (73:24), protecting (78:53; 107:30; 143:11), and instructing them in wisdom (27:11; see Prov 4:11). • The Lord’s name guarantees the relationship; he guards his reputation against any accusation of his abandoning his people or allowing them to sin (see 25:11; 31:3; 106:8; 143:11).

23:4 darkest valley: Or dark valley of death. • The shepherd used his rod and staff to fend off danger.

23:5 A feast demonstrates the Lord’s care and mercy toward his people (see 22:26, 29). Although enemies can watch, they cannot trouble the guests. • The ritual of anointing the head with oil showed guests honor (92:9-11), hospitality, and refreshment (104:15; 133:2).

23:6 The Lord expresses his unfailing love through the goodness of his presence and other benefits that he alone provides (69:16; 86:17; 109:21; see 18:6; 61:4). He actively bestows care that is greater than the temporary trials imposed by enemies (7:1).

Ps 24 The shepherd of Ps 23, who is also the King of the whole world, takes possession of Zion.

24:1-2 The kingdom belongs to the Creator, the Great King (cp. 22:27).

24:1 The Lord created and now rules the earth and everything in it (see 1 Cor 10:25-26). He sees all its people (33:14), regardless of their status (49:1-2).

24:2 God created everything in an orderly and stable manner (see 89:11; 102:25; 104:5).

24:3-6 The citizens of the King’s realm include all who seek him. The Lord invites them to enter his presence.
Who may stand in his holy place?
Only those whose hands and hearts are pure,
who do not worship idols and never tell lies.
They will receive the Lord's blessing
and have a right relationship with God their savior.
Such people may seek you
and worship in your presence, O God of Jacob.

Open up, ancient gates!
Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory enter.
Who is the King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty;
the Lord, invincible in battle.
Open up, ancient gates!
Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory enter.
Who is the King of glory?
The Lord of Heaven's Armies—he is the King of glory.

PSALM 25
A psalm of David.

1 O Lord, I give my life to you.
2 I trust in you, my God!
Do not let me be disgraced,
or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat.
3 No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced,
but disgrace comes to those who try to deceive others.
4 Show me the right path, O Lord;
point out the road for me to follow.
5 Lead me by your truth and teach me,
for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.
6 Remember, O Lord, your compassion
and unfailing love, which you have shown from long ages past.
7 Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth.
Remember me in the light of your unfailing love,
for you are merciful, O Lord.
8 The Lord is good and does what is right;
he shows the proper path to those
who go astray.
9 He leads the humble in doing right,
teaching them his way.
10 The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness
all who keep his covenant and obey his demands.
11 For the honor of your name, O Lord,
forgive my many, many sins.
12 Who are those who fear the Lord?
He will show them the path they should choose.
13 They will live in prosperity,
and their children will inherit the land.
14 The Lord is a friend to those who fear him.
He teaches them his covenant.

24:3 These questions invite readers to look away from their problems with the wicked and to examine themselves (see 15:1). • God's holy place is the holy mountain, a reference both to Jerusalem and to heaven.
24:4 Those with pure hands have not shed blood or injured relationships between people (see 9:12; 15:2-9). • Those with pure hearts commit themselves fully to the Lord, as evidenced in strength of character, transparency, and selflessness (51:10; 73:1; see Matt 5:8).
24:10 The Lord of Heaven's Armies reigns from his home, the Temple in Jerusalem (84:3-5). He excludes sin and sinners (24:3-6) but protects all who dwell in Zion.
Ps 25 This psalm is a Hebrew acrostic poem; each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This individual lament includes instruction in wisdom and a community lament; it begins and ends with an affirmation of trust in the Lord (25:1-3, 15-22). The psalmist prays for guidance (25:4-7) and encourages the godly to practice a lifestyle of wisdom (25:12-14). In addition to the enemies who trouble him, the psalmist confesses his sins (25:7, 11, 18) as part of his anguish. Trust develops with understanding God's character: He is compassionate, faithful, and good (25:8-10).
25:1-3 The psalmist expresses confidence that the godly will be vindicated and his enemies will not succeed (see 25:15-22).
25:1 The psalmist commits himself to the Lord instead of to idols (see 24:3-4).
25:2 Enemies would rejoice by singing a victory song.
25:4-7 In this prayer for guidance, compassion, and forgiveness, the psalmist turns to the Lord for instruction in wisdom. He confesses his past failures and acknowledges that his hope lies with his merciful Savior.
25:4-6 The right path, the path of wisdom (see 5:8), means being open to instruction that leads to life (27:11; 43:3; 73:24; 119:12).
25:5 Biblical hope does not mean wishing for an event to turn out favorably. Hope trusts the Lord's will and gives the courage to face disappointments (33:22; 130:5).
25:6 compassion: See also 51:1; 57:1; 103:8.
25:8-10 The Lord keeps his people close to himself.
25:11 The psalmist again asks forgiveness for his many sins (25:7; 32:1-5). The sins of Israel's kings demonstrated the weaknesses inherent in David's dynasty and the reasons for its failure in OT Israel (see Ps 89).
25:12-15 Those who fear the Lord will receive further instruction and experience God's presence (25:14) and blessing (25:13).
25:13 prosperity: See 23:6. • inherit the land: Unlike the wicked, who will perish (1:6), the godly have a secure future. In the end, God will bless them, and their blessings will endure (see 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34; Isa 57:13; Matt 5:5).
Ps 27:1-3

The psalmist opens himself to divine examination of his life, especially in the areas of his character and devotion.

Ps 26

A psalm of David.

1 Declare me innocent, O Lord, for I have acted with integrity; I have trusted in the Lord without wavering.

2 Put me on trial, Lord, and cross-examine me. Test my motives and my heart.

3 For I am always aware of your unfailing love, and I have lived according to your truth.

4 I do not spend time with liars or go along with hypocrites.

5 I hate the ‘gatherings of those who do evil, and I refuse to join in with the wicked.

6 I wash my hands to declare my innocence. I come to your altar, O Lord, singing a song of thanksgiving and telling of all your wonders.

7 I love your sanctuary, Lord, the place where your glorious presence dwells.

9 Don’t let me suffer the fate of sinners. Don’t condemn me along with murderers.

10 Their hands are dirty with evil schemes, and they constantly take bribes.

11 But I am not like that; I live with integrity. So redeem me and show me mercy.

12 Now I stand on solid ground, and I will publicly praise the Lord.

Ps 26:1-3

The psalmist expresses confidence in the Lord, commits to a life of integrity, and prays for rescue.

Ps 26:15-22

The psalmist expresses confidence in the Lord, commits to a life of integrity, and prays for rescue.

Ps 26:15

The traps of my enemies: See 5:9; 10; 31:4; 140:5; Prov 3:26.

Ps 26:17-18

The psalmist can find no relief (see 4:1; 13:1-2) as his problems go from bad to worse. He associates his anguish with sin, but he does not elaborate on the nature of his sin (see 25:7, 11).

Ps 26:19-20

Knowing that the Lord hates violent people (see 11:5), the psalmist pleads with God to deal with these enemies.

Ps 26:21

Just as it opened, the psalm closes with a commitment of trust and hope (see 9:18; 25:5).

Ps 26

In this individual lament, the psalmist prays for redemption on the basis of his own innocence and the Lord’s justice.

Ps 26:1-3

The psalmist opens himself to divine examination of his life, especially in the areas of his character and devotion.

Ps 26:3

For God’s truth to become part of one’s character requires a habitual commitment.

Ps 26:4-5

Because of his devotion to the Lord (26:1-3), the psalmist dissociates himself from evil people (see 1:1).

Ps 26:6-8

The psalmist demonstrates his loyalty to the Lord through pious rituals, praise, and acknowledgment of the Lord’s presence in the Temple.

Ps 26:6

Ritual purity required the worshiper to wash his hands, symbolic of separation from evil and evildoers (see 73:13). The altar symbolizes God’s presence (43:4).

Ps 26:8

The sanctuary symbolized the manifest presence of the Lord (see 18:6).

Ps 26:9

Don’t let me suffer: The end of the godly cannot be the same as that of the wicked.

Ps 26:12

The psalmist’s footing on solid ground represents salvation (cp. 143:10).

Ps 26:9

The Lord’s justice.

Ps 26:7

Ps 26:6-8

The psalmist demonstrates his devotion.

Ps 26:9

The Lord’s instruction, timing, and priorities.

Ps 26:10

Ps 26:11

Ps 26:12

Ps 26:13

Ps 26:21

Ps 26:22

Ps 26:23

Ps 26:24
PSALM 27:4

4 The one thing I ask of the Lord—
   the thing I seek most—
is to live in the house of the Lord all the
days of my life,
delighting in the Lord’s perfections
and meditating in his Temple.
5 For he will conceal me there when
   troubles come;
he will hide me in his sanctuary.
He will place me out of reach on a
high rock.
6 Then I will hold my head high
   above my enemies who surround me.
At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices
with shouts of joy,
singing and praising the Lord with
music.
7 Hear me as I pray, O Lord.
   Be merciful and answer me!
8 My heart has heard you say, “Come and
talk with me.”
And my heart responds, “Lord, I am
coming.”
9 Do not turn your back on me.
   Do not reject my servant in anger.
You have always been my helper.
Don’t leave me now; don’t abandon me,
O God of my salvation!
10 Even if my father and mother
   abandon me,
the Lord will hold me close.
11 Teach me how to live, O Lord.
   Lead me along the right path,
for my enemies are waiting for me.
12 Do not let me fall into their hands.
   For they accuse me of things I’ve
   never done;
with every breath they threaten me
with violence.
13 Yet I am confident I will see the Lord’s
goodness
   while I am here in the land of the
living.
14 Wait patiently for the Lord.
   Be brave and courageous.
Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.

PSALM 28

A psalm of David.
1 I pray to you, O Lord, my rock.
   Do not turn a deaf ear to me.
For if you are silent,
   I might as well give up and die.
2 Listen to my prayer for mercy
   as I cry out to you for help,
as I lift my hands toward your holy
sanctuary.
3 Do not drag me away with the
   wicked—
with those who do evil—
those who speak friendly words to their
neighbors
while planning evil in their hearts.
4 Give them the punishment they so richly
deserve!
   Measure it out in proportion to their
wickedness.
   Pay them back for all their evil deeds!
   Give them a taste of what they have
done to others.
5 They care nothing for what the Lord has
done
   or for what his hands have made.
   So he will tear them down,
   and they will never be rebuilt!
6 Praise the Lord!
   For he has heard my cry for mercy.
The psalmist did not believe in other deities but called on people who thought they were real to look to the Lord for his power (cp. 96:7-9; 81:1; 99:5, 9; 107:32; 118:28; 145:1; see Exod 15:1; Isa 25:1). The Lord is a safe fortress for his anointed king.

Save your people!
Bless Israel, your special possession. Lead them like a shepherd, and carry them in your arms forever.

**PSALM 29**

A psalm of David.  

1 Honor the Lord, you *heavenly beings; honor the Lord for his glory and strength.*
2 Honor the Lord for the glory of his name.  
3 Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.
4 The voice of the Lord echoes above the sea.  
5 The God of glory thunders.  
6 The Lord thunders over the mighty sea.  
7 The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic.
8 The voice of the Lord splits the mighty cedars; the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon.
9 The Lord is majestic above the nations; he is exalted above all gods.  
10 The Lord reigns as king forever.  

11 The Lord gives his people strength.  
12 The Lord blesses them with peace.

**PSALM 30**

A psalm of David. A song for the dedication of the Temple.

1 I will *exalt you, Lord, for you rescued me.*  
2 O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you restored my health.  
3 You brought me up from the grave, O Lord. You kept me from falling into the pit of death.
4 Sing to the Lord, all you godly ones! Praise his holy name.

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28:7 my strength and shield: The Lord protects the psalmist (see 59:9, 17).  
28:9 The poem closes with intercession for the Lord’s people. *Bless Israel, your special possession: Literally Bless your inheritance.* See 29:11; 133:3.

Ps 29 This nature hymn in praise of the Creator declares that the Lord holds all power over nature. God uses the same unsurpassed strength to care for his people.

29:1-2 The psalmist issues a call to honor the Lord for his power (cp. 96:7-8). *you heavenly beings* (literally you *sons of God*): Angels or deities who, some believed, held special powers. The psalmist did not believe in other deities but called on people who thought they were real to look to the Lord as the only God.

29:3-9 The word translated voice (Hebrew qol) can also mean “noise” (1 Kgs 1:45) or “thunder” (Joel 3:16). The Lord’s voice is awe-inspiring, and it dominates whatever rumblings people might attribute to other deities.

29:3 God (Hebrew el): See note on 19:1.

29:5 The cedars of Lebanon were known for their size and quality (see Isa 2:13).  
29:6 Lebanon’s mountains and Hermon are high mountains to the north of Israel. *The Lord can cause even immense mountains to shake at his command* (see 114:4). *Mount Hermon: Hebrew Sirion, another name for Mount Hermon.

29:8 The wilderness of Kadesh was located south of Judah. God’s voice can be heard throughout the land, from the north (29:6) to the south.

29:9 twist mighty oaks: Or *causes the deer to writhe in labor.* The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

29:10 The image of powerful floodwaters connects with the Genesis flood (Gen 6:17). The Lord *reigns as king* over the whole created order; no one contests his kingdom.

29:11 The ruler of nature *blesses* his people with peace (see 28:8-9; 37:11; 133:3).

Ps 30 This individual thanksgiving

psalm opens in praise to the Lord for his salvation (30:1-3), then contrasts God’s favor with his anger (30:4-7), and ends with a transformation from mourning to dancing (30:8-12).  

30:title Perhaps David wrote this psalm in advance for the dedication of the Temple, making his own experience representative of the nation’s.

30:1-3 The psalmist praises God for his triumph over adversity, which he likens to salvation from the grave.

30:1 I will *exalt you, Lord, for you rescued me.* You refused to let my enemies triumph over me.

30:2 O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you restored my health.

30:3 You brought me up from the grave, O Lord. You kept me from falling into the pit of death.

30:4 Sing to the Lord, all you godly ones! Praise his holy name.
For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.

When I was prosperous, I said, “Nothing can stop me now!” Your favor, O LORD, made me as secure as a mountain. Then you turned away from me, and I was shattered.

I cried out to you, O LORD. I begged the LORD for mercy, saying, “What will you gain if I die, if I sink into the grave? Can my dust praise you? Can it tell of your faithfulness?”

Hear me, LORD, and have mercy on me. Help me, O LORD.” You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy, that I might sing praises to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever!

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

O LORD, I have come to you for protection; don’t let me be disgraced. Save me, for you do what is right. Turn your ear to listen to me; rescue me quickly. Be my rock of protection, a fortress where I will be safe.

You are my rock and my fortress. For the honor of your name, lead me out of this danger.

Nothing can stop me now! The psalmist confesses his presumptuous attitude (cp. 32:3-4). * secure as a mountain: In the psalms, this phrase creates a powerful image of stability and of God’s control (see 11:1; 18:7; 36:6; 46:2; 72:3; 76:4; 83:14; 97:5; 114:4; 6; 125:2). * I was shattered: The absence of God’s favor destroys the security of the proud (cp. 104:27-30).

The psalm faced death (also in 30:1-3)—perhaps literally, perhaps figuratively. But when he turned to the Lord, the Lord rescued him and turned his mourning into joyful dancing. Only God’s favor can permanently and powerfully overcome human failure and the depths of despair.

Ps 31 The psalmist encourages the godly to find refuge in the Lord and wait for his salvation. Despite having had a death-like experience, he testifies to the Lord’s faithfulness. This psalm foreshadows the suffering of Jesus (Luke 23:46).

The psalmist offers refuge to anyone who comes to him for protection. The psalmist trusts in and submits to the Lord. See also 71:1-3.

The psalmist issues an urgent call for the Lord to pay attention to his desperate situation (71:2; 88:2; 102:2).

I entrust my spirit into your hand: Whether he lives or dies, the psalmist will trust his Lord. Jesus uttered these words on the cross just before he died (Luke 23:46).

Trust in the Lord requires confidence that he has our best interests at heart.

A safe place literally means a broad place, in contrast to a “narrow” or constricted place of distress (see 18:19).

In this prayer for mercy, the psalmist wedges a description of the intensity of suffering and the pain of rejection between two affirmations of confidence that he has our best interests at heart.

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31:15 My future is in your hands: To relinquish control of timing is one way to express submission.

31:17 The psalmist, who did not deserve to be disgraced, invokes the principle of retribution (see note on 1:6). *in the grave: Hebrew in Sheol.*

31:19-20 The psalmist thanks the Lord for answering his prayer (31:1-18) and rescuing him.

31:19-20 Since the godly are under the Lord’s protection and shelter, evil has no power over them.

31:21-22 Praise the Lord: The psalmist expresses his joy at the experience of God’s goodness and love. Throughout his ordeal, the Lord has cared for him.

32:1 Out of his own pain and renewed awareness of the Lord’s goodness, the psalmist turns to others who suffer. He holds out the promise of God’s loving care for those who persevere in hoping for the Lord.

32:3-5 The psalmist acknowledges his own sin (see 19:12-13; 25:7, 11, 15-22) and his resistance to confessing sin.

32:4 So be strong and courageous, all you who put your hope in the Lord!

**PSALM 32**

**A psalm of David.**

1 Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!

2 Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!

3 When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.

4 Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me.

My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. **Interlude**

5 Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.” And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. **Interlude**

6 Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment.

7 For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory. **Interlude**

8 The Lord says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.”

---

31:15 My future is in your hands. Rescue me from those who hunt me down relentlessly.

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31:23-24 Out of his own pain and renewed awareness of the Lord’s goodness, the psalmist turns to others who suffer. He holds out the promise of God’s loving care for those who persevere in hoping for the Lord.

32:1 This wisdom psalm of confession and thanksgiving encourages and exorts the godly to learn from the psalmist’s experience of sin, denial, confession, and forgiveness. This psalm was one of the seven psalms of penitence used in the early church (also Pss 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).

32:title psalm: Hebrew maskil. This may be a literary or musical term.

32:1-2 The Lord’s forgiveness restores people to fellowship with him, clears them of guilt, and gives them great joy. Paul quoted this text when explaining justification by faith alone (Rom 4:4-8).


32:3-5 The psalmist acknowledges his own sin (see 19:12-13; 25:7, 11, 15-22) and his resistance to confessing sin.

32:4 The godly will learn from the psalmist’s experience to pray for forgiveness before it is too late.

32:7 The Lord promises to be his people’s hiding place (31:20). Instead of being overwhelmed by terror (31:13), the psalmist is surrounded by songs of victory.

32:8 God interrupts the psalmist’s teaching with a message that invites the godly to receive the Lord’s wisdom (see 5:8; 23:3; 25:4-6).
9 Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."

10 Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unflagging love surrounds those who trust the Lord.

11 So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

**PSALM 33**

1 Let the godly sing for joy to the Lord; it is fitting for the pure to praise him.

2 Praise the Lord with melodies on the lyre; make music for him on the ten-stringed harp.

3 Sing a new song of praise to him; play skillfully on the harp, and sing with joy.

4 For the word of the Lord holds true, and we can trust everything he does.

5 He loves whatever is just and good; the unflagging love of the Lord fills the earth.

6 The Lord merely spoke, and the heavens were created. He breathed the word, and all the stars were born.

7 He assigned the sea its boundaries and locked the oceans in vast reservoirs.

8 Let the whole world fear the Lord, and let everyone stand in awe of him.

9 For when he spoke, the world began! It appeared at his command.

10 The Lord frustrates the plans of the nations and thwarts all their schemes.

11 But the Lord’s plans stand firm forever; his intentions can never be shaken.

12 What joy for the nation whose God is the Lord, whose people he has chosen as his inheritance.

13 The Lord looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race.

14 From his throne he observes all who live on the earth.

15 He made their hearts, so he understands everything they do.

16 The best-equipped army cannot save a king, nor is great strength enough to save a warrior.

17 Don’t count on your warhorse to give you victory—for all its strength, it cannot save you.

18 But the Lord watches over those who fear him, those who rely on his unflagging love.

19 He rescues them from death and keeps them alive in times of famine.

20 We put our hope in the Lord. He is our help and our shield.

21 In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.

22 Let your unflagging love surround us, Lord, for our hope is in you alone.
PSALM 34
A psalm of David, regarding the time he pretended to be insane in front of Abimelech, who sent him away.

1 I will praise the LORD at all times.
2 I will constantly speak his praises.
3 Come, let us tell of the LORD's greatness;
4 I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me.
5 Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy;
6 In my desperation I prayed, and the LORD heard me.
7 For the angel of the LORD is a guard;
8 Taste and see that the LORD is good.
9 Fear the LORD, you godly people,
10 Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry,
11 Come, my children, and listen to me,
12 Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy;
13 I will praise the LORD at all times.
14 Turn away from evil and do good.
15 The eyes of the LORD watch over those who do right;
16 But the LORD hears his people when they call to him for help.
17 The LORD hears his people when they call to him for help.
18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
19 The righteous person faces many troubles,
20 For the LORD protects the bones of the righteous;
21 Calamity will surely overtake the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be punished.
22 But the LORD will redeem those who serve him.
23 No one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

Ps 34 This psalm is a Hebrew acrostic poem; each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The acrostic is missing one letter (waw) and has an additional verse at the end (34:22). This wisdom psalm includes a Thanksgiving hymn (34:1-7) that celebrates the Lord's care for the needy and the sufferer's professions. It also includes an invitation to wisdom (34:8-14) and an exposition of wisdom concerning the Lord's presence during the wilderness journey. He protected Israel from the forces of Egypt (Exod 14:19-20), and he will guard all the godly (91:11). 34:8-14 The godly encourage everyone to seek wisdom, to fear the Lord, and to place themselves under the protection of the Lord's angel. 34:9-10 Fear of the Lord includes reverence and respect, and it motivates a life of wisdom (see Prov 1:7; 9:10).

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16 But the LORD hears his people when they call to him for help.
17 The LORD hears his people when they call to him for help.
18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
19 The righteous person faces many troubles,
20 For the LORD protects the bones of the righteous;
21 Calamity will surely overtake the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be punished.
22 But the LORD will redeem those who serve him.
23 No one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

Ps 34 This psalm is a Hebrew acrostic poem; each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The acrostic is missing one letter (waw) and has an additional verse at the end (34:22). This wisdom psalm includes a Thanksgiving hymn (34:1-7) that celebrates the Lord's care for the needy and the sufferer's professions. It also includes an invitation to wisdom (34:8-14) and an exposition of wisdom concerning the Lord's presence during the wilderness journey. He protected Israel from the forces of Egypt (Exod 14:19-20), and he will guard all the godly (91:11). 34:8-14 The godly encourage everyone to seek wisdom, to fear the Lord, and to place themselves under the protection of the Lord's angel. 34:9-10 Fear of the Lord includes reverence and respect, and it motivates a life of wisdom (see Prov 1:7; 9:10).

Ps 35 This psalm of David, regarding the time he pretended to be insane in front of Abimelech, who sent him away.
PSALM 35
A Psalm of David.

1 O LORD, oppose those who oppose me.
2 Put on your armor, and take up your shield.
   Prepare for battle, and come to my aid.
3 Lift up your spear and javelin against those who pursue me.
Let me hear you say,
   “I will give you victory!”
4 Bring shame and disgrace on those trying to kill me;
turn them back and humiliate those who want to harm me.
5 Blow them away like chaff in the wind—a wind sent by the angel of the LORD.
6 Make their path dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.
7 I did them no wrong, but they laid a trap for me.
   I did them no wrong, but they dug a pit to catch me.
8 So let sudden ruin come upon them!
   Let them be caught in the trap they set for me!
   Let them be destroyed in the pit they dug for me.
9 Then “I will rejoice in the LORD. I will be glad because he rescues me.
10 With every bone in my body I will praise him:
   “LORD, who can compare with you?
   Who else rescues the helpless from the strong?
   Who else protects the helpless and poor from those who rob them?”
11 Malicious witnesses testify against me.
   They accuse me of crimes I know nothing about.
12 They repay me evil for good.
   I am sick with despair.

13 Yet when they were ill, I grieved for them.
   I denied myself by fasting for them, but my prayers returned unanswered.
14 I was sad, as though they were my friends or family,
as if I were grieving for my own mother.
15 But they are glad now that I am in trouble;
   they gleeiously join together against me.
   I am attacked by people I don’t even know;
   they slander me constantly.
16 They mock me and call me names;
   they snarl at me.
17 How long, O LORD, will you look on and do nothing?
   Rescue me from their fierce attacks.
   Protect my life from these lions!
18 Then I will thank you in front of the great assembly.
   I will praise you before all the people.
19 Don’t let my treacherous enemies rejoice over my defeat.
   Don’t let those who hate me without cause gloat over my sorrow.
20 They don’t talk of peace;
   they plot against innocent people who mind their own business.
21 They shout, “Aha! Aha!
   With our own eyes we saw him do it!”
22 O LORD, you know all about this.
   Do not stay silent.
   Do not abandon me now, O LORD.
23 Wake up! Rise to my defense!
   Take up my case, my God and my Lord.
24 Declare me not guilty, O LORD my God, for you give justice.
   Don’t let my enemies laugh about me in my troubles.
25 Don’t let them say, “Look, we got what we wanted!
   Now we will eat him alive!”

Ps 35:1-25
In this lament, the Lord’s troubled servant calls God to see his circumstances and vindicate him.

35:4-10 The psalmist longs for the Lord’s salvation. The language seems vindictive, but it arises from a desire for justice and for the Lord to care for the needy and oppressed.

35:6 A path that is dark and slippery suggests instability and untimely doom under the Lord’s judgment (see 69:23; 73:18; 82:5; 107:10; 143:3). • The angel of the Lord is an agent of judgment as well as salvation.

The psalmist’s crisis looms so large that a resolution must be found in the Lord. The psalmist has taken the high road, believing that vengeance belongs to the Lord. God’s patience hardens the hearts of the wicked and gives them reasons to justify their evil lifestyle.

35:19 John applied this claim of innocence (see also 69:4) to Jesus (John 15:25).

35:19-25 Aha! . . . Look! Both words translate the same expression of glee (Hebrew he’akh).
Ps 36:1-4

1 Sin whispers to the wicked, deep within their hearts. They have no fear of God at all.
2 In their blind conceit, they cannot see how wicked they really are.
3 Everything they say is crooked and deceitful. They refuse to act wisely or do good.
4 They lie awake at night, hatching sinful plots. Their actions are never good. They make no attempt to turn from evil.
5 Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the heavens; your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.

Ps 36:5-9

6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the ocean depths. You care for people and animals alike, O Lord.
7 How precious is your unfailing love, O God! All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings.
8 You feed them from the abundance of your own house, letting them drink from your river of delights.
9 For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see.
10 Pour out your unfailing love on those who love you; give justice to those with honest hearts.
11 Don’t let the proud trample me or the wicked push me around.
12 Look! Those who do evil have fallen! They are thrown down, never to rise again.

Ps 37 A psalm of David.

1 Don’t worry about the wicked or envy those who do wrong.
2 For like grass, they soon fade away. Like spring flowers, they soon wither.
3 Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.
4 Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.
5 Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you.
6 He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.
7 Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes.
8 Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper—it only leads to harm.
9 For the wicked will be destroyed, but those who trust in the Lord will possess the land.
10 Soon the wicked will disappear. Though you look for them, they will be gone.
11 The lowly will possess the land and will live in peace and prosperity.
12 The wicked plot against the godly; they snarl at them in defiance.
13 But the Lord just laughs, for he sees their day of judgment coming.
14 The wicked draw their swords and string their bows to kill the poor and the oppressed, to slaughter those who do right.
15 But their swords will stab their own hearts, and their bows will be broken.
16 It is better to be godly and have little than to be evil and rich.
17 For the strength of the wicked will be shattered, but the Lord takes care of the godly.
18 Day by day the Lord takes care of the innocent, and they will receive an inheritance that lasts forever.
19 They will not be disgraced in hard times; even in famine they will have more than enough.
20 But the wicked will die. The Lord's enemies are like flowers in a field—they will disappear like smoke.
21 The wicked borrow and never repay, but the godly are generous givers.
22 Those the Lord blesses will possess the land, but those he curses will die.
23 The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.
24 Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand.
25 Once I was young, and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly abandoned or their children begging for bread.
26 The godly always give generous loans to others, and their children are a blessing.
27 Turn from evil and do good, and you will live in the land forever.
28 For the Lord loves justice, and he will never abandon the godly. He will keep them safe forever, but the children of the wicked will die.

37:4 To take delight in the Lord means aligning with the Lord's way in order to enjoy him.
37:6 Justice occurs when the Lord's will triumphs and the godly experience his rescue (Isa 45:8; 51:5-6; 58:8, 10-11).
37:7 Be still: We should let the Lord be God rather than taking matters into our own hands.
37:8 Irritability and anger quickly corrode character.
37:9-11 The wicked will not possess the land; those who trust in the Lord will. The Lord promises an inheritance because he is committed to caring for his people.
37:11 The Lord is the author of peace (85:10)—he brings peace to a chaotic world (29:11; 37:11; 85:8; 147:14). His wisdom guides the lowly into the way of peace (119:165; Matt 5:5).
37:12-17 The wicked seek to destroy the Lord's order, but he defeats them.
37:12-13 The wicked snarl to express their bitter envy. They plot to bring an end to the godly, but the Lord derides them because they cannot succeed (2:4).
37:14-15 The weapons of the wicked will turn against them (cp. 7:12-13).
37:16 Being wise with modest means is better than having prosperity and power (Prov 15:16; 16:8; 19; 17:1; 28:6) and being wicked.
37:18-20 The Lord cares for the blameless in this life and for eternity, but the wicked will perish.
37:20 Smoke depicts the temporary nature of life (68:2; 102:3).
37:21 To borrow and never repay is a behavior of a crooked lifestyle.
37:22 Generous givers freely share what they freely receive from the Lord (see 111:5; 112:5).
37:25-26 The Lord does not abandon his children or their descendants.
37:27-33 The godly are wise: they do good and reject evil. The Lord cares for them, protecting them and ensuring...
29 The godly will possess the land and will live there forever.

30 The godly offer good counsel; they teach right from wrong.

31 They have made God’s law their own, so they will never slip from his path.

32 The wicked wait in ambush for the godly, looking for an excuse to kill them.

33 But the Lord will not let the wicked succeed or let the godly be condemned when they are put on trial.

34 Put your hope in the Lord. Travel steadily along his path. He will honor you by giving you the land. You will see the wicked destroyed.

35 I have seen wicked and ruthless people flourishing like a tree in its native soil.

36 But when I looked again, they were gone! Though I searched for them, I could not find them!

37 Look at those who are honest and good, for a wonderful future awaits those who love peace.

38 But the rebellious will be destroyed; they have no future.

39 The Lord rescues the godly; he is their fortress in times of trouble.

40 The Lord helps them, rescuing them from the wicked. He saves them, and they find shelter in him.

Wisdom Psalms (Ps 37)

Some psalms are called wisdom psalms because they make a case for the primary importance of wisdom or instruct readers in dealing with questions, issues, and doubts that arise in life (see Ps 1, 14, 25, 34, 39, 49, 73, 78, 90–91, 111–112, 127–128, 131, 133, 139). Many other psalms contain elements of wisdom teaching (see Ps 18, 27, 31, 32, 40, 62, 92, 94, 107, 144, 146).

In the ancient Near East, wisdom had to do with ordering life and society, pleasing God and other people, and carefully observing life, society, and nature. In Israel, wisdom shares these concerns but is distinct in the centrality it gives to fear of the Lord. God alone is the center and focus of life (76:7), and proper fear of him opens the path of wisdom (111:10). Fear of the Lord is a disposition of absolute submission to and trust in the Lord (40:3; 112:7; 115:11), which leads to purity of life (19:9). Psalm 34 defines the fear of the Lord as a search for abundant life (34:12) that begins with seeking the Lord (34:4).

The way of wisdom is the way of godliness. Psalm 31 invites all readers of the Psalter to delight in God, his revelation, and the lifestyle that results from his care for the wise. The lives of the godly demonstrate inner consistency, growth, and beauty as they increasingly reflect God’s righteousness and justice, love and fidelity, compassion and grace. They practice godliness from the heart—from the inside out.

Wisdom enlarges a person’s perspective on life. A wise person desires to see life from God’s point of view. This search means living in submission and trust under the sovereign King who maintains the order and harmony of creation. Seeking God encourages an orderly and peaceful life (104:24; 139:14) and motivates obedience (19:7; 25:12; 51:6; 112:1; 119:98). The wise imitate God, and their lives are full of joy even when they are suffering hardship. They praise the Lord amidst all circumstances of life (22:23, 25). They face life confidently because the Lord is with them (23:4; 27:1, 3; 33:18; 49:5; 91:1-16).

In contrast to the way of the wise is the way of the fool, or the wicked. Such people perceive themselves as powerful and continually boast of their accomplishments. They do not accept limitations. They brag, oppress, steal, and deprive others of their happiness. They have no fear of the Lord (36:1; 55:19). The poets of Israel repeatedly warned the people to be wary of the path of folly, lest God’s judgment overtake the foolish (2:10-11; 33:8; 64:9; 94:8). Jesus Christ came into the world as God in the flesh. He embodies all the qualities of wisdom. Through him, we can walk in the way of wisdom since he suffered for our sins (Col 2:2-3).
PSALM 38
A psalm of David, asking God to remember him.

1 O Lord, don't rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your rage!
2 Your arrows have struck deep, and your blows are crushing me.
3 Because of your anger, my whole body is sick; my health is broken because of my sins.
4 My guilt overwhelms me—It is a burden too heavy to bear.
5 My wounds fester and stink because of my foolish sins.
6 I am bent over and racked with pain.
7 A raging fever burns within me, and my health is broken.
8 I am exhausted and completely crushed.
9 You know what I long for, Lord; you hear my every sigh.
10 My heart beats wildly, my strength fails, I am on the verge of collapse, facing constant pain.
11 My beloved ones and friends stay away, and I am going blind.
12 Meanwhile, my enemies lay traps to kill me. Those who wish me harm make plans to ruin me. All day long they plan their treachery.
13 But I am deaf to all their threats.

I am silent before them as one who cannot speak.
14 I choose to hear nothing, and I make no reply.
15 For I am waiting for you, O Lord. You must answer for me, O Lord my God.
16 I prayed, “Don’t let my enemies gloat over me or rejoice at my downfall.”
17 I am on the verge of collapse, facing constant pain.
18 But I confess my sins; I am deeply sorry for what I have done.
19 I have many aggressive enemies; they hate me without reason.
20 They repay me evil for good and oppose me for pursuing good.
21 Do not abandon me, O Lord. Do not stand at a distance, my God.
22 Come quickly to help me, O Lord my savior.

PSALM 39
For Jeduthun, the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 I said to myself, “I will watch what I do and not sin in what I say. I will hold my tongue when the ungodly are around me.”
2 But as I stood there in silence—the hotter I got, the more I thought about it, the turmoil within me grew worse.
3 The more I thought about it, the hotter I got, the torment within me grew worse.
4 “Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be.
5 “I am going blind. Even my own family stands at a distance.
6 Meanwhile, my enemies lay traps to kill me. Those who wish me harm make plans to ruin me. All day long they plan their treachery.
7 I am silent before them as one who cannot speak.
8 I choose to hear nothing, and I make no reply.
9 For I am waiting for you, O Lord. You must answer for me, O Lord my God.
10 I prayed, “Don’t let my enemies gloat over me or rejoice at my downfall.”
11 I am on the verge of collapse, facing constant pain.
12 But I confess my sins; I am deeply sorry for what I have done.
13 I have many aggressive enemies; they hate me without reason.
14 They repay me evil for good and oppose me for pursuing good.
15 Do not abandon me, O Lord. Do not stand at a distance, my God.
16 Come quickly to help me, O Lord my savior.

Ps 38 This lament and prayer for healing is an acrostic that uses the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalmist’s suffering is associated with sin, and his whole body is sick.
38:1-4 The psalmist’s burdens result from sin (see 40:12; 41:4; cp. Gen 4:13).
38:5-8 The severity of God’s punishment brings anguish that affects every part of the psalmist’s being.
38:9-12 The psalmist laments for a restored relationship with God, but he feels alienated. He finds himself lost and alone as his friends disappear.
38:13 The psalmist suffers quietly before his opponents (see Isa 53:7).
38:15 The Lord alone will resolve the conflict (9:18; 27:14; 37:9, 34).
38:17-20 No longer able to endure his suffering and teetering on the verge of collapse (cp. 15:5), the psalmist confesses his sin (see 32:5).
38:19 That the psalmist’s enemies hate him without reason compounds his pain.
38:22 Asking the Lord to act quickly in times of great need is common in the Psalter (22:19; 31:2; 40:13; 69:17; 70:1; 71:12; 79:8; 102:2; 141:1; 143:7). However, wisdom and experience teach that God’s people must often wait for him to act (27:14; 37:7; Isa 8:17; 40:31).
39 This prayer for rescue reflects the psalmist’s discouragement, which comes from having a limited perspective on his situation.
39:1-3 Suffering in silence only intensifies the psalmist’s anguish, pain, and inner turmoil.
39:4-6 Because of his suffering and sin, the psalmist concludes that life is meaningless and fleeting (see Job 7:7; 10; Isa 40:6-8). He had expected a wicked life to have those qualities (see...
Remind me that my days are numbered—
how fleeting my life is.
You have made my life no longer than the
width of my hand.
My entire lifetime is just a moment
to you;
but at best, each of us is but a "breath."

We are merely moving shadows, and all our busy rushing ends in
"nothing.
We heap up wealth, not knowing who will spend it.
And so, Lord, where do I put my hope?
My only hope is in you.
Rescue me from my rebellion.
Do not let fools mock me.
I am silent before you; I won't say a word, for my punishment is from you.
But please stop striking me!
I am exhausted by the blows from your hand.
When you discipline us for our sins, you consume like a moth what is precious to us.
Each of us is but a breath.

Hear my prayer, O Lord!
Listen to my cries for help!
Don't ignore my tears.
For I am your guest—
a traveler passing through,
as my ancestors were before me.
Leave me alone so I can smile again
before I am gone and exist no more.

For the choir director: A psalm of David.
I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry.

He lifted me out of the pit of despair,
out of the mud and the mire.
He set my feet on solid ground
and steadied me as I walked along.
He has given me a new song to sing,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see what he has done and be amazed.
They will put their trust in the Lord.
Oh, the joys of those who trust the Lord,
who have no confidence in the proud
or in those who worship idols.
O Lord my God, you have performed many wonders for us.
Your plans for us are too numerous
to list.
You have no equal.
If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds,
I would never come to the end of them.
You take no delight in sacrifices or offerings.
Now that you have made me listen, I finally understand—
you don't require burnt offerings or
cosmic offerings.
Then I said, "Look, I have come.
As is written about me in the Scriptures:
I take joy in doing your will, my God,
for your "instructions are written on my heart."
I have told all your people about your justice.
I have not been afraid to speak out,
as you, O Lord, well know.
I have not kept the good news of your justice hidden in my heart;
I have talked about your faithfulness and saving power.

Interlude

PSALM 40
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3 He has given me a new song to sing,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see what he has done and be amazed.
They will put their trust in the Lord.
4 Oh, the joys of those who trust the Lord,
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or in those who worship idols.
5 O Lord my God, you have performed many wonders for us.
Your plans for us are too numerous
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7 Then I said, "Look, I have come.
As is written about me in the Scriptures:
8 I take joy in doing your will, my God,
for your "instructions are written on my heart."
9 I have told all your people about your justice.
I have not been afraid to speak out,
as you, O Lord, well know.
10 I have not kept the good news of your justice hidden in my heart;
I have talked about your faithfulness and saving power.

Interlude

PSALM 40
For the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry.
I have told everyone in the great assembly of your unfailing love and faithfulness.

11 Lord, don’t hold back your tender mercies from me. Let your unfailing love and faithfulness always protect me.

12 For troubles surround me—too many to count! My sins pile up so high I can’t see my way out. They outnumber the hairs on my head. I have lost all courage.

13 Please, Lord, rescue me! Come quickly, Lord, and help me.

14 May those who try to destroy me be humiliated and put to shame. May those who take delight in my trouble be turned back in disgrace.

15 Let them be horrified by their shame, for they said, “Aha! We’ve got him now!”

16 But may all who search for you be filled with joy and gladness in you. May those who love your salvation repeatedly shout, “The Lord is great!”

17 As for me, since I am poor and needy, let the Lord keep me in his thoughts. You are my helper and my savior. O my God, do not delay.

PSALM 41
For the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 Oh, the joys of those who are kind to the poor! The Lord rescues them when they are in trouble.

2 The Lord protects them and keeps them alive. He gives them prosperity in the land and rescues them from their enemies.

3 The Lord nurses them when they are sick and restores them to health.

4 “O Lord,” I prayed, “have mercy on me. Heal me, for I have sinned against you.”

5 But my enemies say nothing but evil about me. “How soon will he die and be forgotten?” they ask.

6 They visit me as if they were my friends, but all the while they gather gossip, and when they leave, they spread it everywhere.

7 All who hate me whisper about me, imagining the worst.

8 “He has some fatal disease,” they say. “He will never get out of that bed!”

9 Even my best friend, the one I trusted completely, the one who shared my food, has turned against me.

10 Lord, have mercy on me. Make me well again, so I can pay them back!

11 I know you are pleased with me, for you have not let my enemies triumph over me.

12 You have preserved my life because I am innocent; you have brought me into your presence forever.

13 Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives from everlasting to everlasting.

14 Amen and amen!

Eating together was a sign of unity (Acts 2:42). Refusing to eat with someone indicated hostility (1 Cor 5:11). Jesus experienced the same kind of betrayal (John 13:1, 18).

41:12-17 The psalmist is troubled both by his adversaries and his own sins and prays for rescue. This passage is repeated almost verbatim as Ps 70.

Ps 41 In this wisdom psalm, the psalmist prays for healing (41:1, 4), laments his distress (41:5-9), and expresses confidence in the Lord’s blessing (41:13, 11-12).

41:1 The poor who suffer hardship have special protection under God’s law (Lev 14:21; 19:10); they receive God’s justice and godly rule (72:13; 82:3-4). The word translated poor is often a synonym for the godly (113:7; see Zeph 3:12).

41:3 When they are sick: This illness might be physical or spiritual (see 6:2; Ps 38).

41:4 The psalmist applies the blessing to himself (41:12). Apparently he has taken care of the poor (41:1), but he has sinned against the Lord in other ways. Out of his pain, he cries for healing while confessing his sin. The Lord alone can grant the restoration that brings true joy (30:2; 107:20-21).

41:5-9 The psalmist’s enemies disguise themselves as friends, while his friends openly become his enemies.

41:5 How soon will he die? The psalmist’s opponents regard his suffering as a divine judgment (cp. 1:6).

41:9 The one who shared my food:

41:10-12 The psalmist knows that the Lord has forgiven him and will bless him.


Book Two (Pss 42–72) Book Two includes psalms by many authors: eighteen psalms of David (Pss 51–65, 68–70), eight psalms of the descendants of Korah (Pss 42–49), one psalm ascribed to Asaph (Ps 50), one to Solomon (Ps 72), and several with no author credited. See Psalms Introduction, “The Composition of the Psalms,” p. 901.
2. BOOK TWO (PSS 42–72)

PSALM 42

For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah.

1 As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God.
2 I thirst for God, the living God.
   When can I go and stand before him?
3 Day and night I have only tears for food, while my enemies continually taunt me, saying,
   “Where is this God of yours?”
4 My heart is breaking as I remember how it used to be: I walked among the crowds of worshipers,
   leading a great procession to the house of God, singing for joy and giving thanks amid the sound of a great celebration!
5 Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again—my Savior and my God!
   Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember you—even from distant Mount Hermon, the source of the Jordan, from the land of Mount Mizar.
7 I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your waves and surging tides sweep over me.

Questions and Doubt (Pss 42–43)

The psalmists are not afraid to ask questions and express doubts. These questions clarify life issues. The intensity of the mood or the significance of an issue can be judged by the number of questions asked. For example, the psalmist of 4:2 asks three questions of his adversaries, and there are five questions in 13:1-2. The psalms with the greatest number of questions raise some of the most significant issues, such as God’s perceived abandonment (Pss 42–43, 74, 89) and the prosperity of the wicked (Ps 73).

Questions about God ask whether the Lord is the true God (94:9-10; 121:1) and why he seems to have abandoned the godly (77:7). Questions call attention to the success of the wicked (10:13), the impotence of the godly (11:3), the election of Zion (68:16), the power of God (114:5-6; 147:17), the folly of the nations (2:1), and the issue of injustice (82:2). The psalmists question, examine, challenge, doubt, and occasionally despair over God’s seeming lack of concern.

Questions may also lead to praise and worship: “Who can list the glorious miracles of the Lord? Who can ever praise him enough?” (106:2). The question, “Who will come from Mount Zion to rescue Israel?” (53:6) calls attention to the answer: The Lord rescues his people. For many questions, the implied answer brings praise to the Lord: “Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth” (73:25; 89:8). Questions may also express wonder at God’s grace (84:3; 144:3). Asking good questions can be the beginning of the path that leads us along the path of wisdom and results in worship and praise.
PSALM 43

1 Declare me innocent, O God!
Defend me against these ungodly people.
Rescue me from these unjust liars.
2 For you are God, my only safe haven.
Why have you tossed me aside?
Why must I wander around in grief,
oppressed by my enemies?
3 Send out your light and your truth;
let them guide me.
Let them lead me to your holy mountain,
to the place where you live.
4 There I will go to the altar of God,
to God—the source of all my joy.
I will praise you with my harp,
O God, my God!
5 Why am I discouraged?
Why is my heart so sad?
I will put my hope in God!
I will praise him again—
my Savior and my God!

PSALM 44

For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah.

1 O God, we have heard it with our own ears—
our ancestors have told us of all you did in their day,
in days long ago:
2 You drove out the pagan nations by your power
and gave all the land to our ancestors.
You crushed their enemies and set our ancestors free.
3 They did not conquer the land with their swords;
it was not their own strong arm that gave them victory.
It was your right hand and strong arm
and the blinding light from your face
that helped them, for you loved them.
4 You are my King and my God.
You command victories for Israel.
5 Only by your power can we push back our enemies;
only in your name can we trample our foes.
6 I do not trust in my bow;
I do not count on my sword to save me.
7 You are the one who gives us victory over our enemies;
you disgrace those who hate us.
8 O God, we give glory to you all day long
and constantly praise your name.

Interlude

9 But now you have tossed us aside in dishonor.
You no longer lead our armies to battle.

8 But each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me,
and through each night I sing his songs,
praying to God who gives me life.

9 “O God my rock,” I cry,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I wander around in grief,
oppressed by my enemies?”

10 Their taunts break my bones.
They scoff, “Where is this God of yours?”

11 Why am I discouraged?
Why is my heart so sad?
I will put my hope in God!
I will praise him again—
my Savior and my God!

Psalm 42:8 The psalmist sees rays of hope. A life oriented to God includes songs of joy and praying for justice and vindication (42:9-10; 43:1-4).

Ps 43:1-4 The psalmist brings his many doubts, discouragements, and questions directly to God.

Ps 43:1: The psalmist turns to the Lord for rescue from his troubles, for guidance, for restoration, and for vindication.

Ps 43:2 tossed me aside: Other psalms similarly ask whether God has rejected his people (44:9, 23; 60:1, 10; 74:1; 77:7; 88:14; 89:38; 108:11).

Ps 43:3 In this prayer for God’s redemption, light and truth are viewed as guides (see 18:25-29; 27:1; 85:10-13; 89:14-18; see also 119:105; John 3:19; Eph 5:8; 1 Thes 5:5-7). • The Temple on the mountain in Jerusalem symbolized God’s holy presence among his people (15:1; 43:3; 99:5, 9; 132:7).

Ps 43:5 This verse is repeated in 42:5, 11.

Ps 44: This national lament after defeat in battle continues the tone of the previous two psalms, including reflecting on an unspecified moment in Israel’s history and calling on God for salvation. The people recite God’s past acts of rescue (44:1-3), acknowledge God’s power to save (44:4-8), describe their humiliation in exile (44:9-16), claim their innocence and lament the injustice of their current situation (44:17-22), and cry for vindication (44:23-26).

Ps 44:title psalm: Hebrew maskil. This may be a literary or musical term.

Ps 44:1 we have heard . . . of all you did: The story of redemption encompasses the story of God’s favor and power in his past acts of rescue (see 78:1-4; see also Ps 105–106).

Ps 44:2 God drove out the pagan nations during the conquests recorded in Joshua.

Ps 44:3 Though the Israelites used swords and other weapons (44:6), they would have lost their battles without the light of the Lord’s favor (see 18:25-29; 27:1; 89:15).

Ps 44:4-8 God’s people feel confident about his mighty acts; he was with them in the past, and he is their king in the present.

Ps 44:4 Israel: Literally for Jacob. The names “Jacob” and “Israel” are often interchange- throughout the Old Testament, referring sometimes to the individual patriarch and sometimes to the nation.

Ps 44:9-16 The people have experienced defeat (44:9-12), so they understand suffering and disgrace (44:13-16).
Biblical authors often call for God’s attention in a crisis (35:23; 44:23). Wake up: God’s people can turn to the Lord and trust him for rescue. Their petition for God to remedy their situation is as strong as their lament about God’s rejection.

**Wake up:** Biblical authors often call for God’s attention in a crisis (35:23; 44:23; 73:20; 80:2; Mark 4:38).

*Ps 45* This psalm celebrates a royal wedding; it might have been sung on many occasions and not just at one wedding. As God’s representative, the king carried the responsibility of dispensing justice and maintaining order in God’s world (see Ps 2).

**Psalms 45**

For the choir director: A love song to be sung to the tune “Lilies.” A psalm of the descendants of Korah.

1 Beautiful words stir my heart. I will recite a lovely poem about the king, for my tongue is like the pen of a skillful poet.

2 You are the most handsome of all. Gracious words stream from your lips. God himself has blessed you forever.

3 Put on your sword, O mighty warrior! You are so glorious, so majestic.

4 In your majesty, ride out to victory, defending truth, humility, and justice. Go forth to perform awe-inspiring deeds!

5 Your arrows are sharp, piercing your enemies’ hearts. The nations fall beneath your feet.

6 Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. You rule with a scepter of justice.

7 You love justice and hate evil. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you, pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else.

8 Myrrh, aloes, and cassia perfume your robes. In ivory palaces the music of strings entertains you.
Kings’ daughters are among your noble women. At your right side stands the queen, wearing jewelry of finest gold from Ophir!

Listen to me, O royal daughter; take to heart what I say. Forget your people and your family far away. For your royal husband delights in your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord. The princess of Tyre will shower you with gifts. The wealthy will beg your favor. The bride is a representative of the king. Powerful people and nations try to gain her favor in order to get close to the king. This is a great honor, and she is encouraged to give herself fully to her new position.

The bride, a princess, looks glorious in her golden gown. In her beautiful robes, she is led to the king, accompanied by her bridesmaids. What a joyful and enthusiastic procession as they enter the king’s palace! Your sons will become kings like their father. You will make them rulers over many lands. I will bring honor to your name in every generation. Therefore, the nations will praise you forever and ever.

PSALM 45

For the choir director: A song of the descendants of Korah, to be sung by soprano voices:

1 God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.

2 So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.

3 Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!

4 A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the ‘Most High.

5 God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it.

6 The nations are in chaos, and their kingdoms crumble! God’s voice thunders, and the earth melts!

7 The Lord of Heaven’s Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.

8 Come, see the glorious works of the Lord: See how he brings destruction upon the world.

9 He causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

10 “Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.”

11 The Lord of Heaven’s Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.

PSALM 46

For the choir director: A song of the descendants of Korah, to be sung by soprano voices:

1 God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.

2 So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.

3 Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!

4 A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the ‘Most High.

5 God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it.

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11 The Lord of Heaven’s Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.
PSALM 47
For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah.

1 Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise!
2 For the Lord Most High is awesome. He is the great King of all the earth.
3 He subdues the nations before us, putting our enemies beneath our feet.
4 He chose the Promised Land as our inheritance, the proud possession of Jacob's descendants, whom he loves.

Interlude

5 God has ascended with a mighty shout. The Lord has ascended with trumpets blaring.
6 Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises!
7 For God is the King over all the earth. Praise him with a psalm.
8 God reigns above the nations, sitting on his holy throne.
9 The rulers of the world have gathered together with the people of the God of Abraham.
10 For all the kings of the earth belong to God. He is highly honored everywhere.

PSALM 48
A song. A psalm of the descendants of Korah.

1 How great is the Lord, how deserving of praise, in the city of our God, which sits on his holy mountain!
2 It is high and magnificent; the whole earth rejoices to see it! Mount Zion, the holy mountain, is the city of the great King!
3 God himself is in Jerusalem's towers, revealing himself as its defender.
4 The kings of the earth joined forces and advanced against the city.
5 But when they saw it, they were stunned; they were terrified and ran away.
6 They were gripped with terror and writhed in pain like a woman in labor.
7 You destroyed them like the mighty ships of Tarshish shattered by a powerful east wind.
8 We had heard of the city's glory, but now we have seen it ourselves—the city of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. It is the city of our God; he will make it safe forever.

Interlude

9 O God, we meditate on your unfailing love as we worship in your Temple.
10 As your name deserves, O God, you will be praised to the ends of the earth. Your strong right hand is filled with victory.
11 Let the people on Mount Zion rejoice. Let all the towns of Judah be glad because of your justice.

The psalmist joyfully celebrates God's mighty deeds of redemption and his victory in dealing with Israel and especially under David (see 18:40-50). God's mighty deeds of redemption manifest his love for Israel.
48:12-13 Jerusalem: Hebrew Zion.

• towers . . . fortified walls . . . citadels: These structures provide a visual tour of Zion’s strength.

48:14 No one is like God (35:10; 71:19; 86:8; 89:6, 8; 113:5; see also Isa 40:18, 25). He is the shepherd King (95:7) who will guide (see 5:8; 23:2) the sheep of his flock (77:20).

Ps 49 In this wisdom psalm, a wise teacher warns against enemies, who he portrays as living a rich lifestyle and caring only for themselves (49:5-9). They cannot keep anyone alive, least of all themselves, even in their memories (49:10-12). Like fattened animals, they are led to slaughter (49:14-20).

49:1-2 Anyone who will listen can gain wisdom (Prov 1:5; 8, 33).

49:4 The teacher used both proverbs and riddles for instruction in wisdom (see Prov 1:5-6).

49:5-8 If enemies who live for material rewards cannot sustain themselves, how can they give life to others?

49:7 They cannot redeem themselves from death: Or no one can redeem the life of another. The Hebrew can be translated either way.

49:11-12 The teacher brings wisdom through irony. Everyone dies, and even those with estates named after them will be forgotten.

49:13-15 The teachers of false wisdom cannot rescue themselves from death. Only God has that power.
Mount Zion, the City of God (Ps 48)

Zion is the Hebrew name for the mountain in Jerusalem where the Temple was located (see 2 Sam 5:7; see also 2 Chr 3:1). On the one hand, Zion is synonymous with Jerusalem, and the NLT often translates Zion as “Jerusalem” (69:35; 87:2; 97:8; 132:13). Zion is the actual city of Jerusalem that was destroyed in 586 BC (see 79:1; 102:13; 126:1; 137:1) and again in AD 70.

On the other hand, Zion is the city of God that transcends geographical location. Zion is God’s universal kingdom, pictured as the city in which he dwells (74:2; 76:2; 84:7; 135:21; see Isa 26). The prophets and poets of Israel speak of the city of God as being more extensive than the physical city. The citizens of this city come from Judah, Israel, and the nations (see 87:5-6; Heb 12:22-24). It is on a high mountain (48:2) at the center of God’s kingdom on earth (99:2; 132:13), and his throne is in Zion (see note on 9:11). Therefore, godly prayers and praise focus on Zion (53:6; 65:1; 137:1; 147:12; 149:2) and redemption is sought there (14:7; 20:2; 50:2; 53:6; 133:3).

Zion is also symbolic of God’s protection and blessings (51:18; 128:5; 134:3; see Pss 46; 48). Anyone who trusts in the Lord is as secure as Mount Zion (125:1), but those who reject the Lord also reject Zion and have no future (129:5-8). Zion is the mother of all the nations (87:4-6). Members of the Davidic dynasty are the legitimate heirs who rule over Zion as agents to establish God’s universal kingdom (2:6; 110:2).

The NT likewise speaks of a heavenly Jerusalem, the spiritual home of those from all nations who have been reborn through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 4:24-26; Heb 12:22-24; Rev 3:12; 21:2-4). The book of Hebrews speaks of Zion as the mother city. Abraham sought it in faith (Heb 11:10), and all men and women of faith are its citizens (Heb 12:22-24). Because the Lord knows no geographical limitations (1 Kgs 8:27), the true Zion he inhabits is in the hearts of all who worship him (22:3).

50:2-6 The Lord is coming to bring righteousness. This hope encourages his faithful people, but those who have been unfaithful will not experience blessing when the heavens above and the earth below testify against them (cp. Deut 30:19; 31:28; 32:1; Isa 1:2). The Lord comes to restore order to the world (5:8; 22:31; 33:5; 40:9; 50:6; 71:16; 97:6).

50:7-13 The psalmist delivers a message against those who regard the sacrificial rituals as more important than having a proper heart attitude.

50:9 Unlike pagan gods, God does not need food; instead, he wants his people to serve him with a right heart (50:14-15).

50:10 I own the cattle on a thousand hills: God has no needs; he possesses everything.

50:14 Thankfulness means looking beyond self-interest to express gratitude for God’s blessings (see 51:15-17; 54:6).

50:15 God’s response to his people’s cry is to rescue them.
16 But God says to the wicked:
   "Why bother reciting my decrees
   and pretending to obey my covenant?
17 For you refuse my discipline
   and treat my words like trash.
18 When you see thieves, you approve of
   them, and you spend your time with
   adulterers.
19 Your mouth is filled with wickedness,
   and your tongue is full of lies.
20 You sit around and slander your brother—
your own mother's son.
21 While you did all this, I remained silent,
   and you thought I didn't care.
   But now I will rebuke you,
   listing all my charges against you.
22 Repent, all of you who forget me,
or I will tear you apart,
   and no one will help you.
23 But giving ‘thanks is a sacrifice that
   truly honors me.
   If you keep to my path,
   I will reveal to you the salvation of God.”

PSALM 51
For the choir director: A psalm of David,
regarding the time Nathan the prophet came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

1 Have mercy on me, O God,
because of your unfailing love.

Because of your great compassion,
   blot out the stain of my sins.
2 Wash me clean from my guilt.
   Purify me from my sin.
3 For I recognize my rebellions;
   it haunts me day and night.
4 Against you, and you alone, have I
   sinned;
   I have done what is evil in your sight.
   You will be proved right in what you say,
   and your judgment against me is just.
5 For I was born a sinner—
yes, from the moment my mother
   conceived me.
6 But you desire honesty from the womb,
teaching me wisdom even there.
7 Purify me from my sins, and I will be
   clean;
   wash me, and I will be whiter than
   snow.
8 Oh, give me back my joy again;
you have broken me—
   now let me rejoice.
9 Don’t keep looking at my sins.
   Remove the stain of my guilt.
10 Create in me a clean heart, O God.
   Purify me from my sin
   and renew a loyal spirit within me.
11 Do not banish me from your presence,
   and don’t take your Holy Spirit
   from me.

50:16-21 This message is against the wicked, who only pretend to listen to God.
50:17 my discipline . . . my words: The wicked may observe rituals, but they reject more important matters such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness (cp. Matt 23:23-24).
50:21 Because he is patient, God's everlasting salvation.
50:22 God will tear the wicked apart like a lion tearing its prey (Isa 5:29; 31:4; Ezek 19:3; cp. Ps 7:2; 22:13).
Ps 51–65 These psalms of David share a common thread in their reflection on the experience of evil. In Ps 51, the psalmist confesses the evil he has done and asks God's forgiveness. Psalms 52–64 lament specific evils that David experienced. A song of praise (Ps 65) brings David's laments to an end.
Ps 51 This moving prayer for restoration asks for God's favor, mercy, forgiveness, and cleansing. Out of a broken spirit, the psalmist confesses and accepts responsibility for his sin (51:3-6), then petitions God to remove his guilt and renew him inwardly (51:7-12). The psalmist then recommits himself to a lifestyle of wisdom and joy in the service of God and others (51:13-17).
51:1 title regarding the time Nathan . . . Bathsheba: See 2 Sam 11:1-27. The text of the psalm contains no explicit reference to this event.
51:1-2 The repentant offender has nothing to offer God. He needs God's favor, mercy, forgiveness, and blessing before he can experience renewal and restoration.
51:1 A prayer for God's mercy and kindness is part of the genre of lament. Sometimes the plea comes from the psalmist's acknowledgment of his weakness and sin, as here (see also 6:2; 9:13; 25:16; 31:9; 41:4; 10). At other times, it arises from the psalmist's commitment to the Lord (see 26:11; 27:7; 119:29, 58, 132). In each case, God's mercy brings an inner renewal.
51:2 Wash me . . . Purify me: The psalmist prays for cleansing and release from the guilt of his sin (51:7; see 26:6; Isa 1:16, 18; 4:4).
51:3-6 The psalmist accepts the consequences of his sin against God. He knows that there is nothing good in him unless God renews his life.
51:4 Against . . . you alone: This is hyperbole—the psalmist knows he also sinned against human beings (2 Sam 11:2-4, 15-17), but his offense against God is more important. He expects God to rebuke him and will accept whatever verdict God renders (see Rom 3:4). * and your judgment against me is just: Greek version reads and you will win your case in court. Cp. Rom 3:4, where Paul quotes the Greek translation of this verse.
51:5 I was born a sinner: The psalmist is not making excuses but is acknowledging the depth of his sinfulness. From the time we are conceived, we all share in the human condition of sinfulness.
51:6 from the womb: Or from the heart; Hebrew reads in the inward parts.
51:7 Purify me from my sins (literally Purify me with the hyssop branch; see Exod 12:22; Lev 14:4; John 19:29; Heb 9:19): The psalmist depends on God to purify and renew him (see Isa 1:18).
51:8 Regaining joy is a gracious gift from God. * you have broken me: The psalmist's whole being feels broken (6:2; cp. 34:20).
51:10-12 God's Spirit renews and recreates the human spirit.
51:10 A loyal spirit yields the inner qualities of constancy and perseverance.
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.
13 Then I will teach your ways to rebels, and they will return to you.
14 Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.
15 Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you.
16 You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering.
17 The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.
18 Look with favor on Zion and help her; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
19 Then you will be pleased with sacrifices offered in the right spirit—with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings. Then bulls will again be sacrificed on your altar.

**PSALM 52**

*For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time Doeg the Edomite said to Saul, “David has gone to see Ahimelech.”*

1 Why do you boast about your crimes, great warrior? Don't you realize God's justice continues forever?
2 All day long you plot destruction. Your tongue cuts like a sharp razor; you're an expert at telling lies.
3 You love evil more than good and lies more than truth. *Interlude*
4 You love to destroy others with your words, you liar! *Interlude*
5 But God will strike you down once and for all. He will pull you from your home and uproot you from the land of the living.

6 The righteous will see it and be amazed. They will laugh and say, “Look what happens to mighty warriors who do not trust in God. They trust their wealth instead and grow more and more bold in their wickedness.”
7 But I am like an olive tree, thriving in the house of God. I will always trust in God's unfailing love.
8 I will praise you forever, O God, for what you have done. I will trust in your good name in the presence of your faithful people.

**PSALM 53**

*Ps 53:1-6 /*Ps 14:1-7*

*For the choir director: A meditation; a psalm of David.*

1 Only fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!

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51:11 your Holy Spirit: Or your spirit of holiness. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can change the human will to make it “loyal” (51:10) and “willing to obey” (51:12).
51:13 As he learns from his sin and its consequences, the psalmist wants to teach others.
51:14 shedding blood: This idiom includes any injustice, not just homicide (9:12; 58:10; see 2 Sam 11:14-26; cp. Is 1:15-17).
51:18-19 rebuild the walls of Jerusalem: These verses were probably added as a prayer for national restoration after the Exile (see Ps 42-43); the entire community in exile identified with the spirit of the psalm.
51:19 sacrifices offered in the right spirit come from a heart that is right with God and with others (see 15:2-5; 24:3-6; 50:14; Matt 5:23-24).
52: Wicked people use words to destroy relationships and communities. They foolishly think that they can be heroes by their words (52:1-4), but their fate suddenly overtakes them (52:5-7). In contrast, the godly renew their commitment to the Lord (52:8-9) and find their future secure in him.
52:1-4 Liars foolishly deceive themselves by thinking that they can be heroes by their words. They believe themselves innocent of any charges of evil-doing, though they love evil and cause destruction. Those who speak curses, sarcasm, bitterness, arrogant boasting, and deceptions (31:18; 34:13; 59:7, 12; 120:2-3; 140:3, 9) bring about chaos, alienation, and destruction (Jas 3:5). Their sharp words cut like swords and daggers (55:21; 57:4; 64:3), the fangs of a snake (140:3), or a razor.
52:5-7 God’s judgment on the wicked will come suddenly and forcibly. The godly rejoice in God’s justice, not in the misfortunes of the wicked.
52:5 God will strike the wicked down like a pagan altar, idol, or unclean vessel (Exod 34:13; Lev 11:35; 2 Kgs 10:27).
52:6 In Hebrew, the verbs here translated see and be amazed sound almost alike.
52:8-9 The psalmist commits himself to a life of trust in the Lord. An olive tree lives a long time when cared for (1:3; 128:3). The psalmist desires to be close to the Lord, his Savior and the source of his blessing (18:6; 23:6).
53: This psalm parallels Ps 14, differing only in verse 5.
53:1-3 Paul uses the Greek translation of this passage in his description of the depravity of all people (Rom 3:10-12).
2 God looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if anyone is truly wise, if anyone seeks God.
3 But no, all have turned away; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not a single one!
4 Will those who do evil never learn? They eat up my people like bread and wouldn't think of praying to God.
5 Terror will grip them, terror like they have never known before. God will scatter the bones of your enemies. You will put them to shame, for God has rejected them.
6 Who will come from Mount Zion to rescue Israel? When God restores his people, Jacob will shout with joy, and Israel will rejoice.

PSALM 54
For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time the Ziphites came and said to Saul, “We know where David is hiding.” To be accompanied by stringed instruments.

1 Come with great power, O God, and rescue me!
   Defend me with your might.
2 Listen to my prayer, O God.
   Pay attention to my plea.
3 For strangers are attacking me; violent people are trying to kill me. They care nothing for God.

4 But God is my helper. The Lord keeps me alive!
5 May the evil plans of my enemies be turned against them. Do as you promised and put an end to them.
6 I will sacrifice a voluntary offering to you; I will praise your name, O Lord, for it is good.
7 For you have rescued me from my troubles and helped me to triumph over my enemies.

PSALM 55
For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by stringed instruments.

1 Listen to my prayer, O God.
   Do not ignore my cry for help!
2 Please listen and answer me, for I am overwhelmed by my troubles.
3 My enemies shout at me, making loud and wicked threats. They bring trouble on me and angrily hunt me down.
4 My heart pounds in my chest. The terror of death assaults me. Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can't stop shaking.
5 Oh, that I had wings like a dove; then I would fly away and rest!
6 I would fly far away to the quiet of the wilderness.
7 How quickly I would escape—far from this wild storm of hatred.
8 Confuse them, Lord, and frustrate their plans, for I see violence and conflict in the city.

55:3 have become corrupt: Greek version reads have become useless. Cp. Rom 3:12.
55:5 scatter the bones: Israel's enemies would suffer shameful defeat and lack the peaceful rest of a decent burial (see note on Gen 49:29-33; cp. Ps 141:7; 2 Kgs 9:10; Jer 8:1-2; Ezek 6:5).
Ps 54 In this individual lament, occasioned by violent and godless people (Ps 54:3), the psalmist turns to God in prayer and maintains his focus on God's help (Ps 54:4). He prays for God to save him from evil and to judge his enemies (Ps 54:5, 7).
54:title psalm: Hebrew maskil. This may be a literary or musical term. * The psalm refers to the account of 1 Sam 23:19-20, when the Ziphites were bent on violence.
54:3: The strangers were alienated from the covenant community (see 109:11; Prov 5:10). * Proud and violent people hold no regard for God or for other people (see 35:11, 25; 86:14; Prov 11:16).
54:6-7 In anticipation of God's response, the mood of the psalm changes from gloom to thanksgiving.
54:6 A voluntary offering is a sacrifice of praise (see "Grain Offering" and "Peace Offering" in chart, "Israel's Sacrifices," p. 197). Sacrifices of praise are the kind of offering God most desires (see 50:14-15, 23).
Ps 55 The psalmist is faced with adversaries whose leader is a former friend (55:12-14), and he is overwhelmed with anguish. He turns to the Lord in prayer and commits himself to the Lord for redress (55:22-23). Jesus experienced similar suffering when his friend (Judas) betrayed him. He also experienced the answer to the psalmist's prayer: (1) by taking the place of the wicked and receiving their judgment (Isa 53:7-9), and (2) by committing himself to the Father, who rescued (Luke 23:46) and rewarded him (Isa 53:10-12).
55:title psalm: Hebrew maskil. This may be a literary or musical term.
55:1-3 The occasion for this prayer is an attack by an enemy.
55:4-8 In the experience of deep anguish, the psalmist confesses that his adversity has become unbearable and he seeks an escape.
56:3 I cry out in my distress, and the Lord hears my voice.
56:4 For my enemies refuse to change their ways; they do not fear God.
56:5 They are always twisting what I say; they spend their days plotting to harm me.
56:6 They come together to spy on me—watching my every step, eager to kill me.
56:7 Don’t let them get away with their wickedness; in your anger, O God, bring them down.
56:8 You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.
56:9 My enemies will retreat when I call to you for help.
56:10 This I know: God is on my side! What can mere mortals do to me?
56:11 I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?
56:12 It is not an enemy who taunts me—I could have hidden from them. It is not my foes who so arrogantly insult me—I could have hidden from them.
56:13 Instead, it is you—my equal, my companion and close friend.
56:14 What good fellowship we once enjoyed as we walked together to the house of God.
56:15 Let death stalk my enemies; let the grave swallow them alive, for evil makes its home within them.
56:16 But I will call on God, and the Lord will rescue me.
56:17 Morning, noon, and night I cry out in my distress, and the Lord hears my voice.
56:18 He ransoms me and keeps me safe from the battle waged against me, though many still oppose me.
56:19 God, who has ruled forever, will hear me and humble them.
56:20 I praise God for what he has promised; he broke his promises.
56:21 His words are as smooth as butter, but in his heart is war. His words are as soothing as lotion, but underneath are daggers!
56:22 Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall.

Interlude

55:11 The psalmist’s enemy was once a friend; memories of that close relationship bring him pain (see 31:11).
55:15 let the grave: Hebrew let Sheol (see note on 6:5). See “Prayers for Vengeance” at Ps 137, p. 1017.
55:19-21 God is good and faithful, but the psalmist’s enemies and so-called friend are deceitful and wicked.
55:22-23 The psalmist commits all his cares to the Lord.
55:23 To die young means that one fails to experience God’s full blessing (cp. Prov 3:2, 16).
Ps 56 This individual lament moves from petition to confidence two times (56:1-4, 5-13).
56:title A psalm: Hebrew miktam.
56:4 mere mortals: Or mere flesh, in contrast to the immortal and infinitely more powerful God (see Isa 2:22).
12 I will fulfill my vows to you, O God, and will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help.
13 For you have rescued me from death; you have kept my feet from slipping. So now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life-giving light.

PSALM 57
For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time he fled from Saul and went into the cave. To be sung to the tune “Do Not Destroy!”

1 Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy!
For you have rescued me from death; I will fulfill my vows to you, O God, in your life-giving light.

PSALM 58
For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be sung to the tune “Do Not Destroy!”

1 Justice—do you rulers know the meaning of the word? Do you judge the people fairly?
2 No! You plot injustice in your hearts. You spread violence throughout the land.
3 These wicked people are born sinners; even from birth they have lied and gone their own way.
4 They spit venom like deadly snakes; they are like cobras that refuse to listen.

5 My enemies have set a trap for me. I am weary from distress. They have dug a deep pit in my path, but they themselves have fallen into it.
6 My heart is confident in you, O God; my heart is confident. No wonder I can sing your praises!
7 Wake up, my heart! Wake up, O lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn with my song.
8 I will thank you, Lord, among all the people. I will sing your praises among the nations.
9 For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
10 Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens. May your glory shine over all the earth.
58:6 The psalmist calls on God to break the destructive power of the wicked.
58:7 Make their weapons useless in their hands: Or Let them be trodden down and wither like grass. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.
58:8 When moving over dry ground, snails dry up.
58:9-10 God’s judgment will come suddenly. The certainty of vindication brings joy to the godly.
58:11 Vindication is the reward of those who live for God.

Ps 59 The psalmist laments the power of enemies who conspire with other nations.

59:6-8 The wicked threaten like vicious dogs, but the Lord responds with scorn.
59:11-13 The psalmist prays that the wicked will be forced to endure the same agonizing pain they have caused.
59:14-16 The wicked will go unsatisfied, but the psalmist will praise the Lord’s power and unfailing love.
59:15 But to sleep unsatisfied: Or and growl if they don’t get enough. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.
But as for me, I will sing about your power.
Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love.
For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress.
O my Strength, to you I sing praises, for you, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me unfailing love.

For the choir director: A psalm of David useful for teaching, regarding the time David fought Aram-naharaim and Aram-zobah, and Joab returned and killed 12,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. To be sung to the tune “Lily of the Testimony.”

You have rejected us, O God, and broken our defenses.
You have been angry with us; now restore us to your favor.
You have shaken our land and split it open.
Seal the cracks, for the land trembles.
You have been very hard on us; now restore us to your favor.
For you have been my refuge, my fortress, a rallying point in the face of attack.
Now rescue your beloved people.
Answer and save us by your power.
God has promised this by his holiness:
Oh, please help us against our enemies, for all human help is useless.
With God’s help we will do mighty things, for he will trample down our foes.

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by stringed instruments.
O God, listen to my cry! Hear my prayer!
From the ends of the earth, I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed.
Lead me to the towering rock of safety, for you are my safe refuge, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me.
Let me live forever in your sanctuary, safe beneath the shelter of your wings!

Ps 60 The psalmist laments a national defeat and cries out to God for rescue.

Ps 61 The poet longs for God’s presence. All three psalms concern themselves with the king’s security.

Ps 61 The lamenting psalmist petitions God to protect him and lead him into his presence (61:4–5). He prays for God to extend and protect the king’s rule and makes vows to praise God.

Ps 61:2 the ends of the earth: This expression has the connotation of a cry that comes from a place far away from God.

Ps 61:4 The poet longs for God’s presence and seeks entrance into God’s home on earth for divine protection and care. To be received into God’s sanctuary (literally tent) is the greatest good (see 15:1; 23:6, 24:3–6). The Hebrew word translated sanctuary recalls the Tabernacle and the tent that David built for the Ark (1 Chr 15:1). See also note on John 1:14.

Ps 61:5 The shelter of your wings symbolizes God’s protection and care (see 9:9; 17:8).
5 For you have heard my vows, O God. You have given me an inheritance reserved for those who fear your name.

6 Add many years to the life of the king! May his years span the generations!

7 May he reign under God’s protection forever. May your unfailing love and faithfulness watch over him.

8 Then I will sing praises to your name forever as I fulfill my vows each day.

PSALM 62
For Jeduthun, the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from him.

2 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will never be shaken.

3 So many enemies against one man—all of them trying to kill me.

4 They plan to topple me from my high position. They delight in telling lies about me.

5 Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him.

6 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken.

7 My victory and honor come from God alone.

8 O my people, trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge.

9 Common people are as worthless as a puff of wind, and the powerful are not what they appear to be.

10 Don’t make your living by extortion or put your hope in stealing. And if your wealth increases, don’t make it the center of your life.

11 God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times:

Trust in the Lord (Ps 62)

The Lord’s loving character leads people to trust in him (13:5; 21:7; 32:10; 52:8; 143:8; 17:7; 36:7). His name and reputation also encourage people’s trust (9:10; 20:7; 33:21). The godly reject idolatry and any commitment that detracts from their absolute trust in the Lord (31:6, 14; 44:6; 49:6, 13; 52:7).

For the godly, every adversity in life is an occasion for growth in trust (9:9; 25:2; 46:1; 55:23; 57:1; 59:16; 62:8; 78:7). They are not afraid of life (56:3-4, 11; 112:7) but grow more confident (112:7; 119:42; 125:1). David confides that he trusted in the Lord when he was still a nursing child (22:9-10). Trust in the Lord is a form of wisdom that focuses on the Lord (141:8), the rejection of folly and evil, and the pursuit of the Lord’s way (31:19; 37:3, 5; 115:11).

The Lord rescues, cares for, and rewards his people who trust in him (7:1; 16:1; 25:20; 26:1; 31:1-2, 4, 19; 34:22; 37:40; 86:2). They are blessed (2:12; 22:4-5, 8; 34:8; 40:4; 84:12) as they long for God’s redemption (37:7, 34; 38:15; 40:1; 119:84, 166; 130:5-6). Faith in the Lord gives reason to rejoice and praise the Lord (5:11; 18:30-36; 28:7; 40:3; 56:4; 64:10).
Power, O God, belongs to you; 
12 unfailing love, O Lord, is yours. 
Surely you repel all people 
according to what they have done.

PSALM 63
A psalm of David, regarding a time when David was in the wilderness of Judah.

1 O God, you are my God; 
I earnestly search for you. 
My soul thirsts for you; 
my whole body longs for you 
in this parched and weary land 
where there is no water. 
2 I have seen you in your sanctuary 
and gazed upon your power and glory. 
3 Your unfailing love is better than life 
how I praise you! 
4 I will praise you as long as I live, 
lifting up my hands to you in prayer. 
5 You satisfy me more than the richest 
feast. 
I will praise you with songs of joy. 
6 I lie awake thinking of you, 
meditating on you through the night. 
7 Because you are my helper, 
I sing for joy in the shadow of your 
wings. 
8 I cling to you; 
your strong right hand holds me 
securely. 
9 But those plotting to destroy me will come to ruin. 
They will go down into the depths of the earth.

62:11-12 Strength and unfailing love remain in balance only in God. He cares for his people by ridding the world of evildoers (see 1:6).

Ps 63 The king longs for God's presence so vividly that he eats, drinks, and sees God's goodness. Though worn out and harassed by the wicked, the king sees God, and this animates him with praise. God becomes his life (63:3), while the wicked perish (63:9).

63:1 Together, soul and whole body refer to a person's entire being. *parched and weary land: When David was living in the desert, he also found himself in a spiritual wasteland, separated from God's people and the sanctuary.

63:2 The psalmist remembers that he had found God to be present in his sanctuary (see 18:6; 61:4; 62:5, 11-12).

63:3 Better than life itself: The highest quality of life is found in relationship with God (see 4:7; 63:5; Prov 16:8).

63:4-8 The psalmist reflects and meditates on God's presence through the night. In the absence of light, God is the light. The quietness of the night and the longing for dawn provide time to focus on the true significance of life with the Lord.

63:6 Meditating on God requires focused awareness, concentration, thought, and reflection (see 1:2).

63:9 The wicked were plotting to destroy the psalmist's life through deception and lies, but they would meet their end. *The depths of the earth refers to the place of the dead.

63:10 Wild jackals are associated with desolation and abandonment (Isa 13:20-22; 34:10-15; Jer 9:11; 49:33; 51:37; Lam 5:18; Mal 1:3). The wicked will not receive honor in death; their bodies will be left to scavenging animals (Eccl 6:3; Jer 22:18-19; 36:29-30).

63:11 Those who truly trust in God are loyal to him.

Ps 64 This lament decries the destructive plots and arrogant attitude of the wicked (64:1-6). The psalmist turns to God in prayer and takes heart in God's justice because whatever the wicked do will be undone by the righteous judge. The godly will rejoice and grow in wisdom as they reflect on God's mighty acts.

64:1-6 These verses form a prayer for rescue from bold and powerful liars.

64:3 Their tongues . . . bitter words: Liars use their speech to kill. This description might also refer to practicing magic.

64:6 The enemies create a perfect plan to harm the innocent without getting caught. *Human beings will sink to unthinkable depths with evil words, acts, or plans (83:3; see Jer 17:9).

64:7-10 What God does is righteous. God undoes what is wicked and pays the wicked back with what they planned for others.
Ps 65:1-3 Praise is the appropriate response to God’s majestic deeds in redemption (65:3-5) and in nature (65:5-13).
65:1 God alone deserves praise and is worthy to have vows made to him.
65:2 All of us means all humans.
65:3 you forgive: God graciously removes the guilt of sin (see 32:5).
65:4 those you choose to bring near: This includes people from Israel and from other nations. • Only those whom God sees as blameless live in his holy courts (Ps 15, 24). • At the Temple, God’s earthly palace, all nations can gather to experience God’s holy presence. No structure can separate humans from God (see Rev 21:22).
65:6-7 God brought order to the mountains, the raging oceans, and the pounding waves (see 95:4-5; 104:4-9). • The psalmist compares the chaotic forces of nature with the rebellion of the nations (see Ps 2; 33:6-11; 46:6).
65:8 All over the world (Job 38:13; see Ps 50:1-3 and note), people should stand in awe of the Lord.
65:9-13 The created order provides clear evidence of God’s power (65:6-8). He shows his love by maintaining nature. Everything praises the Lord as all the parts fit together harmoniously.
65:9 The river of God and all rivers demonstrate God’s victorious power and goodness through the order in nature and the regularity of the harvests (see 1:3; 36:8; 46:4; Ezek 47:6-12; Zech 14:8; Rev 22:1).
Ps 66 This anonymous psalm includes two hymns (66:1-12, 13-20) that praise God for his redemption.
66:1-4 The psalmist exults nature to join in a mighty chorus to praise God’s glory, name, and power.
66:2 The glory of his name represents the perfection of God’s character.
66:3 God conquers his enemies (see 18:44; 59:11; 81:15).
66:5-7 The story of the Exodus and God’s victory over the sea evokes responses of astonishment (66:5) and worship (66:6). God works miracles . . . for people in order to redeem them for himself.
7 For by his great power he rules forever. He watches every movement of the nations; let no rebel rise in defiance.

Interlude

8 Let the whole world bless our God and loudly sing his praises.
9 Our lives are in his hands, and he keeps our feet from stumbling.
10 You have tested us, O God; you have purified us like silver.
11 You captured us in your net and laid the burden of slavery on our backs.
12 Then you put a leader over us. We went through fire and flood, but you brought us to a place of great abundance.
13 Now I come to your Temple with burnt offerings to fulfill the vows I made to you—yes, the sacred vows that I made when I was in deep trouble.
14 That is why I am sacrificing burnt offerings to you—the best of my rams as a pleasing aroma, and a sacrifice of bulls and male goats.

Interlude

15 You decreed and permitted the experience.
16 Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he did for me.
17 For I cried out to him for help, praising him as I spoke.
18 If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.
19 But God did listen! He paid attention to my prayer.

66:7 God’s power brings redemption. The same word occurs in 65:6 for God’s power in creation (see also 80:2).
66:8-10 The orderly lives of the redeemed reflect the order of God’s world. The Lord protects them from evil and purifies them.
66:9 God guides his people into wisdom and away from folly (17:5; 37:31; 121:3).
66:10 You have tested us, O God: As the silversmith heats silver to remove the dross, God’s discipline removes sin from his people (see 12:6).
66:11 God decrees and permits the many trying circumstances his people experience.
66:12 Then you put a leader over us: Or You made people ride over our heads. This expression possibly refers to a foreign ruler who kept the Israelites in submission.

66:15 Vows often included sacrifices of thanksgiving, including burnt offerings (see 20:3; 40:6; 50:8; 51:19).
66:16-20 The private testimony in the conclusion of the psalm parallels the public praise of its opening (66:1-4).
66:18 Confession leads to restoration (see 32:5).
Ps 67 In this anonymous prayer for God’s blessing, the psalmist addresses the knowledge and worship of God among the nations (cp. 64:9; 65:8). The prayer requests that God’s name be kept holy and that his kingdom come (cp. Matt 6:9-13).
67:1-2 This prayer is based on the priestly blessing found in Num 6:24-26. God’s goodness to Israel affects his reputation among the nations (see 96:1-3).
67:3 God’s international reputation leads to his praise among the nations (see 138:4), whose turmoil and rebelliousness will cease when they join Israel in praise of God. • One God rules over all, and the nations will give thanks for God’s just rule (see 67:4).
67:4 God brings the ultimate justice that human beings desire (96:10; 98:9).
67:6-7 Bountiful harvests are evidence of God’s blessing (Gen 26:12; Isa 30:23). • All over the world: See 2:8; 96:1-3. • All will fear him, joining with Israel to acknowledge the God of Israel.
Ps 68 This prayer for God’s victorious rule traces God’s march from Sinai to Zion (68:7, 16-18, 24). He rescued the nation of Israel from Egypt, guided it through the wilderness, brought it into the Promised Land, and established his kingdom. He is a caring and victorious God, whose nature is unchanging. Therefore, the godly hope and rejoice in the prospect of God’s universal dominion.
68:2 Both smoke and wax represent a transitory existence (22:12-18; 37:20; 102:3).
68:3 The lot of the godly contrasts with that of the wicked (see 1:6).
68:4-6 The psalmist praises God’s powerful and compassionate reign.
68:4 him who rides the clouds: This is an ancient description of Baal, a Canaanite deity. The psalmist applies it to the Lord as the true “Rider of the Clouds” (see 68:33; 104:3). God wields power over the clouds and the rain.
68:5 God, the father of all marginalized and needy people, shows them compassion and protects their rights (see 10:14, 18; 69:33; 82:3). Like his dwelling, the Lord is holy. The supreme example of the holy God coming down to rescue humanity is Jesus Christ.
68:6 God released Israel from slavery in Egypt (Exod 20:2; see Ps 69:33), and he still sets the prisoners free. *The sun-scorched desert represents alienation from God and separation from blessing.
68:8-10 The earth trembled as in an earthquake (see Exod 19:18). *the heavens poured down rain: Wells in the desert and rain showers in Canaan supplied an abundance of water.
68:11 a great army (or a host of women) brings: The Hebrew suggests women singers caroling the good news of victory (see 68:25; Exod 15:20).
68:13 The seminomadic pastoral people who lived among the sheepfolds were surprised to receive silver and gold carvings from the battle.
68:14 The Almighty (Hebrew Shaddai) is an ancient designation for God (see 91:1; Gen 17:1). *The identification of Mount Zalmon is uncertain; it was possibly a mountain in Bashan (see 68:15).
68:15 Bashan is a plateau northeast of Jerusalem and east of the Sea of Galilee that was known for its woods and pasturage (see 22:12; Isa 2:13). The mountains might have included Mount Hermon to the north of the plateau or Mount Zalmon, which might be Jebel ed-Druze on the east.
68:16 Why do you look with envy? Bashan is physically much more impressive than the mountains around Jerusalem, but it was not the home of the Lord. Only Mount Zion enjoyed the privilege of providing God’s dwelling place.
68:17 Chariots, the ultimate weapon of the armed forces in the psalmist’s day, are an image of the Lord’s power to grant victory (20:7; 44:3).
68:18 When you ascended to the heights: The Most High established his reign victoriously in Zion. *a crowd of captives…gifts: This is an image of a victorious ruler leading the victory march after battle. Paul applied this image to Jesus Christ (Eph 4:8-13).
Praise the Lord; praise God our savior!
For each day he carries us in his arms.

Our God is a God who saves!
The Sovereign Lord rescues us from death.

But God will smash the heads of his enemies,
crushing the skulls of those who love their guilty ways.

The Lord says, “I will bring my enemies down from Bashan;
I will bring them up from the depths of the sea.

You, my people, will wash your feet in their blood,
and even your dogs will get their share!”

Your procession has come into view,
O God—
the procession of my God and King as he goes into the sanctuary.

Singers are in front, musicians behind;
between them are young women playing tambourines.

Praise God, all you people of Israel;
praise the Lord, the source of Israel’s life.

Look, the little tribe of Benjamin leads the way.
Then comes a great throng of rulers from Judah
and all the rulers of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Summon your might, O God.
Display your power, O God, as you have in the past.

The kings of the earth are bringing tribute
to your Temple in Jerusalem.

Rebuke these enemy nations—
these wild animals lurking in the reeds,
this herd of bulls among the weaker calves.

Make them bring bars of silver in humble tribute.
Scatter the nations that delight in war.

Let Egypt come with gifts of precious metals;
let Ethiopia bow in submission to God.

Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth.
Sing praises to the Lord.

Sing to the one who rides across the ancient heavens,
his mighty voice thundering from the sky.

Tell everyone about God’s power.
His majesty shines down on Israel;
his strength is mighty in the heavens.

God is awesome in his sanctuary.
The God of Israel gives power and strength to his people.

Praise be to God!

PSALM 69
For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be sung to the tune “Lilies.”

1 Save me, O God,
for the floodwaters are up to my neck.
2 Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire;
I can’t find a foothold.
I am in deep water,
and the floods overwhelm me.
3 I am exhausted from crying for help;
my throat is parched.
My eyes are swollen with weeping,
waiting for my God to help me.

The conquered kings will bring gifts to the Lord.
Hostile and rebellious people delight in warfare and insurrection (see 2:1-3).
Of precious metals: Or of rich cloth. • Ethiopia: Hebrew Cush.
The psalmist calls for the people to praise God, who is victorious over his enemies.
The term kingdoms of the earth includes all nations and power structures.
When the Lord demonstrates his power, majesty, and strength against the nations, he strengthens his people (see 68:28; 96:4-6).
Pss 69–72 These last four psalms of Book Two contrast with the psalms describing God’s mighty acts in creation and in redemption, capped by God’s march to Zion (Pss 65–68). Psalms 69–71 portray the king’s anguish, and Ps 72 responds with a prayer for God to bless the king.
Ps 69 In this individual lament, the poet expresses his vulnerability, humiliation, and overwhelming pain, asking God to vindicate him for the sake of the righteous.

Title to the tune “Lilies”: Psalm 45 also notes this tune, but Ps 45 celebrates the glory of kingship, whereas Ps 69 is the cry of a tired king who feels abandoned by the Lord.

Psalm 45 also notes this tune, but Ps 45 celebrates the glory of kingship, whereas Ps 69 is the cry of a tired king who feels abandoned by the Lord.
Psalms 69

4 Those who hate me without cause outnumber the hairs on my head. Many enemies try to destroy me with lies, demanding that I give back what I didn’t steal.

5 O God, you know how “foolish I am; my sins cannot be hidden from you.

6 Don’t let those who trust in you be ashamed because of me, O Sovereign Lord of Heaven’s Armies. Don’t let me cause them to be humiliated, O God of Israel.

7 For I endure insults for your sake; humiliation is written all over my face. Even my own brothers pretend they don’t know me; they treat me like a stranger.

8 Passion for your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

9 When I weep and fast, they scoff at me.

10 When I dress in burlap to show sorrow, they make fun of me.

11 I am the favorite topic of town gossip, and all the drunks sing about me.

12 But I keep praying to you, Lord, hoping this time you will show me favor.

13 In your unfailing love, O God, answer my prayer with your sure salvation.

14 Rescue me from the mud; don’t let me sink any deeper! Save me from those who hate me, and pull me from these deep waters.

15 Don’t let the floods overwhelm me, or the deep waters swallow me, or the pit of death devour me.

16 Answer my prayers, O Lord, for your unfailing love is wonderful. Take care of me, for your mercy is so plentiful.

17 Don’t hide from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in deep trouble!

18 Come and redeem me; free me from my enemies.

19 You know of my shame, scorn, and disgrace. You see all that my enemies are doing.

20 Their insults have broken my heart, and I am in despair. If only one person would show some pity; if only one would turn and comfort me.

21 But instead, they give me poison for food; they offer me sour wine for my thirst.

22 Let the bountiful table set before them become a snare and their prosperity become a trap.

23 Let their eyes go blind so they cannot see, and make their bodies shake continually.

24 Pour out your fury on them; consume them with your burning anger.

25 Let their homes become desolate and their tents be deserted.

26 To the one you have punished, they add insult to injury; they add to the pain of those you have hurt.

When the psalmist denies himself normal comforts to seek God in prayer, the wicked ridicule him.

The psalmist’s only recourse is to pray for rescue and relief from his enemies.

Alone and misunderstood, the psalmist turns to the Lord for comfort, relief (69:13-18), and redress (69:22-28).

Though the psalmist concerns himself with God and all that is holy, insults have been his earthly reward. This verse was later applied to Jesus’ anger at the Temple’s money changers (John 2:17) and to his undeserved suffering (Rom 15:3).

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Psalm 70

For the choir director: A psalm of David, asking God to remember him.

1 Please, God, rescue me! Come quickly, Lord, and help me.
2 May those who try to kill me be humiliated and put to shame.

Psalm 71

1 O Lord, I have come to you for protection; don’t let me be disgraced.
2 Save me and rescue me, for you do what is right.
3 Turn your ear to listen to me, and set me free.
4 Be my rock of safety where I can always hide.
5 Give the order to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.
6 My God, rescue me from the power of the wicked, from the clutches of cruel oppressors.
7 O Lord, you alone are my hope. I’ve trusted you, O Lord, from childhood.
8 Yes, you have been with me from birth; from my mother’s womb you have cared for me.
9 No wonder I am always praising you!
10 My life is an example to many, because you have been my strength and protection.
11 That is why I can never stop praising you; I declare your glory all day long.

Psalm 69:27

May those who take delight in my trouble be turned back in disgrace.
2 Let them be horrified by their shame, for they said, “Aha! We’ve got him now!”
3 But may all who search for you be filled with joy and gladness in you. May those who love your salvation repeatedly shout, “God is great!”
4 But as for me, I am poor and needy; please hurry to my aid, O God. You are my helper and my savior; O Lord, do not delay.
9 And now, in my old age, don't set me aside.
Don't abandon me when my strength is failing.

10 For my enemies are whispering against me.
They are plotting together to kill me.

11 They say, "God has abandoned him. Let's go and get him, for no one will help him now."

12 O God, don't stay away. My God, please hurry to help me.

13 Bring disgrace and destruction on my accusers. Humiliate and shame those who want to harm me.

14 But I will keep on hoping for your help; I will praise you more and more.

15 I will tell everyone about your righteousness. All day long I will proclaim your saving power, though I am not skilled with words.

16 I will praise your mighty deeds, O Sovereign Lord. I will tell everyone that you alone are just.

17 O God, you have taught me from my earliest childhood, and I constantly tell others about the wonderful things you do.

18 Now that I am old and gray, do not abandon me, O God. Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me.

19 Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the highest heavens. You have done such wonderful things. Who can compare with you, O God?

20 You have allowed me to suffer much hardship, but you will restore me to life again and lift me up from the depths of the earth.

21 You will restore me to even greater honor and comfort me once again.

22 Then I will praise you with music on the harp, because you are faithful to your promises, O my God. I will sing praises to you with a lyre, O Holy One of Israel.

Music in Ancient Israel (Ps 71:22-23)

The earliest nomadic peoples made music. The first musician mentioned in the Bible is "Jubal . . . the first of all who play the harp and flute" (Gen 4:21). Music and sound were significant from the beginning of Israel's worship in the Tabernacle. In Exodus 28:34-35, Aaron's robe is described as having bells attached to the lower hem that sounded as he entered the Holy Place. In the OT, the first liturgical music mentioned is in the narrative of the transfer of the Ark—David and the Israelites sang, played instruments, and danced to the glory of the Lord (2 Sam 6:5).

This music bore little resemblance to the stately ceremony of Solomon's Temple that is described later (2 Chr 7:1-6). Singers and musicians for the Temple worship were chosen from the tribe of Levi (1 Chr 25:1, 7). They rotated their participation in the weekday, Sabbath, and high holy day services.

David is recognized as inventing the musical instruments used in the Temple (2 Chr 7:6). In the postexilic era, the Levitical singers that are mentioned were the descendants of Asaph, the singing-master appointed by David (Ezr 2:41; Neh 7:44; 11:22-23). From passages such as these, we understand that liturgical music and organization originated in David's time.

71:9-18 The aging believer turns to the Lord for hope. As questions from his adversaries get under his skin and his own strength fails, he asks God to answer his prayers. He does not seek answers to prayer for himself but so that he can tell the story to the next generation.

71:9 The poet prays for continued fellowship with God (see 9:10; 51:11). In his weakness, he needs the Lord's strength even more (see 143:7).

71:10 In their plotting, the psalmist's enemies take counsel and scheme together (2:2; 21:11; 31:13; 35:4; 63:9-10).

71:14 The psalmist contrasts his own goodness with his enemies' evil; he centers his life in the Lord, even during hard times (see 9:17-18; 27:13-14).

71:15 though I am not skilled with words: Or though I cannot count it. The Hebrew can be translated either way.

71:19-21 God's righteous character provides encouragement and strength in the midst of suffering. The wounded psalmist confesses faith in God's ability to transform his misery and weakness into abundant life.

71:20 lift me up from the depths: The psalmist hopes for the renewal of an abundant earthly life. This later became grounds for belief in the resurrection of the dead.

71:21 Being assured of God's comfort also assures the poet of God's presence, care, and goodness (23:4; 6; 86:17). God's comfort enhances the psalmist's sense of being alive (see 119:50).
23 I will shout for joy and sing your praises, for you have ransomed me.
24 I will tell about your righteous deeds all day long, for everyone who tried to hurt me has been shamed and humiliated.

PSALM 72
A Psalm of Solomon.

1 Give your love of justice to the king, O God, and righteousness to the king’s son.
2 Help him judge your people in the right way; let the poor always be treated fairly.
3 May the mountains yield prosperity for all, and may the hills be fruitful.
4 Help him to defend the poor, to rescue the children of the needy, and to crush their oppressors.
5 May they fear you as long as the sun shines, as long as the moon remains in the sky.
   Yes, forever!
6 May the king’s rule be refreshing like spring rain on freshly cut grass, like the showers that water the earth.
7 May all the godly flourish during his reign.
   May there be abundant prosperity until the moon is no more.
8 May he reign from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.
9 Desert nomads will bow before him; his enemies will fall before him in the dust.
10 The western kings of Tarshish and other distant lands will bring him tribute.
   The eastern kings of Sheba and Seba will bring him gifts.
11 All kings will bow before him, and all nations will serve him.
12 He will rescue the poor when they cry to him; he will help the oppressed, who have no one to defend them.
13 He feels pity for the weak and the needy, and he will rescue them.
14 He will redeem them from oppression and violence, for their lives are precious to him.
15 Long live the king! May the gold of Sheba be given to him.
   May the people always pray for him and bless him all day long.

The eastern kings of Sheba came from an area in southern Arabia, home of the queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10). *Sheba* was probably located somewhere south of Egypt, perhaps on the western shore of the Red Sea across from Sheba. *The gifts offered to the king represented a tribute and a token of submission.*

All kings and all nations must submit to the messianic king. The hope expressed in Ps 2:10-11 will be realized (see 96:1-3; 1 Cor 15:25) when other leaders and peoples bow before and serve this king.

12:14 The anointed king will rescue the needy. He is not only the judge but also a father to the poor (10:14, 17; 68:5).
12:12 To rescue the poor means to bring an end to the rule of their oppressors.
12:13 Like a father, the king feels pity for those in need (see Mal 3:17).
12:15-17 The just kingdom will be long-lasting and universal. The summary combines the themes of abundance of crops, longevity, tribute of the nations, and the prayer of the nations.
12:15 The people will bless him, fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3; see Ps 133:3).
72:16 the trees of Lebanon: Lebanon was renowned for its lumber (see note on 2 Chr 2:8).
72:18-19 This doxology concludes Book Two of the Psalter.
72:20 This parenthetical note ends Book Two, which consists mostly of prayers of David. Books Three to Five were probably compiled after Book Two; they include additional psalms of David (Ps 86, 101, 103, 108–110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138–145).

Book Three (Pss 73–89) Book Three begins with the problem of inequity in the world: The wicked enjoy prosperity while the righteous suffer. Psalm 73 also prepares readers to contemplate the collapse of David's dynasty, which forms the context for the end of Book Three (Ps 89). * Book Three consists of two collections: (1) psalms by Asaph that focus on the restoration of God's people and the judgment of his enemies (Pss 73–83); and (2) psalms by the "Sons of Korah" (Pss 84–89).

Pss 73–75 The apparent prosperity of the wicked (Ps 73) and God's apparent rejection of his people (Ps 74) raise questions about his justice. God is sovereign over the whole world, and he determines the time for judgment (Ps 75).

Ps 73 This wisdom psalm (see "Wisdom Psalms" at Ps 37, p. 937) examines the injustice of the prosperity of the wicked. The psalmist affirms that God is good to the godly but his own experience differs (73:2–12). Nearly overcome by his doubts (73:13–16), the psalmist meets the Lord in the sanctuary and gains a perspective that stretches beyond his life and renews his confidence in God (73:17–26). His disturbing doubts stir a greater passion for truth. He knows that he can trust God and that God will rescue him (73:27–28).

73:TITLE Asaph was a Levitical singer appointed by David (1 Chr 6:39); his descendants were singers and instrumentalists (1 Chr 15:16–17). Many of the psalms of Asaph (Pss 50, 73–83) were probably written by Asaph's descendants at a later time in Israel's history (e.g., Ps 74).

73:1 People whose hearts are pure are renewed by God's spirit (51:10), commit themselves to lives of godliness, keep away from anything that is sinful, and enjoy God's presence (see 24:3–4 and notes).

73:2-3 The poet sees the prosperity of the wicked as unfair (see 72:7) and resents it. * The psalmist's feet were slipping (73:9) from the way of wisdom and godliness (see 17:5; 37:31), but God kept him from falling off the trail entirely (38:16; 66:9; 94:18; 121:3). * When I saw them prosper: Cp. 72:3, 7.

73:4-12 The psalmist presents a caricature of the bliss of the wicked (cP. Ps 1).

73:6 The proud adorn themselves with pride and cruelty rather than wisdom (Prov 1:9).

73:9 The proud boast, claiming that they own everything and are not subject to anyone (see 2:1–3).

73:13-17 Recognizing the ramifications of his discouragement and doubt, the psalmist turns to the Lord and receives special insight.

I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain.

If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people.

So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper.

But what a difficult task it is!

Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked.

Truly, you put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction.

In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors.

When you arise, O Lord, you will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning.

Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside.

I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.

Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand.

You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny.

Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth.

My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

Those who desert him will perish, for you destroy those who abandon you.

But as for me, how good it is to be near God!

I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.

A psalm of Asaph.

O God, why have you rejected us so long? Why is your anger so intense against the sheep of your own pasture?

Remember that we are the people you chose long ago, the tribe you redeemed as your own special possession.

And remember Jerusalem, your home here on earth.

Walk through the awful ruins of the city; see how the enemy has destroyed your sanctuary.

There your enemies shouted their victorious battle cries; there they set up their battle standards.

They swung their axes like woodcutters in a forest.

With axes and picks, they smashed the carved paneling.

They burned your sanctuary to the ground.

They defiled the place that bears your name.

Then they thought, “Let’s destroy everything!” So they burned down all the places where God was worshiped.

We no longer see your miraculous signs. All the prophets are gone, and no one can tell us when it will end.

If the psalmist had verbalized his suspicions about the futility of godly living, he would have discouraged God’s people and given God’s enemies an opportunity to blaspheme (cp. John 13:20). Instead, the psalmist internalizes the experience and reflects on it.

At this time, God’s sanctuary was the Temple in Jerusalem. There, in God’s presence, the psalmist receives special insight (cp. 18:6). God deals with the wicked over the long term. He waits patiently and gives them time to repent (Ezek 33:11; 2 Pet 3:9); those who do not repent will get what they deserve.

The psalmist’s feelings about the prosperity of the wicked had given him a bitter spirit.

The Lord leads the godly through their troubles and changes their misery into splendor.

Nothing in heaven or on earth is better than being near God.

Ps 74 The psalmist laments the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (586 bc) with vivid imagery, questions, fresh memories, and a direct appeal for the Lord to act (74:19-23).

Title psalm: Hebrew maskil. This may be a literary or musical term.

In the aftermath of Jerusalem’s fall, it seemed that God had forgotten his special covenant relationship with his people.

God rejected his people because their sin aroused his anger (106:34-46). Like a tender shepherd, God cares for his people, the sheep of his pasture (Ps 23; 100:3).

The Lord chose and redeemed Israel from Egypt in the Exodus (cp. Exod 15:13). Your own special possession: This is another expression for “your people” (28:9; 78:62; 94:14; 106:40). Jerusalem: Hebrew Mount Zion. See “Mount Zion, the City of God” at Ps 48, p. 947.

Like a guide, the psalmist points out to the Lord what took place during the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 bc.
How long, O God, will you allow our enemies to insult you?
Will you let them dishonor your name forever?
Why do you hold back your strong right hand?
Unleash your powerful fist and destroy them.
You, O God, are my king from ages past,
bringing salvation to the earth.
You split the sea by your strength and smashed the heads of the sea monsters.
You crushed the heads of Leviathan and let the desert animals eat him.
You caused the springs and streams to gush forth, and you dried up rivers that never run dry.
Both day and night belong to you; you made the starlight and the sun.
You set the boundaries of the earth, and you made both summer and winter.
See how these enemies insult you, Lord.
A foolish nation has dishonored your name.
Don't let these wild beasts destroy your turtledoves.
Don't forget your suffering people forever.
Remember your covenant promises, for the land is full of darkness and violence!
Don't let the downtrodden be humiliated again.
Instead, let the poor and needy praise your name.
Arise, O God, and defend your cause.
Remember how these fools insult you all day long.

Don't overlook what your enemies have said or their growing uproar.

**Psalm 75**

*For the choir director: A psalm of Asaph. A song to be sung to the tune “Do Not Destroy!”*

1 We thank you, O God!
We give thanks because you are near.
People everywhere tell of your wonderful deeds.
2 God says, “At the time I have planned, I will bring justice against the wicked.
3 When the earth quakes and its people live in turmoil, I am the one who keeps its foundations firm.

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**Interlude**

4 “I warned the proud, ‘Stop your boasting!’
I told the wicked, ‘Don’t raise your fists!’
5 Don’t raise your fists in defiance at the heavens or speak with such arrogance.’
6 For no one on earth—from east or west, or even from the wilderness—should raise a defiant fist.
7 It is God alone who judges; he decides who will rise and who will fall.
8 For the Lord holds a cup in his hand that is full of foaming wine mixed with spices.
He pours out the wine in judgment, and all the wicked must drink it, draining it to the dregs.
9 But as for me, I will always proclaim what God has done;
I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.
10 For God says, “I will break the strength of the wicked, but I will increase the power of the godly.”
PSALM 76
For the choir director: A psalm of Asaph. A song to be accompanied by stringed instruments.

1 God is honored in Judah; his name is great in Israel.
2 Jerusalem is where he lives; Mount Zion is his home.
3 There he has broken the fiery arrows of the enemy, the shields and swords and weapons of war.
4 You are glorious and more majestic than the everlasting mountains.
5 Our boldest enemies have been plundered. They lie before us in the sleep of death. No warrior could lift a hand against us.
6 At the blast of your breath, O God of Jacob, their horses and chariots lay still.
7 No wonder you are greatly feared! Who can stand before you when your anger explodes?
8 From heaven you sentenced your enemies; the earth trembled and stood silent before you.
9 You stand up to judge those who do evil, O God, and to rescue the oppressed of the earth.
10 Human defiance only enhances your glory, for you use it as a weapon.

11 Make vows to the Lord your God, and keep them. Let everyone bring tribute to the Awesome One.
12 For he breaks the pride of princes, and the kings of the earth fear him.

PSALM 77
For Jeduthun, the choir director: A psalm of Asaph.

1 I cry out to God; yes, I shout. Oh, that God would listen to me!
2 When I was in deep trouble, I searched for the Lord. All night long I prayed, with hands lifted toward heaven, but my soul was not comforted.
3 I think of God, and I moan, overwhelmed with longing for his help.
4 You don't let me sleep. I am too distressed even to pray!
5 I think of the good old days, long since ended, when my nights were filled with joyful songs. I search my soul and ponder the difference now.
6 Has the Lord rejected me forever? Will he never again be kind to me?
7 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he slammed the door on his compassion?
8 Is his unfailing love gone forever? Have his promises permanently failed?
9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he slammed the door on his compassion?
10 And I said, “This is my fate; opportunity for prayer and meditation (77:6, 11; see 6:6; 16:7; 17:3; 30:5; 63:6; 119:55, 62, 148).

77:3 I think of God: God’s people inevitably face difficult times, but recalling his mighty acts at the beginning of their relationship assures them of God’s commitment. Feeling overwhelmed, the psalmist is unable to deal with the crisis (142:3; 143:4).
77:4-6 As the psalmist meditates at night, he feels so disturbed that he cannot sleep or speak. He has pleasant memories of the past, but he cannot look beyond the present moment into the future.
77:7-9 The psalmist questions his status before God.
77:7 Feeling rejected (see 43:2), the psalmist asks if the situation is permanent.
77:10-12 The memories of God's mighty works in the past fill the psalmist's mind.

77:10 The psalmist fears that God's hand of protection (44:3; 77:15; Exod 6:6) and favor (16:7-8; 110:1) is now against him for no apparent reason.

77:13-15 This central section of the poem reflects on God as the holy and powerful redeemer.

77:16 The Red Sea: Literally the waters. The Canaanites attributed divine power to the sea, but God is the one who made the sea and uses it for his own purposes.

Ps 78 This wisdom psalm exhorts the people to learn wisdom and faithfully pass it on.

Psalm 78
A psalm of Asaph.

1 O my people, listen to my instructions. Open your ears to what I am saying,

78:1-8 The prologue is an invitation to learn wisdom.

78:2 The psalmist recites Israel's story (78:5-72) in a parable to teach them to their children—

78:3-4 This story of what God has done should be told from generation to generation (see Deut 6:20-25; Prov 4:1-4).

78:5-6 The telling of the story should motivate God's people to obey what he commanded (Deut 6:4-9).

78:7-8 God holds each generation responsible for its own response, which should be to maintain faith and hope (see 9:18; 27:14) and avoid being stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful (see Deut 9:6-7; 10:16; 30:6; 31:27).

78:9-11 Ephraim, the second son of Joseph, received a special blessing from Jacob (Gen 48:15-20; 49:22-26; Deut 33:13-17). The land that his descendants received included fertile valleys and strategic roads (Judg 8:2). However, the people of Ephraim did not live in obedience to God's gracious covenant.

78:12-16 The focus shifts from Ephraim (78:9-11) to Israel as a whole as the psalmist reflects on God's power in Egypt (see 81:4-7) and in the wilderness.

78:12 The miracles are the ten plagues against Egypt that God performed during Israel's captivity (Exod 7–12).
13 For he divided the sea and led them through, making the water stand up like walls!
14 In the daytime he led them by a cloud, and all night by a pillar of fire.
15 He split open the rocks in the wilderness to give them water, as from a gushing spring.
16 He made streams pour from the rock, making the waters flow down like a river!
17 Yet they kept on sinning against him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert.
18 They stubbornly tested God in their hearts, demanding the foods they craved.
19 They even spoke against God himself, saying, "God can’t give us food in the wilderness.
20 Yes, he can strike a rock so water gushes out, but he can’t give his people bread and meat."
21 When the Lord heard them, he was furious. The fire of his wrath burned against Jacob.
Yes, his anger rose against Israel,
22 for they did not believe God or trust him to care for them.
23 But he commanded the skies to open; he opened the doors of heaven.
24 He rained down ‘manna’ for them to eat; he gave them bread from heaven.
25 They ate the food of angels! God gave them all they could hold.
26 He released the east wind in the heavens and guided the south wind by his mighty power.
27 He rained down meat as thick as dust—birds as plentiful as the sand on the seashore!
28 He caused the birds to fall within their camp and all around their tents.
29 The people ate their fill. He gave them what they craved.
30 But before they satisfied their craving, while the meat was yet in their mouths,
31 the anger of God rose against them, and he killed their strongest men. He struck down the finest of Israel’s young men.
32 But in spite of this, the people kept sinning. Despite his wonders, they refused to trust him.
33 So he ended their lives in failure, their years in terror.
34 When God began killing them, they finally sought him. They repented and took God seriously.
35 Then they remembered that God was their ‘rock’, that God Most High was their redeemer.
36 But all they gave him was lip service; they lied to him with their tongues.
37 Their hearts were not loyal to him. They did not keep his covenant.
38 Yet he was merciful and ‘forgave’ their sins and did not destroy them all. Many times he held back his anger and did not unleash his fury!
39 For he remembered that they were merely mortal, gone like a breath of wind that never returns.
40 Oh, how often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved his heart in that dry wasteland.
41 Again and again they tested God’s patience and provoked the Holy One of Israel.
42 They did not remember his power and how he rescued them from their enemies.

78:13 God divided the sea when Israel crossed through the Red Sea (see Exod 14–15).
78:14 God used a cloud and a pillar of fire to guide and protect Israel in the wilderness (Exod 13:21-22).
78:17-31 Israel rebelled in the wilderness despite God’s abundant provision.
78:23-25 Abundance comes through the doors of heaven (Gen 8:2; 2 Kgs 7:1; Mal 3:10). • Israel ate manna for forty years in the wilderness (Exod 16:31-36; John 6:31).
78:26-31 God powerfully satisfied the people’s desires, but they did not respond with gratitude or faith. Therefore, God exercised his justice.
78:32-39 Israel’s rebellion resulted in God’s judgment, but even their short-lived and insincere repentance motivated God to exercise forbearance.
78:33 An entire generation died in the wilderness (Num 14:22-23, 28-35).
78:34-39 Israel’s continued existence, in spite of the people’s rebellion and unbelief (78:7-8), was due to God’s compassion.
78:34 They repented: This demonstration of zeal was not sincere.
78:35-39 The Israelites remembered the right doctrine (9:9; 91:1), but they did not allow God to change their hearts (Lev 26:41). • God Most High: Hebrew el-c’lyon.
78:40-55 The Israelites rebelled even though the Lord had rescued them from powerful plagues.
They did not remember his miraculous signs in Egypt,
his wonders on the plain of Zoan.
For he turned their rivers into blood,
so no one could drink from the streams.
He sent vast swarms of flies to consume them
and hordes of frogs to ruin them.
He gave their crops to caterpillars;
their harvest was consumed by locusts.
He destroyed their grapevines with hail
and shattered their sycamore-figs with sleet.
He abandoned their cattle to the hail,
their livestock to bolts of lightning.
He loosed on them his fierce anger—
all his fury, rage, and hostility.
He dispatched against them a band of destroying *angels*.
He turned his anger against them;
he did not spare the Egyptians’ lives
but ravaged them with the plague.
He killed the oldest son in each Egyptian family,
the flower of youth throughout the land of Egypt.

But he led his own people like a flock of sheep,
guiding them safely through the wilderness.
He abandoned his dwelling at Shiloh.

God’s Anger (Ps 78:18-64)
The psalmists understood Israel’s exodus from Egypt as an object lesson about God’s anger (78:18-64). God expressed his anger against the Egyptians while sparing his people (78:49-50). But Israel became the object of his wrath during the wilderness journey, when the people provoked the Lord to anger through their rebelliousness (78:31; 106:29, 32; see Rom 2:5). God took an oath that that rebellious generation would not enter his place of rest (95:8-11), and they died in the wilderness. But he restrained his wrath (78:38) and did not destroy Israel as it deserved.

The Lord is just and righteous in his judgment (7:11); he is patient and slow to anger (86:15; 103:8; 145:8). The wicked have stirred up God’s wrath and deserve his judgment (see 2:5, 12; 13:1-2; 21:9; 56:7; 59:13; 69:24; 79:6; see also Rom 1:18). The purpose of his wrath is to remove evildoers and extend his kingdom. Evil must come to an end, and the wicked must perish for the godly to inherit the earth (Ps 37).

God’s people experience his wrath when they sin. The experience, though painful, is brief in comparison to their joy in God’s mercy and goodness (30:5). He will not be angry forever (103:9). God’s wrath brings death (106:23), but his forgiveness and mercy restore his people (see 85:2-7).

God is love, and he loves people with justice and holiness. In love for us, he poured out his anger on Jesus Christ (Rom 3:25; 5:9). Jesus received the full brunt of God’s wrath so that he could atone for our sins and reconcile us to God. He saves his people (1 Jn 2:2) and rules from heaven at God’s right hand (Heb 2:17). Jesus is now the agent of God’s wrath against the wicked (2:5-9; 110:5-7; Eph 5:6; Rev 6:15-17; 11:18; 19:11-16).
the Tabernacle where he had lived among the people.  
61 He allowed the Ark of his might to be captured;  
he surrendered his glory into enemy hands.  
62 He gave his people over to be butchered  
by the sword,  
because he was so angry with his own people—his special possession.  
63 Their young men were killed by fire;  
their young women died before singing their wedding songs.  
64 Their priests were slaughtered,  
and their widows could not mourn their deaths.  
65 Then the Lord rose up as though waking  
from sleep,  
like a warrior aroused from a drunken stupor.  
66 He routed his enemies  
and sent them to eternal shame.  
67 But he rejected Joseph’s descendants;  
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim.  
68 He chose instead the tribe of Judah,  
and Mount Zion, which he loved.  
69 There he built his sanctuary as high as  
the heavens,  
as solid and enduring as the earth.  
70 He chose his servant David,  
calling him from the sheep pens.  
71 He took David from tending the ewes  
and lambs  
and made him the shepherd of Jacob’s descendants—  
God’s own people, Israel.  
72 He cared for them with a true heart  
and led them with skillful hands.  

Ps 78:61-11

The early history of Israel’s rebellions  
was not completely rejected, but God favored Judah (78:68).  
78:68-69 In the choice of Mount Zion  
instead of Shiloh as God’s sanctuary on earth, God moved from the north to the south (see Ps 69).  
78:70-72 The God who had turned against his own people (78:62) chose David, a shepherd (Gen 46:34; 1 Sam 16:10-11), to become their shepherd (78:52; cp. 23:1).  
Ps 79 This lament describes the occasion of Jerusalem’s fall in 586 bc. The early history of Israel’s rebellions described in Ps 78 provoked God’s wrath, resulting in the desolati  
of Zion described here as the defilement of the Temple and the disgraced bodies that littered the landscape. The psalmist then prays for forgiveness and rescue (79:8-9), as well as for God to pay back the nation’s enemies (79:12-13). Other psalms lamenting the Exile include Pss 42-44, 102, 107, 126, 137.  
79:1-4 The poet laments the desecration of the Temple and the success of the enemy.  
79:1 your special possession: This phrase might refer to the land, the Temple (see 61:5), or the people (see 79:2; 78:71).  
79:5-8 The intensity of God’s judgment surprises the people; they cry out in despair for compassion, forgiveness, and relief. Verses 6-7 are repeated almost verbatim in Jer 10:25.  
79:6 The repentant among God’s people ask him not to vent his anger on them but on their wicked and unrepentant enemies.  
79:7 devoured your people Israel: Literally devoured Jacob. See note on 44:4.  
79:8 The people’s accumulation of past sins contributed to the Exile (2 Kgs 17:7-23; 24:3-4); however, the people perished because of their own sins (Jer 31:30; Ezek 18:20).  
79:9-11 The people ask God to rescue them. Although Israel’s sins caused the tragedy, the pagan nations must also be held responsible for the bloodshed.

Psalm 78

A psalm of Asaph.

1 O God, pagan nations have conquered your land,  
your special possession.  
They have defiled your holy Temple  
and made Jerusalem a heap of ruins.  
2 They have left the bodies of your servants  
as food for the birds of heaven.  
The flesh of your godly ones  
has become food for the wild animals.  
3 Blood has flowed like water all around Jerusalem;  
no one is left to bury the dead.  
4 We are mocked by our neighbors,  
an object of scorn and derision to those around us.

5 O Lord, how long will you be angry with us? Forever?  
How long will your jealousy burn like fire?  
6 Pour out your wrath on the nations that refuse to acknowledge you—on kingdoms that do not call upon your name.  
7 For they have devoured your people Israel,  
making the land a desolate wilderness.  
8 Do not hold us guilty for the sins of our ancestors!  
Let your compassion quickly meet our needs,  
for we are on the brink of despair.

9 Help us, O God of our salvation!  
Help us for the glory of your name.  
Save us and forgive our sins  
for we are on the brink of despair.

10 Why should pagan nations be allowed to scoff,  
asking, “Where is their God?”  
Show us your vengeance against the nations,
The Exile resulted in national suffering and in individual searching for the Lord. • *pay back*: See 1:6; 94:2; Jer 32:18. • The expression seven times signifies something complete. • Israel's neighbors included Edom, Moab, and Ammon (see 137:7; 2 Kgs 24:2; Obad 1:21).

**Ps 80** This psalm of lament might originate with the remnant of the northern kingdom after its fall in 722 bc. The people call on God as their Shepherd and as the God of Heaven's Armies in the hope that he will return to them and restore them. They remember the Exodus and their special relationship with the Lord and conclude with an expression of renewed commitment to him (80:18).

**80:1-3** The psalmist urgently calls upon the Lord to act.

79:12 The Exile resulted in national suffering and in individual searching for the Lord. • *pay back*: See 1:6; 94:2; Jer 32:18. • The expression seven times signifies something complete. • Israel's neighbors included Edom, Moab, and Ammon (see 137:7; 2 Kgs 24:2; Obad 1:21).

**Ps 80** This psalm of lament might originate with the remnant of the northern kingdom after its fall in 722 bc. The people call on God as their Shepherd and as the God of Heaven's Armies in the hope that he will return to them and restore them. They remember the Exodus and their special relationship with the Lord and conclude with an expression of renewed commitment to him (80:18).

**80:1-3** The psalmist urgently calls upon the Lord to act.

80:1-2 God is the Shepherd of Israel: See also 23:1; 28:9; 78:52-53. • *radiant glory . . . power*: These expressions (145:11) refer to God's manifest presence.

80:3 This verse is repeated (with an increasing crescendo) in 80:7, 19.

80:4 The people cry out for rescue from the shame of their recent defeat. The enemy's victory is less devastating, however, than the knowledge that they themselves are objects of God's wrath.

80:6 The scorn: As in Syriac version; Hebrew reads the strife.

80:8-11 Israel has a glorious past, beginning with its redemption from Egypt.

80:9 Israel had been a prosperous grapevine (Gen 1:28; Gal 5:22-23) that God transplanted into the land of Canaan at the time of the conquest. However, the people forgot the source of their prosperity and chose to do evil (Isa 5:1-7; Hos 10:1).

80:10-11 Solomon's kingdom had extended west to the Mediterranean Sea and east to the Euphrates River (literally west to the sea, . . . east to the river; see 72:8-9; 89:25; 1 Kgs 4:21).

80:12 broken down our walls: God no longer defended Israel (Isa 5:5).

80:13 The surrounding nations were ceremonially unclean, like a wild boar or vicious wild animals.

80:15 Israel was the son that God had brought out of Egypt (see Hos 11:1) and planted in the Holy Land.

80:16-19 The community prays for God to change their desperate situation and restore them. They are still the Lord's chosen people.

80:17 The son of your choice was probably the northern kingdom of Israel, although it might allude to the king of David's dynasty (110:1).
Ps 81 This warning message invites Israel to worship only the Lord and to enjoy the fullness of his blessing.

Ps 81:1-3 As a prelude to the message of warning, the psalmist invites Israel to contemplate their God in song and dance.

Ps 81:2 An Israelite tambourine was a hand drum—a round frame covered with a skin, used as a percussion instrument during festivities, often to accompany dancing (68:25; 149:3; 150:4). • The sweet lyre and the harp, both stringed instruments, are the instruments most frequently mentioned in the psalms (e.g., 33:2; 57:8; 71:22; 150:3).

Ps 81:3 The ram's horn mustered armies and announced special holy days (47:5; 98:6). • new moon: The first day of the lunar month marked a festival.

Ps 81:4-5 The festival, a time to celebrate and listen to the Lord, took place at God's appointed time. • for Israel: Literally for Joseph. The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (the sons of Joseph) are used here to refer to the entire nation of Israel.

Ps 81:6-7 The Lord heard Israel's cry in Egypt and rescued them from oppressive slavery.

Ps 81:8-10 God pleads with his people to remember the covenant and the Ten Commandments.

Ps 81:10 God emphasizes that he and no one else rescued Israel. • The nation should open its mouth wide to take in God's word (cp. Deut 8:3; Ezek 3:1).
A song. A psalm of Asaph.

1 O God, do not be silent! Don't be quiet, O God. Do not be deaf. Don't you see that your arrogant enemies are rising up? Don't you hear the uproar of your enemies? Don't you see that your arrogant enemies are rising up? They devise crafty schemes against your precious people; they conspire against your precious ones.

4 “Come,” they say, “let us wipe out Israel as a nation. We will destroy the very memory of its existence.”

5 Yes, this was their unanimous decision. They signed a treaty as allies against you—

6 these Edomites and Ishmaelites; Moabites and Hagrites; Gebalites, Ammonites, and Amalekites; and people from Philistia and Tyre. Assyria has joined them, too, and is allied with the descendants of Lot.  

9 Do to them as you did to the Midianites and as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the Kishon River. They were destroyed at Endor, and their decaying corpses fertilized the soil.

11 Let their mighty nobles die as Oreb and Zeeb did. Let all their princes die like Zebah and Zalmunna, for they said, “Let us seize for our own use these pasturelands of God!”

13 O my God, scatter them like tumbleweed, like chaff before the wind! As a fire burns a forest and as a flame sets mountains ablaze, chase them with your fierce storm; terrify them with your tempest.

16 Utterly disgrace them until they submit to your name, O Lord. Let them be ashamed and terrified forever. Let them die in disgrace. Then they will learn that you alone are called the Lord, that you alone are the Most High, supreme over all the earth.

82:5 The unjust oppressors cannot bring or restore order. They wander about in darkness, unmoved by circumstances even when the whole world order falls apart around them (cp. 11:3).  

82:6-7 The gods (see notes on 29:1-2; 58:1), like mere mortals, cannot escape the judgment common to human rulers. Jesus quoted from this passage in John 10:34.

82:8 The nations belong to God; he will take over the realms formerly ruled by local deities and give them to his people, just as he did with the Promised Land.  

Ps 83 This community lament asks God for rescue and victory. The terse poetry suggests difficult times. A powerful coalition desires to destroy Israel (83:1-4) and allies itself against God (83:5-8). Recalling the fate of others who came against Israel (83:9-12), the psalmist prays that the same will happen to these enemies (83:13-16) so that God will receive honor among them (83:17-18). It is unclear whether this psalm arose out of a specific historical instance of opposition by these nations, or if it is a poetic collage of nations representing Israel’s enemies.  

83:1-4 The enemy has successfully intimidated God’s people, so the poet prays that the Lord will hear and act.

83:5-8 signed a treaty: The allies agreed to fight against God and his people. The nations that are named in the alliance were situated around Israel and Judah.

83:6-7 The Edomites, descendants of Esau, were located to the southeast of Judah (see Gen 25:30; 32:3; 36:1-8).  

83:7 The Ishmaelites were desert-dwelling descendants of Hagar.  

83:8 Assyria has joined them, too, and is allied with the descendants of Lot.

83:9-18 The psalmist prays that God will miraculously destroy the new coalition as he did three other enemies; doing so would bring him glory.

83:9-11 The Midianites, ruled by Zebah and Zalmunna and led by Oreb and Zeeb, were Israel’s enemy in the days of Gideon (Judg 7:1–8:5). Barak’s coalition defeated Sisera and Jabin (Judg 4).

83:12 The coalition’s motivation for wiping out Israel was to acquire the land (see Jer 3:19).  

83:13 tumbleweed . . . chaff: This dry plant material easily blows away (see Isa 17:13).

83:14-15 fire . . . fierce storm . . . tempest: These are images of God’s manifestation in judgment (see note on 10:7-15; Isa 29:6).
PSALM 84
For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah, to be accompanied by a stringed instrument.

1 How lovely is your dwelling place, 
   O Lord of Heaven's Armies.
2 I long, yes, I faint with longing
   to enter the courts of the Lord.
3 Even the sparrow finds a home, 
   and the swallow builds her nest and 
   raises her young
   at a place near your altar, 
   O Lord of Heaven's Armies, my King 
   and my God!
4 What joy for those who can live in your house, 
   always singing your praises.

5 What joy for those whose strength 
   comes from the Lord, 
   who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
6 When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, 
   it will become a place of refreshing springs.
   The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings.
7 They will continue to grow stronger, 
   and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem.

8 O Lord God of Heaven's Armies, hear my prayer.
Listen, O God of Jacob. Interlude
9 O God, look with favor upon the king, 
   our shield!
   Show favor to the one you have anointed.
10 A single day in your courts 
   is better than a thousand anywhere else!
   I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God 
   than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.
11 For the Lord God is our sun and our shield.
   He gives us grace and glory.
   The Lord will withhold no good thing 
   from those who do what is right.
12 O Lord of Heaven's Armies, 
   what joy for those who trust in you.

PSALM 85
For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah.

1 Lord, you poured out blessings on your land!
   You restored the fortunes of Israel.
2 You forgave the guilt of your people—
   yes, you covered all their sins.

3 You held back your fury.
   You kept back your blazing anger.

Ps 84 The psalmist expresses his deep spiritual longing for God's presence. He faints with longing as he reflects on the Temple and on pilgrims making the journey to Jerusalem (84:1-7). He prays for himself and for the community (84:8-9). The conclusion of the psalm (84:10-12) clarifies that the Temple represents God—the psalmist truly longs for God's presence. He knows that God's goodness is greater than life and that only God can give his people favor and honor (84:10-11).

84:1-11 The psalmist is far from the Temple. He turns toward it in hopeful reflection.

84:2 The poet envisions the birds that have nesting places in and around the Temple.

84:4 The priests and Temple personnel lived in the Temple.

84:5-7 The pilgrimage to Jerusalem reenacted the Exodus, when God marvelously provided for his people (see 78:15-16; 105:41). The psalmist imagines the pains of travel turning to the joy of arrival.

84:5 Travelers needed strength to meet the challenges of pilgrimage by foot along unpaved paths, in all kinds of weather and with the possibility of assaults.

84:6 The Valley of Weeping (or Valley of Poplars; Hebrew reads valley of Baca) probably refers to the anguish that lonely pilgrims endured (see 23:4), rather than to an actual location. *refreshing springs . . . autumn rains:* Even when pilgrims feel totally exhausted, the prospect of drawing near to the Lord renews their spirits (cp. Isa 35:6-10; 41:18-20; 43:17-20; 49:10).

84:7 Jerusalem: Hebrew Zion. See "Mount Zion, the City of God" at Ps 48, p. 947.

84:8 Both kings and priests were anointed to dedicate them for service (see 132:17; Exod 28:41; 1 Sam 9:16; 16:1-13; cp. Isa 61:1; Acts 10:38).

84:10 The psalmist viewed being in God's presence as much better than being anywhere else.

84:11 Some people worshiped the sun as a god, but the true God provides all that anyone needs.

Ps 85 The psalmist leads the postexilic community in lament and prayer for full redemption. He ponders God’s past rescue of Israel from exile (85:1-3), longs for greater evidence of God’s goodness, and leads the community in prayer for full restoration (85:4-7). God responds with a message of peace (85:8-9), and the psalm concludes with a lyrical outburst at the grandeur of God’s salvation (85:10-13).

85:1-5 Though the psalmist gratefully acknowledges God’s goodness, he also asks God whether his wrath will last forever.

85:1 God restored the fortunes of Israel by bringing the nation back from exile (see 14:7; 126:1). *of Israel: Literally of Jacob. See note on 44:4.

85:2 When God forgave the guilt of their sins, he gave the people the possibility of fellowship with him (see 32:5).
Ps 86:3-14

4 Now restore us again, O God of our salvation. Put aside your anger against us once more.
5 Will you be angry with us always? Will you prolong your wrath to all generations?
6 Won’t you revive us again, so your people can rejoice in you?
7 Show us your unfailing love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.
8 I listen carefully to what ‘God the Lord’ is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people. But let them not return to their foolish ways.
9 Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, so our land will be filled with his glory.
10 Unfailing love and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed!
11 Truth springs up from the earth, and righteousness smiles down from heaven.
12 Yes, the Lord pours down his blessings. Our land will yield its bountiful harvest.
13 Righteousness goes as a herald before him, preparing the way for his steps.

PSALM 86
A prayer of David.

1 Bend down, O Lord, and hear my prayer; answer me, for I need your help.
2 Protect me, for I am devoted to you. Save me, for I serve you and trust you. You are my God.
3 Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am calling on you constantly.
4 Give ‘me happiness, O Lord, for I give myself to you.
5 O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help.
6 Listen closely to my prayer, O Lord; hear my urgent cry.
7 I will call to you whenever I’m in trouble, and you will answer me.
8 No pagan god is like you, O Lord. None can do what you do!
9 All the nations you made will come and bow before you, Lord; they will praise your holy name.
10 For you are great and perform wonderful deeds. You alone are God.
11 Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I may live according to your truth! Grant me purity of heart, so that I may honor you.
12 With all my heart I will praise you, O Lord my God. I will give glory to your name forever, for your love for me is very great. You have rescued me from the depths of death.
13 O God, insolent people rise up against me; a violent gang is trying to kill me. You mean nothing to them.
14 O Lord and know that he and his salvation—come together and transform the created order into something new (see Isa 32:15-20).
15 Righteousness is like a messenger preparing the world for God’s coming in response to the prayers of his people (Ps 85:4-7; 89:14).
Ps 86 The psalmist invokes God’s help and praises his character in a lament prompted by the presence of evil (Ps 86:14, 17). All people will worship the gracious and almighty God (Ps 86:8-10). To this end, the poet commits himself to a lifestyle of ethical integrity (Ps 86:11) and praising the Lord (Ps 86:12-13). The last stanza contrasts the qualities of evil people with those of the Lord (Ps 86:14-17).

86 TITLE This is the only psalm connected with David in Book Three.
86:1-4 God’s devoted servant prays for mercy. The psalmist sees himself as a member of the covenant community and as a citizen of the world.
86:5-7 The psalmist appeals to God to remain true to his character, which is the basis for hope.
86:8 The psalmist recounts the catalog of divine perfections (Exod 34:6-7), especially God’s willingness to forgive sin (see 32:5; 85:2; 145:7-10).
86:8-10 All the nations must submit themselves to the Lord and worship him (45:17; 117:1; 148:7-11).
86:11 The poet responds to the Lord by seeking faithful instruction in the truth. • An individual with purity of heart has integrity and wholeness (see 73:1).
86:12-13 In anticipation of God’s rescue, the psalmist praises him and trusts in his goodness.
86:14-17 The arrogant exist both inside and outside the community. The psalmist asks for a vision of God’s character; God is so great that just a glimpse of his goodness will shut the mouths of the wicked.
15 But you, O Lord, are a God of compassion and mercy, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.

16 Look down and have mercy on me. Give your strength to your servant; save me, the son of your servant.

17 Send me a sign of your favor. Then those who hate me will be put to shame, for you, O Lord, help and comfort me.

PSALM 87
A song. A psalm of the descendants of Korah.

1 On the holy mountain stands the city founded by the Lord.

2 He loves the city of Jerusalem more than any other city in Israel.

3 O city of God, what glorious things are said of you! Interlude

4 I will count Egypt and Babylon among those who know me—also Philistia and Tyre, and even distant Ethiopia. They have all become citizens of Jerusalem.

5 Regarding Jerusalem it will be said, “Everyone enjoys the rights of citizenship there.” And the Most High will personally bless this city.

6 When the Lord registers the nations, he will say, “They have all become citizens of Jerusalem.” Interlude

86:15 God has mercy on his people (51:1); he is gracious (25:6). slow to get angry (103:8; 145:8), and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness (Hebrew khesed and ‘emeth; 143:1). This verse repeats a theme first expressed in Exodus 34:7; Num 14:18 (cp. 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2).

Ps 87 This psalm envisions Jerusalem as the city of God where all the nations are citizens.

87:1 Jerusalem was Israel’s capital and the location of the Temple, God’s earthly palace (see Ps 84).

87:2 This verse reads literally He loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. See note on 44:4.

87:4 As great as Zion is, it will be even greater when it becomes an international city where believers from all the nations have citizenship. • Egypt: Hebrew Raḥab, the name of a mythical sea monster that represents chaos in ancient literature. The name is used here as a poetic name for Egypt (Isa 30:7). In other passages Rahab refers to the sea monsters themselves (89:10; see Job 9:13). • God keeps a record of all who confess him as their Lord (Dan 7:10; Rev 13:8). • Ethiopia: Hebrew Cush.

87:5-6 Jerusalem (Hebrew Zion) becomes the international city where all God’s children are citizens.

87:7 will play flutes: Or will dance.

Ps 88 In this lament, the psalmist sees himself as cast out from God’s presence. At first, he calls on the Lord. When he finds no relief from his suffering, he presents three charges against God (88:6-7, 8-12, 13-17).

88:TITLE psalm: Hebrew maskil. This may be a literary or musical term.

88:1 The people will play flutes and sing, “The source of my life springs from Jerusalem!”

PSALM 88
For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah. A song to be sung to the tune “The Suffering of Affliction.”

A psalm of Heman the Ezrahite.

1 O Lord, God of my salvation, I cry out to you by day. I come to you at night.

2 Now hear my prayer; listen to my cry.

3 For my life is full of troubles, and death draws near.

4 I am as good as dead, like a strong man with no strength left.

5 They have left me among the dead, and I lie like a corpse in a grave.

6 You have thrown me into the lowest pit, into the darkest depths.

7 Your anger weighs me down; with wave after wave you have engulfed me.

8 You have driven my friends away by making me repulsive to them.

9 My eyes are blinded by my tears. Each day I beg for your help, O Lord; I lift my hands to you for mercy.

10 Are your wonderful deeds of any use to the dead? Do the dead rise up and praise you? Interlude

88:1 God’s overpowering anger did not make sense. • The phrase the darkest depths implies the place of the dead (143:3; see Lam 3:6) or the depths of the sea (68:22; 69:1-2).

88:3 death: Hebrew Sheol, the place of the dead.

88:6-7 In his first charge, the psalmist blames the Lord for his demise. God’s overpowering anger did not make sense.

88:8-12 In his second charge, the psalmist claims that God has isolated him and caused his loneliness (cp. 31:11; 38:11). Loneliness was a curse in a culture where relationships were more important than personal achievement.
Ps 89
A psalm of Ethan the Ezrahite.

1 I will sing of the Lord's unfailing love forever!
    Young and old will hear of your faithfulness.
2 Your unfailing love will last forever.
    Your faithfulness is as enduring as the heavens.
3 The Lord said, “I have made a covenant with David, my chosen servant.
    I have sworn this oath to him:
4 'I will establish your descendants as kings forever;
    they will sit on your throne from now until eternity.'
5 All heaven will praise your great wonders, Lord;
    myriads of angels will praise you for your faithfulness.
6 For who in all of heaven can compare with the Lord?
    What mightiest angel is anything like the Lord?
7 The highest angelic powers stand in awe of God.

The Exile in the Psalms (Ps 89)

Israel’s kings repeatedly rebelled against God, and the people of Israel sinned and broke their covenant with him. God therefore declared that he would bring the curses of the covenant upon them and their nation (see Deut 28:15-68; cp., e.g., Isa 59:10; Jer 4:13; Amos 5:11; Mic 6:14-15). In his wrath, God sent the Assyrian and Babylonian armies to execute this sentence, and all but a few of the Israelites were taken into exile (see 2 Kgs 24:1–25:21).

The Exile shaped many of the psalms; we see its impact working behind the scenes in their images and themes. The grief, anguish, and confusion of the Exile are distilled into several questions that the psalmist addresses: How long will God’s wrath last (89:46)? Does God understand human frailty (89:47-48)? Is God true to his nature (89:49)? Is God just in not avenging his people (89:50-51)? Has God abandoned David’s royal line (89:38-39)?

These questions were on the minds of God’s people during and after the Exile. Some of their doubts raise questions concerning God’s ability to rule. Rather than dismissing these questions, wise readers listen, reflect, and study the answers that Scripture gives. The definitive answer came in the Lord Jesus Christ (see Isa 52:1–54:17; Luke 1:46-55, 67-79; 4:18-19; Rom 6:6, 16-22; Heb 12:22-24). However, those who experienced the Exile could only dimly foresee his coming. They asked these hard questions and lived without clear answers.

11 Can those in the grave declare your unfailing love?
    Can they proclaim your faithfulness in the place of destruction?
12 Can the darkness speak of your wonderful deeds?
    Can anyone in the land of forgetfulness talk about your righteousness?
13 O Lord, I cry out to you.
    I will keep on pleading day by day.
14 O Lord, why do you reject me?
    Why do you turn your face from me?
15 I have been sick and close to death since my youth.
    I stand helpless and desperate before your terrors.
16 Your fierce anger has overwhelmed me.
    Your terrors have paralyzed me.
17 They swirl around me like floodwaters all day long.
    They have engulfed me completely.
18 You have taken away my companions and loved ones.
    Darkness is my closest friend.
He is far more awesome than all who surround his throne.
8 O Lord God of Heaven’s Armies! Where is there anyone as mighty as you, O Lord?
9 You are entirely faithful.
10 You rule the oceans. You subdue their storm-tossed waves.
11 The heavens are yours, and the earth is yours; everything in the world is yours—you created it all.
12 You created north and south, Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon, praise your name.
13 Powerful is your arm! Strong is your hand! Your right hand is lifted high in glorious strength.
14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Unfailing love and truth walk before you as attendants.
15 Happy are those who hear the joyful call to worship, for they will walk in the light of your presence, Lord.
16 They rejoice all day long in your wonderful reputation. They exult in your righteousness.
17 You are their glorious strength. It pleases you to make us strong.
18 Yes, your protection comes from the Lord, and he, the Holy One of Israel, has given us our king.
19 Long ago you spoke in a vision to your people, to worship, foundation of your throne.
20 You adopted David as his son and as king of Israel (see 2:4-6; 2 Sam 7:14-15, 22:10). He records his commitment to the dynasty of David in the same way.
21 His enemies will not defeat him, nor will the wicked overpower him. 
22 I will beat down his adversaries before him and destroy those who hate him.
23 My faithfulness and unfailing love will be with him, and by my authority he will grow in power.
24 I will extend his rule over the sea, his dominion over the rivers. And he will call out to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.’
25 I will make him my firstborn son, the mightiest king on earth. I will love him and be kind to him forever; my covenant with him will never end.
26 I will preserve an heir for him; his throne will be as endless as the days of heaven.
27 But if his descendants forsake my instructions and fail to obey my regulations, if they do not obey my decrees and fail to keep my commands, 
28 then I will punish their sin with the rod, and their disobedience with beating. But I will never stop loving him nor fail to keep my promise to him.
29 I have raised up a warrior.
30 Those who are wise worship God, walk in his light, rejoice in their relationship with him, and exult in his character. The Lord protects his people with the same power by which he established the created order.
31 The Lord chose David as his son and as king of Israel (see 2:4-6; 2 Sam 7:14-15) to provide protection for his people.
32 Then I will punish their sin with the rod, and their disobedience with beating. But I will never stop loving him nor fail to keep my promise to him.
33 No, I will not break my covenant; I will not take back a single word I said.
34 You said, “I have raised up a warrior.
35 I have selected him from the common people to be king. 
36 I have anointed him with my holy oil.
37 I will steady him with my hand; with my powerful arm I will make him strong.
38 In this hymn, the psalmist celebrates God’s comprehensive and powerful sovereignty over nature. The Hebrew term Rahab refers to a mythical sea monster that represents chaos in ancient literature (see 87:4 and note). The Lord rules over all parts of the created order, including evil.
39 You scattered your enemies with your mighty arm. God of Heaven’s Armies!
40 You scattered your enemies with your mighty arm. This phrase represents God’s strength (89:13). 89:12 Mount Tabor was in northern Israel. Mount Hermon formed the extreme northern border of the nation.
41 God rules wisely over creation. The qualities of righteousness, justice, and faithfulness fit the profile of a wise ruler. The happy people who live under his rule enjoy his protection. 
42 Those who are wise worship God, walk in his light, rejoice in their relationship with him, and exult in his character. The Lord protects his people with the same power by which he established the created order.
43 The Lord chose David as his son and as king of Israel (see 2:4-6; 2 Sam 7:14-15) to provide protection for his people.
44 I have anointed him: This is the verb from which anointed one (Hebrew messiah) is derived.
45 The Lord adopted David as his son, appointed him as his commander over the nations, and promised to support him forever. Verse 26 recalls a verse from David’s song of praise (2 Sam 22:47).
46 David was the most eminent of earthly kings. The Hebrew word translated mightiest is the same as the designation for God as “Most High” (’elyon). The Lord writes his faithfulness in heaven, on the canvas of his universe (see 89:2). He records his commitment to the dynasty of David in the same way. 
47 The Lord disciplines but does not reject his erring children. He foresees violation of trust and subsequent punishment, but he commits himself to uphold the covenant. His fidelity to David corresponds to his faithfulness to the created order.
Ps 92:7
Ps 90:6
Isa 40:6
90:5
2 Pet 3:8
Ps 39:5
90:4
Job 34:14-15
90:3
Ps 102:24-25, 27
90:2
Ps 39:13-14
1 Chr 28:9
Ps 78:59
90:1

But now you have rejected him and cast him off. You are angry with your anointed king. You have renounced your covenant with him; you have thrown his crown in the dust. You have broken down the walls protecting him and ruined every fort defending him. Everyone who comes along has robbed him, and he has become a joke to his neighbors. You have strengthened his enemies and made them all rejoice. You have made his sword useless and refused to help him in battle. You have ended his splendor and overturned his throne. You have made him old before his time and publicly disgraced him.

O Lord, how long will this go on? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your anger burn like fire? Remember how short my life is, how empty and futile this human existence!

Interlude

4. BOOK FOUR (PSS 90–106)

PSALM 90
A prayer of Moses, the man of God.

1 Lord, through all the generations you have been our home! Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God. You promised it to David with a faithful pledge. Consider, Lord, how your servants are disgraced! I carry in my heart the insults of so many people.

51 Your enemies have mocked me, O Lord; they mock your anointed king wherever he goes.

52 Praise the Lord forever! Amen and amen!

89:35 holiness: The Lord is wholly distinct from the created order (22:3); his character is totally pure. He does as he pleases (115:3), and he chooses to be faithful (89:1; 115:1); therefore, he cannot lie.

89:38 You are angry: The harshness of God’s wrath perplexes the psalmist.

89:40 broken down the walls: The Lord’s people are completely vulnerable.

89:42 Although the Lord promised to strengthen David, he secretly strengthened David’s enemies.

89:46-47 The psalmist wonders if he will live to see the end of the Lord’s anger. Our lifetimes are short, like a day in the Lord’s sight (90:4, 10).


89:50 The phrase your servants refers to the community loyal to the Lord.

89:52 This doxology concludes all of Book Three (Pss 73–89); it is not intended to be read as part of Ps 89. It stands in stark contrast to the anguish and questioning of Ps 89. Cp. Ps 90.

89:6 No one can live forever; all will die. No one can escape the power of the grave.

49 Lord, where is your unfailing love? You promised it to David with a faithful pledge.

50 Consider, Lord, how your servants are disgraced! I carry in my heart the insults of so many people.

51 Your enemies have mocked me, O Lord; they mock your anointed king wherever he goes.

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1 Lord, through all the generations you have been our home! Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God.

2 You turn people back to dust, saying, “Return to dust, you ‘mortals!’” For you, a thousand years are as a passing day, as brief as a few night hours.

3 You sweep people away like dreams that disappear. They are like grass that springs up in the morning.

4 Interlude

6 In the morning it blooms and flourishes, but by evening it is dry and withered.

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51 Your enemies have mocked me, O Lord; they mock your anointed king wherever he goes.

52 Praise the Lord forever! Amen and amen!
7 We wither beneath your anger; we are overwhelmed by your fury.
8 You spread out our sins before you—our secret sins—and you see them all.
9 We live our lives beneath your wrath, ending our years with a groan.
10 Seventy years are given to us! Some even live to eighty. But even the best years are filled with pain and trouble; soon they disappear, and we fly away.
11 Who can comprehend the power of your anger? Your wrath is as awesome as the fear you deserve.
12 Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.
13 O Lord, come back to us! How long will you delay? Take pity on your servants! Satisfy us each morning with your unfailing love, so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.
14 Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery! Replace the evil years with good.
15 Let us, your servants, see you work again; let our children see your glory.
16 And may the Lord our God show us his approval and make our efforts successful. Yes, make our efforts successful!

PSALM 91
1 Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
2 This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. He will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. He will cover you with his feathers. His faithful promises are your armor and protection.
3 Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day.
4 Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday.
5 Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you. Just open your eyes, and see how the wicked are punished.
6 If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home.
7 You will hold you up with their hands and make our efforts successful.
8 They will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.
9 You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!
10 The Lord says, “I will rescue those who love me.”

Psalm 91 and 90:17-10 Sinners cannot escape God’s wrath because the Lord sees their sins. Their fleeting lives are filled with afflictions. 90:9-10 A groan of sorrow (Ezek 2:10) sums up a life spent in facing the consequences of sin. Humans cause trouble (see 10:6) and receive pain in return. 90:11-12 In the search for wisdom, no one can comprehend the Lord (see Isa 40:13). The appropriate human response to the Lord is godly fear (see 60:4). The Lord alone can teach humans to follow the path of wisdom (25:4-6). 90:13-17 The psalmist prays for the Lord’s favor and restoration. 90:13 The phrase your servants refers to the community of those loyal to the Lord. 90:15 The psalmist calls upon the Lord to give the people gladness to replace their mourning (see 92:4-5). 90:16 The children represent future generations in contrast to the generations past (90:1). 90:17 Humans waste their efforts unless the Lord makes them successful (44:3).

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The wicked, like grass, are quickly destroyed (Ps 92:7-10). This is the reason for the poet's renewed strength and glory, and for the imminent defeat of the enemy.

92:8 The transcendent Lord stays above the world of human experience. From this exalted place, he rules and judges the universe in a manner that is both just and sovereign.

92:9 Your enemies, Lord, will surely perish; all evildoers will be scattered.

92:10 But you have made me as strong as a wild ox. You have anointed me with the finest oil.

92:11 My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the defeat of my wicked opponents. But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon.

92:12 The Lord promises to answer the prayers of his people. They flourish in the courts of our God. They flourish in the courts of our God. They flourish in the courts of our God.

92:13 For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. They flourish in the courts of our God. They flourish in the courts of our God.

Psalm 92: A song to be sung on the Sabbath Day.

1 It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to the Most High.

2 It is good to proclaim your unfailing love in the morning, your faithfulness in the evening,

3 accompanied by the ten-stringed harp and the melody of the lyre.

4 You thrill, Lord, with all you have done for me! I sing for joy because of what you have done.

5 O Lord, what great works you do! And how deep are your thoughts.

6 Only a simpleton would not know, and only a fool would not understand this:

7 Though the wicked sprout like weeds, they will be destroyed forever.

8 But you, O Lord, will be exalted forever.

9 Your enemies, Lord, will surely perish; all evildoers will be scattered.

10 But you have made me as strong as a wild ox. You have anointed me with the finest oil.

11 My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the defeat of my wicked opponents. But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon.

12 For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. They flourish in the courts of our God. They flourish in the courts of our God.

Psalm 93

1 The Lord is king! He is robed in majesty. Indeed, the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength. The world stands firm and cannot be shaken.
2 Your "throne, O LORD, has stood from time immemorial. You are from the everlast-
ing past.
3 The floods have risen up, O LORD. The floods have roared like thunder; the floods have lifted their pounding waves.
4 But mightier than the violent raging of the seas, mightier than the breakers on the shore— the LORD above is mightier than these!
5 Your royal laws cannot be changed. Your reign, O LORD, is holy forever and ever.

PSALM 94
1 O LORD, the God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, let your glorious justice shine forth!
2 Arise, O judge of the earth. Give the proud what they deserve.
3 How long, O LORD? How long will the wicked be allowed to gloat?
4 How long will they speak with arrogance?
5 How long will these evil people boast?
6 They crush your people, LORD, hurting those you claim as your own.
7 “The LORD isn’t looking,” they say, “and besides, the God of Israel doesn’t care.”
8 Think again, you fools! When will you finally catch on?
9 Is he deaf—the one who made your ears? Is he blind—the one who formed your eyes?
10 He punishes the nations—won’t he also punish you? He knows everything—doesn’t he also know what you are doing?
11 The LORD knows people’s thoughts; he knows they are worthless!
12 Joyful are those you discipline, LORD, those you teach with your instructions.
13 You give them relief from troubled times until a pit is dug to capture the wicked.
14 The LORD will not reject his people; he will not abandon his special possession.
15 Judgment will again be founded on justice, and those with virtuous hearts will pursue it.
16 Who will protect me from the wicked? Who will stand up for me against evildoers?
17 Unless the LORD had helped me, I would soon have settled in the silence of the grave.
18 I cried out, “I am slipping!” but your unfailing love, O LORD, supported me.
19 When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer.

93:3-4 God’s victory over natural chaos gives the psalmist confidence that the LORD will also defeat his present enemies (cp. Jer 46:8; 47:2).
93:5 Through his stable rule and royal laws, the LORD orders the world. *Your reign (literally your house): The house from which God reigns might be the Lord’s heavenly palace or the earthly Temple.
Ps 94 This plea for the LORD’s justice includes both communal and individual expressions of lament (94:1-7, 16-23). The psalmist gives voice to the pain and suffering caused by the wicked, but he also depicts the comfort and stability of the LORD’s protection. He calls on the LORD to avenge the needy against the arrogant and foolish, he rebukes such people for their folly (94:8-11), and he pronounces a blessing on the wise (94:12-15).
94:1-7 After the community falls victim to the wicked (94:5-7), they pray that the LORD will render justice (see 7:11; 9:12).
20 Can unjust leaders claim that God is on their side—leaders whose decrees permit injustice?  
21 They gang up against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death.  
22 But the Lord is my fortress; my God is the mighty rock where I hide.  
23 God will turn the sins of evil people back on them. He will destroy them for their sins. The Lord our God will destroy them.

PSALM 95

1 Come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.  
2 Let us come to him with thanksgiving. Let us sing psalms of praise to him.  
3 For the Lord is a great God, a great King above all gods.  
4 He holds in his hands the depths of the earth and the mightiest mountains.

5 The sea belongs to him, for he made it.  
6 Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God.  
7 We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care.  
8 The Lord says, ‘Don’t harden your hearts as Israel did at Meribah, as they did at Massah in the wilderness.  
9 For there your ancestors tested and tried my patience, even though they saw everything I did.  
10 For forty years I was angry with them, and I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts turn away from me. They refuse to do what I tell them.’  
11 So in my anger I took an oath: ‘They will never enter my place of rest.’ ”

The Creator-King (Pss 93–100)

The Psalter portrays Israel’s view of God as the Creator, the great King over the world of nature and nations. God created and established the world, and he rules over it (95:4-5; 96:10; see 24:2; 78:69). The whole of creation is his handiwork. The Creator governs and cares for all that he made. Several psalms celebrate the manifestation of God’s glory in creation (Pss 8, 19, 29, 33, 89, and 104). Psalm 8 centers on God’s endowing human beings with splendor and vesting them as his rulers in creation. Psalm 19 encourages reflection on creation in order to cultivate wisdom. Psalm 29 reveals God’s power in the world and the stability of his creation. Psalm 33 exalts God’s governance, order, and wisdom in creation and fosters the importance of wisdom. Psalm 89 lays the foundation of God’s covenant with David on his commitment to creation (89:9-18). Psalms 93–100 anticipate the worldwide dominion of God. When he comes into the world, he brings harmony and peace. The earth already belongs to him, and the Creator has demonstrated his power in history. Psalm 104 is a creation hymn that reworks the six days of creation into a marvelous lyric in praise of God’s wisdom. The psalms call upon all nations to acknowledge and praise God and to show their acceptance of his sovereign rule over all nations (see 9:11; 47:1-2, 7-9; 66:8; 67; 117:1).

Ps 95 This call to worship urges the people to respond to the Lord, the Shepherd, and to follow him faithfully. The previous generation, who refused to obey, did not receive the blessings of the Promised Land.  
95:3-5 The Lord is the great King over the whole universe.  
95:3 above all gods: The psalmist refutes idolatry and paganism (96:4-6; 135:15-18; see also Isa 46:5-7).  
95:4-5 The whole created order owes its existence to the sovereign Lord alone—not to various gods.  
95:6-7 The great King cares for his people as a shepherd cares for his flock (Isa 40:11). • The Lord our maker, the Creator of heaven and earth, also made a people for himself (Isa 45:9-12; 51:12-16).  
95:8-11 If people want to enter into the Lord’s rest, they need to respond immediately (see Heb 3:7-4:11).  
95:8 To harden your hearts means to be stubborn and resist the Lord’s grace (see Num 20:2-13; see also Matt 13:3-23; John 12:37-43; Eph 4:17-32; Heb 3:6-19; 4:6-11).  
95:9 Israel’s ancestors . . . saw the wonders of the Lord, but they foolishly did not try to grasp their significance (see 92:5-6).  
95:11 The generation of Israel that wandered in the wilderness for forty years failed to enter the place of rest that Israel enjoyed after the conquest of the land (1 Kgs 8:56; see Deut 12:9). The Lord promised them the land and gave it to them (Isa 28:12), but they did not obey him (Isa 28:1). The warning reminds every generation of the need to obey in faith. • The rest that God provides includes peace, provision, and protection (132:14-18). The author of Hebrews challenged a new generation to enter the rest provided by Jesus Christ (Heb 3:7–4:13).
PSALM 96
Ps 96:1-13 // 1 Chr 16:23-33
1 Sing a new song to the LORD!
   Let the whole earth sing to the LORD!
2 Sing to the LORD; praise his name.
   Each day proclaim the good news that he saves.
3 Publish his glorious deeds among the nations.
   Tell everyone about the amazing things he does.
4 Great is the LORD! He is most worthy of praise!
   He is to be feared above all gods.
5 The gods of other nations are mere idols,
   but the LORD made the heavens!
6 Honor and majesty surround him;
   strength and beauty fill his sanctuary.
7 O nations of the world, recognize the LORD;
   recognize that the LORD is glorious and strong.
8 Give to the LORD the glory he deserves!
   Bring your offering and come into his courts.
9 Worship the LORD in all his holy splendor.
   Let all the earth tremble before him.
10 Tell all the nations, "The LORD reigns!"
   The world stands firm and cannot be shaken.
   He will judge all peoples fairly.

11 Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice!
   Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise!
12 Let the fields and their crops burst out with joy!
   Let the trees of the forest rustle with praise
13 before the LORD, for he is coming!
   He is coming to judge the earth.
   He will judge the world with justice,
   and the nations with his truth.

PSALM 97
1 The LORD is king!
   Let the earth rejoice!
   Let the farthest coastlands be glad.
2 Dark clouds surround him.
   Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
3 Fire spreads ahead of him
   and burns up all his foes.
4 His lightning flashes out across the world.
   The earth seizes and trembles.
5 The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,
   before the Lord of all the earth.
6 The heavens proclaim his glory;
   every nation sees his glory.
7 Those who worship idols are disgraced—

Ps 96 This psalm establishes the Lord’s universal kingship (see Ps 93) and prepares for the coming of the Lord to bring justice and righteousness into the world. The psalmist invites everyone to worship the Lord (96:1-3), the glorious Creator of all the earth (96:4-6), because worship is due to him alone (96:7-9). The universe joins in praise as the righteous Judge establishes a new order (96:10-13). This psalm (along with 96:14-15; 98:1-9) and inaugurates an era of renewal in God’s presence (65:17; 72:6, 16; Isa 44:23; 55:12; Rom 8:21-22). Ps 97 God is greatly exalted over the gods and over all the earth. Awe-inspiring phenomena accompany his coming. Even the created order is visibly affected and the wicked perish, but the people of Zion love his coming and rejoice.

97:1 The farthest coastlands represent the most remote parts of the world.
97:2-4 Dark clouds . . . Fire . . . lighting: This language shows that the Lord is coming in judgment (see note on 18:7-15).
97:5-7 The created order stirs at the coming of its King. He alone deserves worship.
97:6 As the Lord enters the world, the testimony of his righteousness resonates from above (50:6). * Every nation will view the open display of the Lord’s glory (see 8:1; 19:1-4a; 24:7; Isa 40:5).
all who brag about their worthless gods—for every god must bow to him.
8 Jerusalem has heard and rejoiced, and all the towns of Judah are glad because of your justice, O Lord!
9 For you, O Lord, are supreme over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.
10 You who love the Lord, hate evil! He protects the lives of his godly people and rescues them from the power of the wicked.
11 Light shines on the godly, and joy on those whose hearts are right.
12 May all who are godly rejoice in the Lord and praise his holy name!

PSALM 98
A psalm.
1 Sing a new song to the Lord, for he has done wonderful deeds.
2 The Lord has announced his victory and has revealed his righteousness to every nation!
3 He has remembered his promise to love, to establish fairness, and to be faithful to Israel.
4 The ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.
5 Sing your praise to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and melodious song, with trumpets and the sound of the ram’s horn. Make a joyful symphony before the Lord, the King!
6 Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise!
7 Let the earth and all living things join in.
8 Let the rivers clap their hands in glee!
9 Let the hills sing out their songs of joy before the Lord.
10 For the Lord is coming to judge the earth.
11 He will judge the world with justice, and the nations with fairness.

PSALM 99
1 The Lord is king! Let the nations tremble!
2 The Lord sits on his throne between the cherubim.
3 He protects the lives of his godly people and rescues them from the power of the wicked.
4 May all who are godly rejoice in the Lord and praise his holy name!
5 Exalt the Lord our God!
6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests; Samuel also called on his name.
They cried to the Lord for help, and he answered them.
7 He spoke to Israel from the pillar of cloud, and they followed the laws and decrees he gave them.
8 O Lord our God, you answered them. You were a forgiving God to them, but you punished them when they went wrong.
9 Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain in Jerusalem, for the Lord our God is holy!

PSALM 100
A psalm of thanksgiving.
1 Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth!
2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him, singing with joy.
3 Acknowledge that the Lord is God!
He made us, and we are his.
We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise.
5 Give thanks to him and praise his name.
5 For the Lord is good.
His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation.

PSALM 101
A psalm of David.
1 I will sing of your love and justice, Lord.
I will praise you with songs.
2 I will be careful to live a blameless life—when will you come to help me?
I will lead a life of integrity in my own home.

101:2 in my own home (literally in my house): This commitment to integrity might refer to private life at home. Some interpreters view my house as referring to the king’s palace; the commitment would then refer to the policies of his administration. **Leading a life of integrity** means choosing a wise lifestyle.

101:4-5 The psalmist hates what the Lord hates (Prov 6:16-19; see Ps 5:5; 11:4-5). **Perverse ideas** come from corrupt human hearts (18:26).

101:6 The psalmist surrounds himself with people who are also committed to integrity (101:2).

101:7-8 The psalmist commits himself to ridding his house and the city of the Lord—representing the entire kingdom—of all evil.

Ps 102 A frail and afflicted human being prays for the Lord’s compassion on Jerusalem and for his presence with its inhabitants.

102:1-2 The psalmist appeals to the Lord not to turn away (or hide your face). Israel experienced his turning his face away during their exile.

102:3 Smoke is an image of transitory life (37:20; 68:2). The psalmist’s bones represent his whole being (see 6:2; 34:19-22).

102:4 Like dried grass, the psalmist senses his life ebbing away.

102:5 skin and bones: The psalmist has wasted away because of his anguish (see 102:9; 109:24).

102:6 The owl was associated with ruin and desolation (Isa 34:11, 15).

99:7 The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron from the pillar of cloud (Exod 33:9; Num 12:5-6), and for a time, the people responded to the revelation.

Ps 100 This psalm calls all nations to come to Jerusalem to worship the Lord and acknowledge his goodness to Israel.

100:3 and we are his: As in an alternate reading in the Masoretic Text; the other alternate and some ancient versions read and not we ourselves. The Lord is the one who determines who his people are. **the sheep of his pasture**: God will guide and protect his people (23:1, 4).

100:4 Gates and courts were part of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Ps 101 This hymn expresses a commitment to live with integrity and to avoid evil. Jesus meets this ideal.
Ps 103

A psalm of David.

1 Let all that kI am praise the L

ord.

102:7-8 The psalmist cannot sleep (see 63:6-8). Like a kbird on the roof, khe feels isolated from both friends (see 88:8) and enemies. 
102:10 The psalmist blames the Lord for his troubles. 
102:12-17 The topic changes from the psalmist’s miseries to the Lord’s glory. A vision of the Lord’s compassionate kingship gives him confidence in Zion’s future. 
102:12 forever . . . to every generation: The frailty of humans (102:3-11) contrasts with the permanence of the Lord. 
102:13 Jerusalem: Hebrew Zion; also in 102:16. * Now is the time for the Lord to restore Jerusalem from exile (see 75:2; Jer 29:10; Dan 9:1-19). 
102:15-16 When the Lord arises [102:13], the nations will tremble with fear because they will see his glory (see 8:1; 19:1-4a; 24:7). The rebuilding of Zion and the Temple portray God’s glory and fulfill this promise. An even greater fulfillment will come with the New Jerusalem (Rev 21). 
102:17 The people of Israel were destitute (or naked) during the Exile. 
102:18-22 The Lord will have mercy; Jews and Gentiles alike will worship him. 
102:18 Let this be recorded: The written record stands as a memorial to the Lord’s goodness. 
102:19 The heavenly sanctuary refers to God’s holy place on high (see 92:8-10). 
102:22 The multitudes—both Jews and Gentiles—will join in the worship of the Lord (see 96:7, 9; 106:48; Isa 2:2-4; 43:10-13; 57:15; 60:3-7). 
102:23-28 Although the psalmist suffers in the present, he bases his hope for the future on the Lord’s past faithfulness.

102:7 I lie awake, 
lonely as a solitary bird on the roof. 
8 My enemies taunt me day after day. 
They mock and curse me. 
9 I eat ashes for food. 
My tears run down into my drink 
because of your anger and wrath. 
10 Because you have picked me up and thrown me out. 
11 My life passes as swiftly as the evening shadows. 
I am withering away like grass. 
12 But you, O L

ord, will sit on your throne forever. 
Your fame will endure to every generation. 
13 You will arise and have mercy on Jerusalem— 
and now is the time to pity her, now is the time you promised to help. 
14 For your people love every stone in her walls 
and cherish even the dust in her streets. 
15 Then the nations will tremble before the Lord. 
The kings of the earth will tremble before his glory. 
16 For the Lord will rebuild Jerusalem. 
He will appear in his glory. 
17 He will listen to the prayers of the destitute. 
He will not reject their pleas. 
18 Let this be recorded for future generations, so that a people not yet born will praise the Lord.

19 Tell them the Lord looked down 
from his heavenly sanctuary. 
He looked down to earth from heaven 
to hear the groans of the prisoners, 
to release those condemned to die. 
20 And so the Lord’s fame will be celebrated in Zion, 
his praises in Jerusalem, 
21 when multitudes gather together 
and kingdoms come to worship the Lord. 
22 He broke my strength in midlife, 
cutting short my days. 
23 But I cried to him, “O my God, who lives forever, 
don’t take my life while I am so young!” 
24 Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth 
and made the heavens with your hands. 
25 They will perish, but you remain forever; 
they will wear out like old clothing. 
You will change them like a garment and discard them. 
26 But you are always the same; 
you will live forever. 
27 But you always the same; 
the Lord’s presence provides the basis for the security and happiness of his people (23:6).

Ps 103 This psalm celebrates the Lord’s perfection, compassion, forgiveness, and goodness. The structure of the psalm is an acrostic poem, with one verse for each letter in the Hebrew alphabet (see also Pss 9–10, 25, 34, 37, 38, 111, 112, 119, 145). 
103:1-6 The psalmist offers praise for the Lord’s goodness.
2 Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things he does for me.
3 He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.
4 He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies.
5 He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle’s!
6 The LORD gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly.
7 He revealed his character to Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel.
8 The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
9 He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever.
10 He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.
11 For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.
12 He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.
13 The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him.
14 For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.
15 Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die.
16 The wind blows, and we are gone—as though we had never been here.
17 But the love of the LORD remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children’s children of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments!
18 The LORD has made the heavens his throne; from there he rules over everything.
19 Praise the LORD, you angels, you mighty ones who carry out his plans, listening for each of his commands.
20 Yes, praise the LORD, you armies of angels who serve him and do his will!
21 Praise the LORD, everything he has created, everything in all his kingdom.

Let all that I am praise the LORD.

PSALM 103
1 Let all that I am praise the LORD.
2 You are dressed in a robe of light.
3 You stretch out the starry curtain of the skies above the earth.
4 You make the clouds your chariot; you ride upon the wings of the wind.
5 You send your angels like flames of fire.
6 The wind blows, and we are gone—as though we had never been here.
7 But the love of the LORD remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children’s children of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments!
8 The LORD has made the heavens his throne; from there he rules over everything.
9 Praise the LORD, you angels, you mighty ones who carry out his plans, listening for each of his commands.
10 Yes, praise the LORD, you armies of angels who serve him and do his will!
11 Praise the LORD, everything he has created, everything in all his kingdom.

Let all that I am praise the LORD.

PSALM 104
1 Let all that I am praise the LORD.
2 You are dressed in a robe of light.
3 You stretch out the starry curtain of the heavens;
4 you lay out the rafters of your home in the rain clouds.
5 You make the clouds your chariot; you ride upon the wings of the wind.
6 The wind blows, and we are gone—as though we had never been here.
7 But the love of the LORD remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children’s children of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments!
8 The LORD has made the heavens his throne; from there he rules over everything.
9 Praise the LORD, you angels, you mighty ones who carry out his plans, listening for each of his commands.
10 Yes, praise the LORD, you armies of angels who serve him and do his will!
11 Praise the LORD, everything he has created, everything in all his kingdom.

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1 Let all that I am praise the LORD.
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3 You stretch out the starry curtain of the skies above the earth.
4 You make the clouds your chariot; you ride upon the wings of the wind.
5 You send your angels like flames of fire.
6 The wind blows, and we are gone—as though we had never been here.
7 But the love of the LORD remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children’s children of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments!
8 The LORD has made the heavens his throne; from there he rules over everything.
9 Praise the LORD, you angels, you mighty ones who carry out his plans, listening for each of his commands.
10 Yes, praise the LORD, you armies of angels who serve him and do his will!
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4 you lay out the rafters of your home in the rain clouds.
5 You make the clouds your chariot; you ride upon the wings of the wind.
6 The wind blows, and we are gone—as though we had never been here.
7 But the love of the LORD remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children’s children of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments!
8 The LORD has made the heavens his throne; from there he rules over everything.
9 Praise the LORD, you angels, you mighty ones who carry out his plans, listening for each of his commands.
10 Yes, praise the LORD, you armies of angels who serve him and do his will!
11 Praise the LORD, everything he has created, everything in all his kingdom.
The Lord set a firm boundary for the seas, so it would never again cover the earth. Then you set a firm boundary for the dry land. You clothed the earth with floods of water, water that covered even the mountains. At your command, the water fled; at the sound of your thunder, it hurried away. Mountains rose and valleys sank to the levels you decreed. Then you set a firm boundary for the seas, so they would never again cover the earth. You make springs pour water into the ravines, so streams gush down from the mountains. They provide water for all the animals, and the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

Ps 103

The Hebrew title of the book of Psalms means “Praises,” and that title accurately defines a large number of the psalms. God is praised for his nature and for his great acts in creation and history. Praise psalms were written for individual use and for the community.

Individual praise (Ps 9, 18, 32, 34, 46-48, 93, 96-99, 113, 116, 124, 129, 136, 138). It was customary in Temple worship to give verbal thanks before the whole assembly whenever a vow-offering or a thank-offering was made (see, e.g., 22:22-26; 66:13-20; 116:17-19). Such opportunities for personal praise and testimony must have added warmth and significance to worship. Each act of rescue and every experience of God’s mercy became part of the cumulative, ongoing story of salvation. Worship was not simply a recital of God’s deeds in earlier centuries.

Communal praise (Ps 103, 113, 124, 129, 136). When the community gathered, they praised the Lord in song for his acts in history (Ps 103) or for a specific recent manifestation of his mercy (Ps 124, 129). In Ps 103, the psalmist praises God for his mercy to each individual (103:1-5) and to the whole community (103:6-14). The frailty of humanity contrasts with God’s constancy (103:15-18); his universal and absolute rule merits universal praise (103:19-22).

104:6 At first, water covered the earth.
104:7 The Lord created dry ground on day three of creation (Gen 1:9-13).
104:8 The earth originates in God’s will.
104:9-10 The Lord reigns over all bodies of water, including those on land. He replaced chaotic waters with order and abundance, and the earth became a splendid place for animals and humans, with water refreshing the ground, the birds, and the animals.
104:9 The Lord set a firm boundary for the seas to protect the land. God’s sovereignty over sea and land was an argument against the existence of Baal, whom the Canaanites celebrated as victorious over the waters (see Ps 29).
104:11-18 The psalmist celebrates animal, plant, and human life, as well as the Lord’s abundant provision for all of it (Gen 1:9-30).
104:14 people to use: People are the managers of the created order, and they receive nourishment from the work of their hands.
104:15 While both can be misused (cp. Prov 21:17), the Lord provides wine and olive oil as gifts to enhance life. Life is sustained by basic food, represented by bread.
104:17-18 The storks migrated from northern Europe and resided in Palestine during the winter. * hyraxes (or conies, or rock badgers): These animals are about the size of a rabbit and live in rocky places.
104:19-23 The psalmist rejoices in the order of night and day, marking day four of creation (Gen 1:14-19). This cycle gives all creatures an opportunity to live.
104:19 the moon to mark the seasons: Ancient Israel based its calendar on the cycles of the moon (see chart, p. 145). * the sun knows when to set: This is a poetic description from the perspective of normal observation. The sun goes down at a regular time every evening.
20 You send the darkness, and it becomes night, when all the forest animals prowl about.
21 Then the young lions roar for their prey, stalking the food provided by God.
22 At dawn they slink back into their dens to rest.
23 Then people go off to their work, where they labor until evening.
24 O Lord, what a variety of things you have made!
   In wisdom you have made them all.
   The earth is full of your creatures.
25 Here is the ocean, vast and wide, teeming with life of every kind, both large and small.
26 See the ships sailing along, and Leviathan, which you made to play in the sea.
27 They all depend on you to give them food as they need it.
28 When you supply it, they gather it. You open your hand to feed them, and they are richly satisfied.
29 But if you turn away from them, they panic. When you take away their breath, they die and turn again to dust.
30 When you give them your breath, life is created, and you renew the face of the earth.
31 May the glory of the Lord continue forever!
   The Lord takes pleasure in all he has made!
32 The earth trembles at his glance; the mountains smoke at his touch.
33 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live.
   I will praise my God to my last breath!
34 May all my thoughts be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.
35 Let all sinners vanish from the face of the earth;
   let the wicked disappear forever.
   Let all that I am praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 105
Ps 105:1-15 // 1 Chr 16:8-22
1 Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness.
   Let the whole world know what he has done.
2 Sing to him; yes, sing his praises.
   Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.
3 Exult in his holy name; rejoice, you who worship the Lord.
4 Search for the Lord and for his strength;
   continually seek him.
5 Remember the wonders he has performed, his miracles, and the rulings he has given.
6 you children of his servant Abraham, 
you descendants of Jacob, his chosen ones.

7 He is the Lord our God. 
His justice is seen throughout the land.

8 He always stands by his covenant— 
the commitment he made to a thousand generations.

9 This is the covenant he made with Abraham 
and the oath he swore to Isaac.

10 He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, 
and to the people of Israel as a never-ending covenant:

11 “I will give you the land of Canaan 
as your special possession.”

12 He said this when they were few in number, 
a tiny group of strangers in Canaan.

13 They wandered from nation to nation, 
from one kingdom to another.

14 Yet he did not let anyone oppress them. 
He warned kings on their behalf:

15 “Do not touch my chosen people, 
and do not hurt my prophets.”

16 He called for a famine on the land of Canaan, 
cutting off its food supply.

17 Then he sent someone to Egypt ahead of them— 
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

18 They bruised his feet with fetters 
and placed his neck in an iron collar.

19 Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, 
the Lord tested Joseph’s character.

20 Then Pharaoh sent for him and set him free; 
the ruler of the nation opened his prison door.

21 Joseph was put in charge of all the king’s household; 
he became ruler over all the king’s possessions.

22 He could instruct the king’s aides as he pleased 
and teach the king’s advisers.

23 Then Israel arrived in Egypt; 
Jacob lived as a foreigner in the land of Ham.

24 And the Lord multiplied the people of Israel 
until they became too mighty for their enemies.

25 Then he turned the Egyptians against the Israelites, 
and they plotted against the Lord’s servants.

26 But the Lord sent his servant Moses, 
along with Aaron, whom he had chosen.

27 They performed miraculous signs 
among the Egyptians, 
and wonders in the land of Ham.

28 The Lord blanketed Egypt in darkness, 
for they had defied his commands to let his people go.

29 He turned their water into blood, 
poisoning all the fish.

30 Then frogs overran the land 
and even invaded the king’s bedrooms.

31 When the Lord spoke, flies descended 
on the Egyptians, 
and gnats swarmed across Egypt.

32 He sent them hail instead of rain, 
and lightning flashed over the land.

33 He ruined their grapevines and fig trees 
and even invaded the king’s bedrooms.

34 He spoke, and hordes of locusts came— 
young locusts beyond number.

35 They ate up everything green in the land, 
destroying all the crops in their fields.

36 Then he killed the oldest son in each Egyptian home, 
the pride and joy of each family.

37 The Lord brought his people out of Egypt, 
loaded with silver and gold; 

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between God and Israel, Abraham’s descendants.

105:8 The covenant is the Lord’s irrevocable oath to be the Father of Abraham 
and his descendants (see Gen 12:1-9; 15:1-21).

105:11 God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham’s descendants as 
their special possession, where they could live as God’s people (105:44-45; 

105:12-15 The Lord protected Israel’s patriarchs.
and not among the tribes of Israel even stumbled.
38 Egypt was glad when they were gone, for they feared them greatly.
39 The Lord spread a cloud above them as a covering and gave them a great fire to light the darkness.
40 They asked for meat, and he sent them quail; he satisfied their hunger with manna—bread from heaven.
41 He split open a rock, and water gushed out to form a river through the dry wasteland.
42 For he remembered his sacred promise to his servant Abraham.
43 So he brought his people out of Egypt with joy, his chosen ones with rejoicing.
44 He gave his people the lands of pagan nations, and they harvested crops that others had planted.
45 All this happened so they would follow his decrees and obey his instructions.

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 106
Ps 106:1, 47-48 // 1 Chr 16:34-36
1 Praise the Lord!
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
His faithful love endures forever.
2 Who can list the glorious miracles of the Lord?
Who can ever praise him enough?
3 There is joy for those who deal justly with others and always do what is right.
4 Remember me, Lord, when you show favor to your people; come near and rescue me.
5 Let me share in the prosperity of your chosen ones. Let me rejoice in the joy of your people; let me praise you with those who are your heritage.
6 Like our ancestors, we have sinned. We have done wrong! We have acted wickedly!
7 Our ancestors in Egypt were not impressed by the Lord's miraculous deeds. They soon forgot his many acts of kindness to them. Instead, they rebelled against him at the Red Sea.
8 Even so, he saved them—to defend the honor of his name and to demonstrate his mighty power.
9 He commanded the Red Sea to dry up. He led Israel across the sea as if it were a desert.
10 So he rescued them from their enemies and redeemed them from their foes.
11 Then the water returned and covered their enemies; not one of them survived.
12 Then his people believed his promises. Then they sang his praise.
13 Yet how quickly they forgot what he had done! They wouldn't wait for his counsel!
14 In the wilderness their desires ran wild, testing God's patience in that dry wasteland.
106:15 he sent a plague: See Exod 32:10-14. 106:16-18 The people became jealous because they presumed to have the same privileges as God’s appointed priests (see Num 16:1-3). the earth opened up: See Num 16:28-33. 106:19-23 they bowed before an image: The people forgot their Savior and committed the sin of idolatry (see Exod 32:1-6). 106:19 at Mount Sinai: Hebrew at Horeb, another name for Sinai. 106:22 The land of Ham is Egypt. 106:24-25 The people disobeyed God’s command when they refused to enter the pleasant land (the Promised Land; see Jer 3:19). they wouldn’t believe his promise: See Num 13:25-14:12. 106:26-27 God’s judgment when Israel refused to obey was death and exile (Num 14:26-30). The occasion for these severe judgments seems to have been disobeying God’s word (106:24-25) and provoking the Lord’s wrath (106:28-46). 106:28-39 Israel’s idolatry outside of the land came with them into their land. Their nature did not change; they continued to provoke the Lord to anger by their actions. 106:28 the worship of Baal at Peor: See Num 25:3; Deut 4:3. 106:30-33 Phinehas, who executed a flagrantly apostate Israelite man (Num 25:3-8), is an even better model of a righteous man than Moses, who failed at Meribah (Num 20:11-13). 106:33 They made Moses angry: literally They embittered his spirit. As a result, he spoke foolishly and disobeyed the Lord (see Num 20:12). 106:34 Israel continued to disobey the word of the Lord while living in the Promised Land. Rather than destroying the nations, Israel accepted them and their ways (see Judg 2:1-3, 11-15; 3:5-6). 106:37 Pagan gods were demons (see Deut 32:17). 106:39 Idolatry, like adultery, defiles God’s people (see Lev 18:24; Hos 5:3). 106:40 God abhorred Israel’s sin, as he does all sin.

15 So he gave them what they asked for, but he sent a plague along with it. 16 The people in the camp were jealous of Moses and envious of Aaron, the Lord’s holy priest. 17 Because of this, the earth opened up; it swallowed Dathan and buried Abiram and the other rebels. 18 Fire fell upon their followers; a flame consumed the wicked. 19 The people made a calf at Mount Sinai; they bowed before an image made of gold. 20 They traded their glorious God for a statue of a grass-eating bull. 21 They forgot God, their savior, who had done such great things in Egypt—such wonderful things in the land of Ham, such awesome deeds at the Red Sea. 22 So he declared he would destroy them. But Moses, his chosen one, stepped forward. 23 He begged the Lord to turn from his anger and not destroy them. 24 The people refused to enter the pleasant land, for they wouldn’t believe his promise to care for them. Instead, they grumbled in their tents and refused to obey the Lord. Therefore, he solemnly swore that he would kill them in the wilderness,

27 that he would scatter their descendants among the nations, exiling them to distant lands.

28 Then our ancestors joined in the worship of Baal at Peor; they even ate sacrifices offered to the dead! 29 They angered the Lord with all these things, so a plague broke out among them. But Phinehas had the courage to intervene, and the plague was stopped. So he has been regarded as a righteous man ever since that time. 32 At Meribah, too, they angered the Lord, causing Moses serious trouble. They made Moses angry, and he spoke foolishly. Israel failed to destroy the nations in the land, as the Lord had commanded them. Instead, they mingled among the pagans and adopted their evil customs. They worshiped their idols, which led to their downfall. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons. They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters. By sacrificing them to the idols of Canaan, they polluted the land with murder. They defiled themselves by their evil deeds, and their love of idols was adultery in the Lord’s sight. That is why the Lord’s anger burned against his people, and he abhorred his own special possession.

 Деятельность людей стала причиной мятежа в палатке. Они сделали созерцательное изображение, которое, по их мнению, стояло выше обычных предметов. Но это было всего лишь способом проявления их неверия в Спасителя. Поступки людей привели к тем же результатам, что и предыдущие: они забыли о своем спасителе и сделали статую в виде быка. По приказу Господа, земля раскрылась и проглотила Датан и Абираим, а также других восставших.

Господь гневно отреагировал на это, и он повелел преследовать народ израильский за свои действия. Это привело к тяжелым последствиям, как и в предыдущих случаях. Но Мойсей, его избранный, шагнул вперед и просил Господа не наказывать их. Господь обещал не наказывать их, если они избегнут повторения этой ошибки.

Однако они продолжали недовольство и отказывались от своей обетованной земли. Их незаметное поведение привело к тому, что они забыли о своем спасителе и их судьба не изменилась. Они продолжали страдать от гнева Господа.

Господь, в ответ на их неверие, гневно отреагировал на их действия, и он повелел преследовать народ израильский за свои действия. Это привело к тяжелым последствиям, как и в предыдущих случаях. Но Мойсей, его избранный, шагнул вперед и просил Господа не наказывать их. Господь обещал не наказывать их, если они избегнут повторения этой ошибки.

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41 He handed them over to pagan nations, and they were ruled by those who hated them.
42 Their enemies crushed them and brought them under their cruel power.
43 Again and again he rescued them, but they chose to rebel against him, and they were finally destroyed by their sin.
44 Even so, he pitied them in their distress and listened to their cries.
45 He remembered his covenant with them and relented because of his unfailing love.
46 He even caused their captors to treat them with kindness.

47 Save us, O Lord our God!
Gather us back from among the nations, so we can thank your holy name and rejoice and praise you.

48 Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives from everlasting to everlasting!
Let all the people say, “Amen!”
Praise the Lord!

5. BOOK FIVE (PSS 107–150)

PSALM 107
1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
His faithful love endures forever.

2 Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out!
Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.
3 For he has gathered the exiles from many lands, from east and west, from north and south.
4 Some wandered in the wilderness, lost and homeless.
5 Hungry and thirsty, they nearly died.
6 “Lord, help!” they cried in their trouble, and he rescued them from their distress.
7 He led them straight to safety, to a city where they could live.
8 Let them praise the Lord for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them.
9 For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.
10 Some sat in darkness and deepest gloom, imprisoned in iron chains of misery.
11 They rebelled against the words of God, scorning the counsel of the Most High.
12 That is why he broke them with hard labor; they fell, and no one was there to help them.

106:43-44 When Israel was finally destroyed, the destruction was not complete. The Lord pitied them, so he left a remnant.
106:45 He remembered . . . and relented: Unlike Israel, the Lord is faithful to his covenant (105:8).
106:46 As harsh as the Exile was, the Lord still protected his people (see 2 Kgs 25:27-29).
106:47 Gather us back: The community prays for restoration from exile (see 102:19-22; 107:3; see also Isa 11:12; 40:11; 43:5; 54:7; 56:8; 66:18).
106:48 This doxology concludes Book Four (cp. 41:13; 89:52). *from everlasting to everlasting*: The reference to God’s eternal nature links to the opening of Book Four (Ps 90:1-2). *Let all the people say, “Amen”: The Hebrew word amen means “It is true.” The godly accept the Lord’s will in exile and his promise to be their God.

Book Five (Pss 107–150) This final book of the Psalter was shaped in the context of Israel’s return from exile in Babylon. God’s sovereign power and loving faithfulness to his covenant people were demonstrated as he restored and exalted them. The uncertainty in Book Four about the future of David’s royal line (see 89:38) finds positive resolution in Book Five. The psalms of David occur in greater number in this final book than they do in Books Three and Four, and David is remembered for the covenant he received and for his devotion to the Lord (e.g., Ps 132). Thus, there remains the prospect of a coming King. Book Five contains two early liturgical collections: the “Egyptian Hallel” (Pss 113–118) and the “Great Hallel” (Pss 120–136; hallel means “praise”). The Great Hallel is largely made up of a collection known as the “Songs of Ascents” or "Pilgrim Psalms” (Pss 120–134). The Psalter then returns to its roots with a collection of David’s psalms dominated by lament (Pss 138–145), followed by a section of praise to conclude the whole book of Psalms (Pss 146–150).

Ps 107 This psalm is a hymn of praise to God the Redeemer. After an introduction exhorting the redeemed to praise God for his goodness (107:1-3), the poet brings together four case studies of people whom the Lord redeemed from adversity (107:4-32). He then sums up the Lord’s sovereignty (107:33-42) and concludes with an invitation to discern God’s unfaithful love in all areas of life (107:43).

107:2 The redeemed might be all who came out of exile.
107:3 exiles: People came from all nations where the people of Israel and Judah had been scattered.
107:4-9 Those who were lost in the wilderness thank God for his rescue. The wilderness might be a metaphor for leaving the path of wisdom (1:1; Prov 4:10-15).
107:6 The psalmist does not specify the occasion of his trouble and distress. The generic nature of the adversity permits readers in a variety of circumstances to identify with the laments.
107:7-8 God led them like a shepherd (see 23:1). *Verse 8 is a refrain that is repeated in 107:15, 21, 31.
107:10-16 The psalmist calls for Thanksgiving and praise in people in despair over the consequences of their rebellion.
107:11 God’s counsel includes his instruction and will.
107:12 Exhausted by their hard labor (Lam 5:13), the people fell. While this
The same God who speaks
The Lord creates (Gen 1:3) and

107:20 He sent out his word and healed them,
and he saved them from their distress.

107:21 Let them praise the Lord for his great love
and for the wonderful things he has done for them.

107:22 Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving
and sing joyfully about his glorious acts.

107:23 Some went off to sea in ships,
plying the trade routes of the world.

107:24 They, too, observed the Lord's power in action,
his impressive works on the deepest seas.

107:25 He spoke, and the winds rose,
stirring up the waves.

107:26 Their ships were tossed to the heavens
and plunged again to the depths;
the sailors cringed in terror.

107:27 They reeled and staggered like drunkards
and were at their wits' end.

107:28 "Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.

107:29 He calmed the storm to a whisper;
he cut apart their bars of iron.

107:30 What a blessing was that stillness
as he brought them safely into harbor!

107:31 Let them praise the Lord for his great love
and for the wonderful things he has done for them.

107:32 Let them exalt him publicly before the congregation
and before the leaders of the nation.

107:33 He changes rivers into deserts,
and springs of water into dry, thirsty land.

107:34 He turns the fruitful land into salty wastelands,
because of the wickedness of those who live there.

107:35 He brings the hungry to settle there
and to build their cities.

107:36 He brings the hungry to settle there,
and harvest their bumper crops.

107:37 They sow their fields, plant their vineyards,
and harvest their bumper crops.

107:38 How he blesses them!
They raise large families there,
and their herds of livestock increase.

107:39 When they decrease in number and become impoverished
through oppression, trouble, and sorrow,
the Lord pours contempt on their princes,
causing them to wander in trackless wastelands.

107:40 But he rescues the poor from trouble
and increases their families like flocks of sheep.

107:41 The godly will see these things and be glad,
while the wicked are struck silent.

107:42 The godly will see these things and be glad,
while the wicked are struck silent.

107:43 Those who are wise will take all this to heart:
they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord.

might be expected of the wicked (9:3; 27:2), it was unlike the Israelites' flight
from Egypt (10:37).

107:17-22 Fools who received what they deserved but were rescued from
death offer thanksgiving to the Lord.

107:20 The Lord creates (Gen 1:3) and sustains the universe (Heb 1:3) simply by speaking (147:18); when he speaks, people are also healed (Matt 8:8).

107:23-32 Sailors give thanks to the Lord when he saves them from the chaos and peril of the sea.

107:25-29 The same God who speaks
and brings about the sailors' distress can also calm the storm with just a word (cp. Jon 1:4; Matt 8:26).


107:33-42 These two sections (107:33-38, 39-42) expand the theme of the Lord's sovereignty over things that humans cannot control.

107:33-35 The Lord can choose to make the earth fertile or barren (74:15; Isa 35:6-7).

107:38 God's presence can be seen in
the abundance of his people's families and herds (127:3; 133:3; cp. 109:8).

107:39 People often become impoverished when their rulers practice oppression.

107:40 In his contempt for human rulers, the Lord rectifies their corruption on earth.

107:41 The large families of the poor are evidence of God's blessing.

107:42-43 Justice prevails in God's world (1:6), and Israel's history demonstrates God's faithful love.
A song. A psalm of David.

1 My heart is confident in you, O God; no wonder I can sing your praises with all my heart!
2 Wake up, lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn with my song.
3 I will thank you, Lord, among all the people. I will sing your praises among the nations.
4 For your unfailing love is higher than the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
5 Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens. May your glory shine over all the earth.
6 Now rescue your beloved people. Answer and save us by your power.
7 God has promised this by his holiness: I will divide up Shechem with joy.

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 O God, whom I praise, don’t stand silent and aloof while the wicked slander me and tell lies about me.
2 They surround me with hateful words and fight against me for no reason. I love them, but they try to destroy me with accusations even as I am praying for them!
3 They repay evil for good, and hatred for my love.
4 They say, “Get an evil person to turn against him. Send an accuser to bring him to trial. When his case comes up for judgment, let him be pronounced guilty. Count his prayers as sins.”
5 Let his years be few; let someone else take his position.
6 May the Lord destroy him with diseases. May his children become fatherless, and his wife a widow.
7 May his children wander as beggars and be driven from their ruined homes.
8 May creditors seize his entire estate, and strangers take all he has earned.
9 May his family name be blotted out in human memory.
10 May creditors seize his entire estate, and strangers take all he has earned.
11 May creditors seize his entire estate, and strangers take all he has earned.
12 Let no one be kind to him; let no one pity his fatherless children.
13 May all his offspring die. May his family name be blotted out in a single generation.
14 May the Lord never forget the sins of his fathers; may his mother’s sins never be erased from the record.
15 May the Lord always remember these sins, and may his name disappear from human memory.

Ps 108 This psalm combines two excerpts from David’s other psalms (cp. 57:5; 71:11; 60:5-12).

108:7 by his holiness: Or in his sanctuary.

Ps 109 The psalmist begins this lament with a general charge against his accusers: They do evil in return for good (109:1-5). At the end of the psalm, he turns to the Lord in prayer, asking for his protection (109:21-25) and vengeance (109:26-31).

109:1 The psalmist sees no evidence that God cares (see 28:1).

109:4-5 The psalmist’s acts of kindness and godliness (see 35:12-14) have only met with stubborn opposition and expressions of hatred.

109:6-19 The NLT translates these verses as the words of the psalmist’s accusers; Hebrew lacks They say, which makes it unclear who is speaking.

109:8-11 Family members of those guilty of capital crimes often died with their property confiscated (1 Kgs 21:13-16).

109:8 The wicked person apparently held a position of leadership. Peter referred to this psalm in regard to Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:20-26).

109:13 If one’s family name was blotted out, it meant there was no offspring to carry on the family name or remember its history (see Prov 10:7).

109:14 Children inherit the sinful nature of their parents (51:5; Exod 20:5; Eph 2:3). The speaker wants the Lord to punish the perpetrator for the guilt of family members who went before him (cp. Matt 23:35-36).
For he refused all kindness to others; he persecuted the poor and needy, and he hounded the brokenhearted to death.

He loved to curse others; now you curse him. He never blessed others; now don’t you bless him.

Cursing is as natural to him as his clothing, or the water he drinks, or the rich food he eats.

Now may his curses return and cling to him like clothing; may they be tied around him like a belt.”

May those curses become the Lord’s punishment for my accusers who speak evil of me.

But deal well with me, O Sovereign Lord, for the sake of your own reputation! Rescue me because you are so faithful and good.

For I am poor and needy, and my heart is full of pain.

I am fading like a shadow at dusk; I am brushed off like a locust.

My knees are weak from fasting, and I am skin and bones.

I am a joke to people everywhere; when they see me, they shake their heads in scorn.

Help me, O Lord my God! Save me because of your unfailing love.

Let them see that this is your doing, that you yourself have done it, Lord.

Then let them curse me if they like, but you will bless me! When they attack me, they will be disgraced!

But I, your servant, will go right on rejoicing!

May my accusers be clothed with disgrace; may their humiliation cover them like a cloak.

But I will ‘give repeated thanks to the Lord, bpraising him to everyone.

For he stands beside the needy, ready to save them from those who condemn them.

A psalm of David.

1 The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet.”

2 The Lord will extend your powerful kingdom from Jerusalem; you will rule over your enemies.

3 When you go to war, your people will serve you willingly. You are arrayed in holy garments, and your strength will be renewed each day like the morning dew.
4 The Lord has taken an oath and will not break his vow:
“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”
5 The Lord stands at your right hand to protect you.
He will strike down many kings when his anger erupts.
6 He will punish the nations and fill their lands with corpses;
he will shatter heads over the whole earth.
7 But he himself will be refreshed from brooks along the way.
He will be victorious.

PSALM 111
1 Praise the Lord!
2 How amazing are the deeds of the Lord!
3 Everything he does reveals his glory and majesty.
4 He causes us to remember his wonderful works.
How gracious and merciful is our Lord!
5 He gives food to those who fear him;
he always remembers his covenant.
6 He has shown his great power to his people
by giving them the lands of other nations.
7 All he does is just and good,
and all his commandments are trustworthy.
8 They are forever true,
to be obeyed faithfully and with integrity.
9 He has paid a full ransom for his people.
He has guaranteed his covenant with them forever.
What a holy, awe-inspiring name he has!
10 Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom.
All who obey his commandments will grow in wisdom.
Praise him forever!

PSALM 112
1 Praise the Lord!
2 How joyful are those who fear the Lord
and delight in obeying his commands.
3 Their children will be successful everywhere;

110:4 The Lord has made an unbreakable oath and covenant, so his apparent rejection of David’s dynasty (89:38) in the Exile had led to a crisis. The placement of Ps 110 in Book Five reaffirms the future of the dynasty: David’s descendant must conform to God’s standard of integrity (Ps 101). His ministry will be transformed as he serves under God’s kingship (Ps 93–100). *You are a priest forever:* The role of God’s messianic ruler changes. The priestly kingship of David and his descendants extended to serving as patrons of the Temple. David had the Ark brought to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:15) and arranged for the Temple service (1 Chr 6:31-48; 15:1-26; 16:4-42; 23:3-42; 25:1). Solomon supervised the Temple construction (1 Kgs 3-7). Even so, Israel’s kingship was separate from its priesthood. In the messianic kingdom, the king would also minister as priest, as *Melchizedek,* king of Salem (Gen 14:18), had done. The NT develops the ministry of Jesus Christ as a fulfillment of this new order (see Heb 5:6-10; 6:20-7:25).

110:5-7 The new priestly role of David’s descendant does not rescind his old role as conquering ruler. He must still bring the nations under his rule (110:2-3; see Ps 2).

110:5-6 at your right hand: This position brings help and protection (see 16:7-8; 108:13). *The Lord will strike down rebellious kings.* Rebellion against the Lord is a capital offense (Ps 2; Rom 6:23).

110:7 God’s messianic ruler obtains victory as a vigorous person, as if he had received nourishment from brooks along the way (110:3).

Ps 111–117 The refrain *Praise the Lord!* (Hebrew hallelu yah) characterizes this group of psalms.

Ps 111 This psalm is a Hebrew acrostic poem; after the introductory note of praise, each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
*This wisdom psalm contains many references to the works of the Lord that reveal his character. God is righteous, gracious, compassionate, faithful, just, trustworthy, upright, holy, and awe-inspiring (111:3, 4, 7, 8, 9). God’s character gives hope in the covenant relationship (111:5). He rescued Israel from Egypt (111:9), gave them the land (111:6), and provides for his people (111:5). However, God demands that the beneficiaries of this relationship also be people of righteousness and integrity.

111:1-5 The godly praise God and delight themselves in his great works. His mighty acts reflect his righteousness, grace, and compassion (see 116:5-7). All who submit themselves to him experience his glory.
111:5 God takes care of his people’s needs, even providing food. He remembers his covenant with Abraham (see 105:8-11).

111:6-8 Giving Israel the lands of other nations was just and good because the Lord was executing his justice on those he dispossessed and showing grace to the Israelites. However, if the Israelites do not live faithfully and with integrity, they will also be dispossessed. The Lord’s people must reflect his character.

111:9 The people of the Exodus generation went free because of God’s grace.

111:10 True wisdom is the source of life (Prov 3:18; 9:11; Eccl 7:12); it begins with the fear of the Lord (Prov 9:10).

Ps 112 This psalm is a Hebrew acrostic poem; after the introductory note of praise, each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
*The psalm reiterates the themes of wisdom and the fear of the Lord (Ps 111). The wise have reason to be happy (112:1-5) and vigorous (112:6-10).

112:1-5 The fear of the Lord leads to a life of wisdom that honors God and blesses the family and community. The godly joyfully imitate God; their obedience is not slavish.

112:2-3 successful: All will know the children of godly people (see 127:4) because the godly leave a legacy for their children (see 1:3; cp. Matt 6:20).
an entire generation of godly people will be blessed.
9 They do not fear bad news; they confidently trust the Lord to care for them.
10 The wicked will see this and be infuriated. They will grind their teeth in anger; they will slink away, their hopes thwarted.

**PSALM 113**

1 Praise the Lord!
Yes, give praise, O servants of the Lord.
Praise the name of the Lord!

**PSALM 114**

1 When the Israelites escaped from Egypt—when the family of Jacob left that foreign land—
2 the land of Judah became God’s sanctuary, and Israel became his kingdom.
3 The Red Sea saw them coming and hurried out of their way. The water of the Jordan River turned back.

12:4-5 The godly imitate God by being generous, compassionate, and righteous (51:1; 111:1-10; 2 Cor 9:9). They lend money to the poor without charging interest (15:5; 112:9; Exod 22:25).

12:6 The honesty and compassion of the wise keep them from stumbling (15:5; 37:23-24), ensuring that they will be long remembered (Prov 10:7).

12:8 Because the godly joyfully expect God to prevail and rescue them, they face their foes triumphantly (59:10; 112:4; 118:7).

12:9 Paul quotes this verse in his instructions about generous giving (2 Cor 9:9).

12:10 The wicked . . . grind their teeth in anger out of their bitter envy (35:16; 37:12). The vigor and reputation of the godly cause conflict with those who want them dead. • The wicked will sink away out of fear and shame.

Ps 113–118 These psalms form what is known as the “Egyptian Hallel” (hallel means “praise”) because Jews use the collection in the celebration of Passover, which was instituted at the beginning of the exodus from Egypt. Psalms 113–114 are recited before the Passover meal and Pss 115–118 afterward.

Ps 113 This hymn of praise exalts the greatness of the Lord’s name and glory. God is greatly exalted and glorious in heaven (113:4); he also stoops down to take care of the lowly and needy on earth (113:5-9).

113:1-3 The name of the Lord [Hebrew Yahuwh; see Exod 3:15] reveals his being, character, and reputation. He is exalted in time (now and forever) and in space (from east to west).

113:4 The Lord’s glory reaches to the heavens (57:5; 11:99; 2:9; 108:5; 138:6; Isa 6:1; 57:15) and throughout the world of human relationships.

113:5-9 The incomparable Lord intimately involves himself in caring for people on earth.

113:6 The Lord stoops to the world’s level to be directly involved with his people (see 138:6; Phil 2:6-8).

113:7-8a These phrases are a quotation from Hannah’s prayer of praise (1 Sam 2:8-9a).

113:9 A childless woman was customarily treated with disdain (Gen 16:4); the Lord has the power to make her a happy mother, as he made Sarah (Gen 21:2), Rebekah (Gen 25:21), Rachel (Gen 30:23), and Hannah (1 Sam 1:20). • God’s greatness and goodness provide ample reason to praise him.

Ps 114 This lyrical celebration of the Lord’s power in nature recalls Israel’s beginning as a nation at the Exodus (114:1-2) and upon their entry to the Promised Land (114:3-6). It promotes reverence for the God of Jacob (114:7-8).

114:1-2 At the time of Israel’s exodus from Egypt and their entrance into the Promised Land, Israel was one holy kingdom (Exod 19:5-6). • The separate references to the land of Judah and Israel indicate that the psalm was composed after the kingdom was divided (1 Kgs 12:16-17; cp. 1 Sam 11:8; 1 Kgs 1:35), and probably after the Exile. The land of Judah became God’s sanctuary because the people worshiped God; his Tabernacle and later his Temple were located there.

114:3-4 The Red Sea: Literally the sea; also in 114:5. • hurried out of their way! The waters divided for Israel to escape Egypt (77:17-18; Exod 14). • The Jordan River turned away when Israel arrived.
The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs!
What’s wrong, Red Sea, that made you hurry out of their way? What happened, Jordan River, that you turned away?
Why, mountains, did you skip like rams? Why, hills, like lambs?
Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob. He turned the rock into a pool of water; yes, a spring of water flowed from solid rock.

PSALM 115

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name goes all the glory for your unfailing love and faithfulness.
Why let the nations say, “Where is their God?”
Our God is in the heavens, and he does as he wishes.
Their idols are merely things of silver and gold, shaped by human hands.
They have mouths but cannot speak, and eyes but cannot see.
They have ears but cannot hear, and noses but cannot smell.
They have hands but cannot feel, and feet but cannot walk, and throats but cannot make a sound.

And those who make idols are just like them, as are all who trust in them.
O Israel, trust the LORD! He is your helper and your shield.
O priests, descendants of Aaron, trust the LORD! He is your helper and your shield.
All you who fear the LORD, trust the LORD! He is your helper and your shield.
The Lord remembers us and will bless us. He will bless the people of Israel and bless the priests, the descendants of Aaron.
He will bless those who fear the LORD, both great and lowly.
May the LORD richly bless both you and your children. May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The heavens belong to the Lord, but he has given the earth to all humanity.
The dead cannot sing praises to the Lord, for they have gone into the silence of the grave.
But we can praise the Lord both now and forever!
Praise the Lord!

PSALM 116

I love the Lord because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy.
The psalmist's near-death crisis made him more aware of life and of God's presence (116:11). He now strongly believes in prayer (116:15). Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath! (116:16). Because the Lord responds to the psalmist's prayers, he confidently says, "Please, Lord, save me!" (116:17). The Lord, who protected him from the grave, now makes him more aware of life and of God's presence (116:18). With an exultant testimony, the psalmist gives thanks for the Lord's rescue (59:10; 112:8). Praise the Lord, all you people of the earth. (116:19). Praise him, all you people of the earth. (118:1). Paul quoting this verse to show that Gentiles would eventually praise the God of Israel (Rom 15:11).
8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in people.
9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.

10 Though hostile nations surrounded me, I destroyed them all with the authority of the Lord.
11 Yes, they surrounded and attacked me, but I destroyed them all with the authority of the Lord.
12 They swarmed around me like bees; they blazed against me like a crackling fire.
But I destroyed them all with the authority of the Lord.
13 My enemies did their best to kill me, but the Lord rescued me.
14 The Lord is my strength and my song; he has given me victory.
15 Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly. The strong right arm of the Lord has done glorious things!
16 The strong right arm of the Lord is raised in triumph. The strong right arm of the Lord has done glorious things!
17 I will not die; instead, I will live to tell what the Lord has done.
18 The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not let me die.
19 Open for me the gates where the righteous enter, and I will go in and thank the Lord.

20 These gates lead to the presence of the Lord, and the godly enter there.
21 I thank you for answering my prayer and giving me victory!
22 The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.
23 This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see.
24 This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.
25 Please, Lord, please save us.

[...] Please, Lord, please give us success.
26 Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.
27 The Lord is God, shining upon us. Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on the altar.
28 You are my God, and I will praise you! You are my God, and I will exalt you!

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. PSALM 119

Aleph (N)
1 Joyful are people of integrity, who follow the instructions of the Lord.
2 Joyful are those who obey his laws and search for him with all their hearts.
3 They do not compromise with evil, and they walk only in his paths.

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118:8-9 Trusting in the Lord is better than placing confidence in even the most powerful human leaders (118:6; 146:3).
118:10-12 Strength comes in the name of the Lord, declared by the threefold mention of the attackers, the Lord's name, and victory. • Even when hostile people blazed...like a crackling fire, the Lord caused them to subside like burning thorns (see Isa 9:18; 10:17).
118:14-18 The psalmist celebrates the victory of the Lord's strong right arm, which kept him from death.
118:17-21 God has restored the psalmist from death to life, so he praises the Lord publicly (cp. 116:6, 12-19).
118:22-24 The psalmist sees his own salvation as the beginning of a new day in which the Lord will do great things.
118:22 The cornerstone (or keystone) of a building or an arch gives the structure its shape and foundation. It is the most important of all the stones. The Lord chooses and places this stone for his sanctuary (Isa 28:16). Jesus referred to himself as this cornerstone (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17; see Acts 4:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:6-7).
118:24 This is the day the Lord has made: The day of the Lord's victory has already arrived, although its completion awaits another day (118:25).
118:25-29 The psalmist concludes with prayer and thanksgiving, anticipating an even greater revelation of God's victory and rescue.
118:26 The one who comes in the name of the Lord brings the Lord's complete victory (see 118:10-12). • During Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the crowds called out various blessings, including phrases taken from this verse (Matt 21:9; Mark 11:9; Luke 19:38; John 12:13). Jesus himself quoted this passage as he wept over Jerusalem (Matt 23:39; Luke 13:35).
Ps 119 This psalm is a Hebrew acrostic poem; there are twenty-two stanzas, one for each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each of the eight verses within each stanza begins with the Hebrew letter named in its heading. Psalm 119 combines elements of wisdom, lament, praise, thanksgiving, and confession. Eight Hebrew words are used frequently, translated as "instructions," "laws," "words," "regulations," "statutes," "commands," "decrees," "commandments," and "promises." Together, these words encourage love for and obedience to God's instructions, as found in the Scriptures (see 2 Tim 3:14-17). The expression of deep commitment to these instructions unifies the psalm.
119:1-8 Aleph (N): God, the author of these instructions, commands that his followers live by them. The psalmist prays to be given the grace to live by that revelation.
119:1-4 The wise are happy. They are people of integrity (see 84:11) who follow the path of divine instruction. They obey God's revelation and search for it with all their hearts (see 27:7; 119:10, 45, 94, 155), but they reject all forms of evil. Cp. 1:1-2.
119:4 To keep God’s commandments means to guard them by obeying them.
119:9-16 Beth (ג): The psalmist is determined to pursue purity and encourages the cultivation of wisdom through God’s principles (119:9) and instructions (119:10-16).
119:9 A young person tends toward foolishness (Prov 22:15) and can easily make mistakes that destroy his life (Prov 7:6-23). Youth is also the best time to develop personal discipline and pursuit of wisdom (see 34:11; Prov 1:4). To stay pure means to remain uncorrupted by wickedness and sin and to develop the integrity of life defined in Ps 15.
119:10 The student asks God the teacher to discipline him so that he will not wander.
119:14 God’s wisdom is far greater than any riches humans seek (119:72, 127; Prov 3:14-15).
119:15 The way of wisdom includes meditating on God’s ways (see 119:1, 3). The wise reflect on the implications of God’s word.
119:17-24 Gimel (ג): Like a foreigner in hostile territory, God’s servant needs God’s guidance.
119:17-18 The psalmist seeks to please the Lord with a full and obedient life of praise (118:17; 119:25, 77, 116, 144, 175). Only the Lord can remove his adversaries and enable him to see the wonderful truths found in God’s instructions.
119:20-21 The arrogant are probably those who mock the psalmist (119:22-23).
119:23-24 Those who meditate on God’s instructions receive wise advice from them.
119:25-32 Daleth (ד): Though the poet feels anguish and sorrow, he entreats the Lord to revive him because he wants to obey the Lord. Suffering and death may result from the Lord’s chastening (118:17-18; 119:67, 71, 75), but his instruction revives the weary soul (see 119:12).
119:29 llying to myself: Self-deception is a fruit of sinful human nature (Jer 17:9); it leads to folly. Access to God’s word is a privilege, not a right.
119:33-40 He (ה): As a student, the poet asks his teacher, God, to renew life and to transform disgrace into righteousness.
for that is where my happiness is found.

36 Give me an eagerness for your laws rather than a love for money!

37 Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word.

38 Reassure me of your promise, made to those who fear you.

39 Help me abandon my shameful ways; for your regulations are good.

40 I long to obey your commandments! Renew my life with your goodness.

Waw (†)

41 Lord, give me your unfailing love, the salvation that you promised me.

42 Then I can answer those who taunt me, for I trust in your word.

43 Do not snatch your word of truth from me, for your regulations are my only hope.

44 I will keep on obeying your instructions forever and ever.

45 I will walk in freedom, for I have devoted myself to your commandments.

46 I will speak to kings about your laws, and I will not be ashamed.

47 How I delight in your commands! How I love them!

48 I honor and love your commands.

Zayin (†)

49 Remember your promise to me; it is my only hope.

50 Your promise revives me; it comforts me in all my troubles.

51 The proud hold me in utter contempt, but I do not turn away from your instructions.

52 I meditate on your age-old regulations; O Lord, they comfort me.

53 I become furious with the wicked, because they reject your instructions.

54 Your decrees have been the theme of my songs wherever I have lived.

55 I reflect at night on who you are, O Lord; therefore, I obey your instructions.

56 This is how I spend my life: obeying your commandments.

Heth (†)

57 Lord, you are mine! I promise to obey your words!

58 With all my heart I want your blessings. Be merciful as you promised.

59 I pondered the direction of my life, and I turned to follow your laws.

60 I will hurry, without delay, to obey your commands.

61 Evil people try to drag me into sin, but I am firmly anchored to your instructions.

62 I rise at midnight to thank you for your just regulations.

63 I am a friend to anyone who fears you—anyone who obeys your commandments.

64 O Lord, your unfailing love fills the earth; teach me your decrees.

Teth (‡)

65 You have done many good things for me, Lord, just as you promised.

66 I believe in your commands; now teach me good judgment and knowledge.

67 I used to wander off until you disciplined me; but now I closely follow your word.

68 You are good and do only good; teach me your decrees.

69 Arrogant people smear me with lies, but in truth I obey your commandments with all my heart.
Their hearts are dull and stupid, but I delight in your instructions. My suffering was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your decrees. Your instructions are more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver. 

119:73 You made me; you created me. Now give me the sense to follow your commands. May all who fear you find in me a cause for joy, for I have put my hope in your word. I know, O Lord, that your regulations are fair; you disciplined me because I needed it. Now let your unfailing love comfort me, just as you promised me, your servant. Surround me with your tender mercies, so I may live, for your instructions are my delight. Bring disgrace upon the arrogant people who lied about me; meanwhile, I will concentrate on your commandments. Let me be united with all who fear you, with those who know your laws. May I be blameless in keeping your decrees; then I will never be ashamed.

119:81 I am worn out waiting for your rescue, but I have put my hope in your word. My eyes are straining to see your promises come true. When will you comfort me? I am shriveled like a wineskin in the smoke, but I have not forgotten to obey your decrees. How long must I wait? When will you punish those who persecute me?

119:85 These arrogant people who hate your instructions have dug deep pits to trap me. All your commands are trustworthy. Protect me from those who hunt me down without cause. They almost finished me off, but I refused to abandon your commandments. In your unfailing love, spare my life; then I can continue to obey your laws.

119:90 Your ‘eternal word, O Lord, stands firm in heaven. Your faithfulness extends to every generation, as enduring as the earth you created. Your regulations remain true to this day, for everything serves your plans. If your instructions hadn’t sustained me with joy, I would have died in my misery. I will never forget your commandments, for by them you give me life. I am yours; rescue me! For I have worked hard at obeying your commandments. Though the wicked hide along the way to kill me, I will quietly keep my mind on your laws. Even perfection has its limits, but your commands have no limit.

119:94 I am yours; rescue me! For I have worked hard at obeying your commandments. Though the wicked hide along the way to kill me, I will quietly keep my mind on your laws. Even perfection has its limits, but your commands have no limit.

119:98 Your word is more enduring than ever, and it stands firm in heaven. Your commands are more precious to me than gold. because they are my constant guide. Your decrees are my teachers, for I have kept your commandments. I am even wiser than my elders, for I have kept your commandments.

119:100 They have dug deep pits to trap me. I am even wiser than my elders, for I have kept your commandments.

119:73-80 Yodh (*): In this prayer for comfort and compassion, the psalmist commits himself to his Creator, who has afflicted him. He wants God to pay back his enemies for the wrongs they have done. He also prays to receive the gift of life. He not only prays for himself but also considers the whole community of the godly, asking that God’s answers to prayer would encourage them.

119:73-76 As God’s child, the psalmist asks for divine wisdom.
101 I have refused to walk on any evil path, so that I may remain obedient to your word.
102 I haven’t turned away from your regulations, for you have taught me well.
103 How sweet your words taste to me; they are sweeter than honey.
104 Your commandments give me understanding; no wonder I hate every false way of life.

Nun (ן)
105 Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.
106 I’ve promised it once, and I’ll promise it again:
I will obey your righteous regulations.
107 I have suffered much, O L
Your commandments give me light that provides perspective, hope, and guidance in darkness (18:25-29; 119:130). Even more, this light gives life (Prov 6:23).

119:103-112 Nun (ן): The psalmist’s devotion to God’s word comes from within his being (119:112) and guides his external life.
119:105-106 The Lord’s word is a lamp that provides perspective, hope, and guidance in darkness (18:25-29; 119:130). Even more, this light gives life (Prov 6:23).

119:108-112 offering of praise: This Hebrew expression is unique in the OT (cp. 50:23). The psalmist is vulnerable to his opponents because of his commitment to a wise life.
119:112 Samekh (ם): The psalmist declares his hatred of evil and his love for God and his ways.
119:113 The godly hate the wicked and their deeds (5:4-6; cp. Ezek 33:11).
119:119-128 Ayin (ף): The servant of the Lord strains to endure the evil around him. He boldly petitions the Lord to rescue him immediately!
119:125 Simply possessing God’s law does not provide any benefits. The psalmist knows that only as the Lord gives discernment will he understand it.
119:129-136 Pe (ך): The psalmist prays earnestly for God to speak to him as he suffers from his adversaries.
119:136 Rivers of tears gush from my eyes because people disobey your instructions.

Tsadhe (ץ): God is righteous, and his word is right and just, especially in contrast to the deceptions of the wicked.

119:137 O Lord, you are righteous, and your regulations are fair. Your laws are perfect and completely trustworthy.

119:138 Your laws are perfect and completely trustworthy. Your promises have been thoroughly tested; that is why I love them so much.

119:139 I am overwhelmed with indignation, and your instructions are perfectly true.

119:140 Your promises have been thoroughly tested; that is why I love them so much.

119:141 I am overwhelmed with indignation, and your instructions are perfectly true.

119:142 As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find joy in your commands.

119:143 I cry out for help and put my hope in you; rescue me, O Lord, that I may obey your laws.

119:144 I pray with all my heart; answer me, Lord! I will obey your decrees.

119:145 I pray with all my heart; answer me, Lord! I will obey your decrees.

119:146 I cry out to you; rescue me, that I may obey your laws.

119:147 I rise early, before the sun is up; I cry out for help and put my hope in your words.

119:148 I stay awake through the night, thinking about your promise.

119:149 In your faithful love, O Lord, hear my cry; let me be revived by following your regulations.

119:150 Lawless people are coming to attack me; they live far from your instructions.

119:151 But you are near, O Lord, and all your commands are true.

119:152 I have known from my earliest days that your laws will last forever.

Resh (ר): This petition for life can be found throughout Ps 119, but it is concentrated in this stanza.

119:153 Look upon my suffering and rescue me, for I have not forgotten your instructions.

119:154 Argue my case; take my side! Protect my life as you promised.

119:155 The wicked are far from rescue, for they do not bother with your decrees.

119:156 Lord, how great is your mercy; let me be revived by following your regulations.

119:157 Many persecute and trouble me, yet I have not swerved from your laws.

119:158 Seeing these traitors makes me sick at heart, because they care nothing for your word.

119:159 See how I love your commandments, Lord. Give back my life because of your unfailing love.

119:160 The very essence of your words is truth; all your just regulations will stand forever.

Shin (י): Powerful people harass me without cause, but my heart trembles only at your word.

119:161 I rejoice in your word like one who discovers a great treasure.

119:162 I rejoice in your word like one who discovers a great treasure.

119:163 I hate and abhor all falsehood, but I love your instructions.

119:164 I will ‘praise you seven times a day because all your regulations are just.

119:165 Those who love your instructions have great peace and do not stumble.

119:166 I long for your rescue, Lord, so I have obeyed your commands.

119:167 I have obeyed your laws, for I love them very much.
A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

1 I look up to the mountains—
2 My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth!

3 He will not let you stumble;
   the one who watches over you will not slumber.

4 Indeed, he who watches over Israel
   never slumbers or sleeps.

5 The LORD himself watches over you!
   The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade.

6 The sun will not harm you by day,
   nor the moon at night.

7 The LORD keeps you from all harm
   and watches over your life.

8 The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go,
   both now and forever.

Ps 121:1-8 The leader of the group of pilgrims uses word pictures to assure the group of the Lord’s presence during the journey.

Ps 119:168-176 Taw (תָּו) God’s servant petitions the Lord one final time; he still feels like a lost sheep.

Ps 119:176 God, the Great Shepherd, seeks out his lost sheep (23:1; Luke 15:4-6).

Ps 120–134 These short, appealing songs were sung during pilgrims’ journeys to Jerusalem for the national festivals three times per year (Deut 16:16). The title of these psalms includes the Ascents) take the reader on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the national festivals three times per year (Deut 16:16). The title of these psalms includes the Ascents) take the reader on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the national festivals three times per year (Deut 16:16).

Ps 120 This short, individual lament expresses the psalmist’s trust that the Lord will deal with deceptive evildoers. It also laments living as a stranger among hateful liars. The psalmist’s picture of his life in a foreign land might have been a reality as he set out for Jerusalem, or it might depict his feelings and concerns as he begins his pilgrimage. Overwhelmed with injustice, he trusts God and looks forward to arriving in the Lord’s presence.

Ps 121 God watches over his own, even and especially when they face many troubles (12:5; 7:69:29; 91:14; 146:9).
**PSALM 122**

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.
A psalm of David.

1 I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD.”
2 And now here we are, standing inside your gates, O Jerusalem.
3 Jerusalem is a well-built city; its seamless walls cannot be breached.
4 All the tribes of Israel—the Lord’s people—make their pilgrimage here.
5 Here stand the thrones where judgment is given, the thrones of the dynasty of David.
6 Pray for peace in Jerusalem.
7 O Jerusalem, may there be peace within your walls and prosperity in your palaces.
8 For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, “May you have peace.”
9 For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek what is best for you, O Jerusalem.

**PSALM 123**

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

1 I lift my eyes to you, O God, enthroned in heaven.
2 We keep looking to the Lord our God for his mercy, just as servants keep their eyes on their master,

Ps 122 Jerusalem is here idealized as the city of God, the city of David, and the city of faith. A group of people on a pilgrimage joyfully arrive in the city (122:1-2). The poet sings an ode to Jerusalem (122:3-5) and prays for the city’s peace (122:1-2). The poet sings an ode to Jerusalem. A psalm of David. 1 I lift my eyes to you, O God, enthroned in heaven. 2 We keep looking to the Lord our God for his mercy, just as servants keep their eyes on their master, as a slave girl watches her mistress for the slightest signal.

Ps 123 Jerusalem is a metaphor for God’s heavenly dwelling. David was the archetype for God’s chosen rulers.

Ps 124 This thanksgiving song describes what might happen if the Lord were not present with his people.

Ps 125 This psalmist’s lowly position expresses vivid trust in the Lord (123:1-2). The psalmist prays for God’s favor on the community, as the reality of evil surrounds them (123:3-4). The poet looks beyond Jerusalem (Ps 122) to God’s throne in heaven.

Ps 124 This thanksgiving song describes what might happen if the Lord were not present with his people.

Ps 125 The psalmist expresses the community’s confidence in the Lord’s protection (125:1-2) and prays for peace (125:3-5).
2 Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, both now and forever.

3 The wicked will not rule the land of the godly, for then the godly might be tempted to do wrong.

4 O Lord, do good to those who are good, whose hearts are in tune with you.

5 But banish those who turn to crooked ways, O Lord.

Take them away with those who do evil.

May Israel have peace!

**PSALM 126**

*A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.*

1 When the Lord brought back his exiles to Jerusalem, it was like a dream!

2 We were filled with laughter, and we sang for joy.

And the other nations said, “What amazing things the Lord has done for them.”

3 Yes, the Lord has done amazing things for us! What joy!

4 Restore our fortunes, Lord, as streams renew the desert.

5 Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy.

6 They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they sing as they return with the harvest.

**PSALM 127**

*A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.*

A psalm of Solomon.

1 Unless the Lord builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. Unless the Lord protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good.

2 It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones.

3 Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him.

4 Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior’s hands.

5 How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them!

6 He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates.

**PSALM 128**

*A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.*

1 How joyful are those who fear the Lord—all who follow his ways!

2 You will enjoy the fruit of your labor. How joyful and prosperous you will be!

3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vineyard, flourishing within your home.

Your children will be like vigorous young olive trees as they sit around your table.

125:2 *surrounds:* God guards and protects like a wall of fire (Zech 2:5).

125:3 *The godly might be tempted* through peer pressure and cultural domination.

125:4-5 People who reject the straight path of the upright are fools (Prov 2:12-15). God pours out his goodness on the godly (see 122:6-9).

Ps 126 This hymn celebrates Israel’s return from exile (126:1-3). The psalmist prays for full restoration (126:4-6).

126:1-3 The Lord brought about Israel’s restoration from exile, just as he had brought Israel out of Egypt (114:1). The restoration transformed the weeping of the Lord’s people into laughter and showed the Lord’s character to the nations (9:11; 64:9; Isa 12:4). *Jerusalem, Hebrew Zion* (see “Mount Zion, the City of God” at Ps 48, p. 947).

126:4-6 The prophets had spoken of the restoration as a time when the wilderness would change into the Garden of Eden (Isa 51:3; Ezek 47); the reality fell far short of paradise. Here the restoration community prays for full redemption (see Hag 2:19). *as streams renew the desert:* The seasonal rains filled the dry river beds (wadis), and the land turned green again. The prayer looks for a similar transformation of Israel’s fortunes, a fulfillment of the imagery of the “Second Exodus” in Isaiah (see “The Second Exodus” at Isa 52:11-12, p. 1185). *The harvest* represents God’s full restoration.

Ps 127 Blessing and protection come from God. Without his presence, there is no success (127:1-2). This is particularly true for children, who are God’s gift (127:3-5).

127:1-2 *Unless:* These conditional sentences emphasize the positive idea that the Lord will protect the city (cp. 124:1-2). *Human effort is futile unless the Lord blesses it (see 44:3).* *from early morning until late at night:* This depicts an aggressive and competitive lifestyle.

128:1-2 *enjoy a quiet night’s sleep:* Children are one of God’s blessings. The words translated “children” (Hebrew benaim) and “builders” (bonim, 127:1) form a wordplay. Having children builds a family.

128:3-6 *like arrows:* Uses children to protect the reputation of his people against the wicked (cp. 120:4; 7:12-13).

Ps 128 The godly, who fear the Lord, will know true happiness (128:1-2). The Lord is with them (see 127:1-2), building their home life (128:3-4) and blessing them across the generations (128:5-6).

128:1-2 Enjoying the fruit of one’s labor means gaining benefit from whatever work one does.

128:3 Like vigorous young olive trees, children are saplings filled with potential. Olive oil symbolizes God’s blessing (104:15; Num 18:12; Jer 31:12; Hag 2:19).
PSALM 129
A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

1 From my earliest youth my enemies have persecuted me. Let all Israel repeat this:
2 From my earliest youth my enemies have persecuted me, but they have never defeated me.
3 My back is covered with cuts, as if a farmer had plowed long furrows.
4 But the LORD is good; he has cut me free from the ropes of the ungodly.
5 May all who hate Jerusalem be turned back in shameful defeat.
6 May they be as useless as grass on a rooftop, turning yellow when only half grown,
7 ignored by the harvester, despised by the binder.
8 And may those who pass by refuse to give them this blessing: “The LORD bless you; we bless you in the LORD’s name.”

PSALM 130
A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

1 From the depths of despair, O LORD, I call for your help.
2 Hear my cry, O Lord. Pay attention to my prayer.
3 LORD, if you kept a record of our sins, who, O Lord, could ever survive?
4 But you offer forgiveness, that we might learn to fear you.
5 I am counting on the LORD; yes, I am counting on him. I have put my hope in his word.
6 I long for the LORD more than sentries long for the dawn, yes, more than sentries long for the dawn.
7 O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is unfailing love.
His redemption overflows.
8 He himself will redeem Israel from every kind of sin.

PSALM 131
A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

1 LORD, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty.
I don’t concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp.
2 Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother’s milk.

128-46 God will continually bless all who fear him (133:3) from his dwelling in Zion (20:2; 50:2; 110:2), no matter where they live. *grandchildren*: God’s blessings extend from generation to generation for the faithful (79:12-13; 89:1; 100:4-5; 103:17-19).

Ps 129 The psalmist briefly reviews Israel’s history of trouble (129:1-2) and redemption (129:3-4). He concludes with curses against the enemies and blessings on the godly (129:5-6).

129:1-2 Israel’s earliest youth as a nation was during its sojourn in Egypt.
129:3-4 the LORD is good: He rescued Israel from Egypt, from many enemy attacks, and from the Babylonian exile.
129:5 Jerusalem: Hebrew Zion (see “Mount Zion, the City of God” at Ps 48, p. 947).
129:6-9 Grass on a rooftop had shallow roots and would scorch easily. A crop was ignored by the harvester when the yield was low. The enemies who had sown hurt among God’s people would gain little.

Ps 130 Beginning with himself as a representative of the community, the psalmist cries for God’s mercy (130:1-3) out of deep distress. He places his hope in the Lord (130:4-6), knowing that the Lord will rescue when and as he chooses. Based on this confidence, the psalmist invites Israel to wait for the Lord (130:7-8).
130:1-3 A cry from the depths is from a place of deep distress (cp. 69:2, 14; Isa 51:10; Ezek 27:34). Out of the frailty of his being, the psalmist prays for divine judgment.
130:3 The psalmist knows that his sins make him guilty and deserving of God’s judgment.
130:4-6 The good news comes in God’s readiness to forgive sinners. His grace encourages people to fear him and hope in him.

130:5 God’s word imparts hope (119:42-43; 49; 147:11).

130:7-8 Israel is invited to hope in the LORD (9:18; 27:14; 131:3) because the Lord pays the costly price for redemption and covers whatever sin separates humans from him (see also 111:9; Exod 6:6-8; 2 Sam 7:23-24; Isa 43:1-4; Titus 2:14; Heb 9:12; 1 Pet 1:18).

Ps 131 Out of his contentment in the Lord, the psalmist invites Israel to seek their rest in God (131:3).
131:1 The heart represents the whole being (see 27:8). • God hates arrogance, which is a foolish way of life (Prov 6:16-19). • The psalmist does not trouble himself with matters that properly belong to the Lord.
131:2 The psalmist calmed and quieted himself, surrendering his ambitions and taming his ego (Gal 2:20). *like a weaned child*: The psalmist sees himself as a contented child.
A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

Lord, remember David
and all that he suffered.
He made a solemn promise to the Lord
He vowed to the Mighty One of Israel,
"I will not go home;
I will not let myself rest.
I will not let my eyes sleep
nor close my eyelids in slumber
until I find a place to build a house for the Lord,
a sanctuary for the Mighty One of Israel."

We heard that the Ark was in Ephrathah;
then we found it in the distant countrysides of Jaar.
Let us go to the sanctuary of the Lord;
let us worship at the footstool of his throne.
Arise, O Lord, and enter your resting place,
along with the Ark, the symbol of your power.
May your priests be clothed in godliness;
may your loyal servants sing for joy.
For the sake of your servant David,
do not reject the king you have anointed.
The Lord swore an oath to David
with a promise he will never take back:
"I will place one of your descendants on your throne.

The Lord's faithfulness to David. When David wanted to bring the Ark into Jerusalem (132:1-5), the Lord granted the request and made Jerusalem his earthly home (132:6-10). The choice of Jerusalem marked God's election of David's line (132:11-13), of Zion (132:14-17), and of the priesthood (132:9, 16).

The Mighty One of Israel: Literally of Jacob; also in 132:5. See note on 44:4.

These verses form a recollection of David's moving the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:1-15) and of the Lord's oath to David (2 Sam 7:4-16).

Ephrathah is Bethlehem (Gen 35:19; 48:7). *Jaar is the singular form of the plural "Jearim." The Ark was at Kiriat-jearim for twenty years in Samuel's time (1 Sam 7:1-2).

If your descendants obey the terms of my covenant
and the laws that I teach them,
then your royal line
will continue forever and ever."

For the Lord has chosen Jerusalem;
he has desired it for his home.
"This is my resting place forever," he said.
"I will live here, for this is the home I desired.
I will bless this city and make it prosperous;
I will satisfy its poor with food.
I will clothe its priests with godliness;
its faithful servants will sing for joy.
Here I will increase the power of David;
my anointed one will be a light for my people.
I will clothe his enemies with shame,
but he will be a glorious king."

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

How wonderful and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in harmony!
For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil
that was poured over Aaron's head,
that ran down his beard
and onto the border of his robe.
Harmony is as refreshing as the dew
that falls on the mountains of Zion.
And there the Lord has pronounced his blessing,
even life everlasting.

Ps 132 This psalm celebrates the Lord's faithfulness to David. When David wanted to bring the Ark into Jerusalem (132:1-5), the Lord granted the request and made Jerusalem his earthly home (132:6-10). The choice of Jerusalem marked God's election of David's line (132:11-13), of Zion (132:14-17), and of the priesthood (132:9, 16).

132:2: The Lord, remember David and all that he suffered.
132:3: He made a solemn promise to the Lord. He vowed to the Mighty One of Israel, "I will not go home; I will not let myself rest. I will not let my eyes sleep nor close my eyelids in slumber until I find a place to build a house for the Lord, a sanctuary for the Mighty One of Israel."

132:6: We heard that the Ark was in Ephrathah; then we found it in the distant countrysides of Jaar.
132:7: Let us go to the sanctuary of the Lord; let us worship at the footstool of his throne.
132:8: Arise, O Lord, and enter your resting place, along with the Ark, the symbol of your power.
132:9: May your priests be clothed in godliness; may your loyal servants sing for joy.
132:10: For the sake of your servant David, do not reject the king you have anointed.
132:11: The Lord swore an oath to David with a promise he will never take back: "I will place one of your descendants on your throne."

Ps 133 This wisdom psalm (see Ps 1), peaceful and harmonious relationships manifest the presence of God.

133:1: The psalmist tells of the joy of consecrated relationships.
133:2: Brothers are related by blood, by profession, or by commitment.
133:3: The anointing oil was the oil used to ordain and consecrate Aaron for service in his office (see Exod 29:7). *head...beard...border of his robe: The oil consecrated Aaron completely.
133:4: The dew represents the richness of divine blessings; in Jerusalem, it comes from moist winds from the Mediterranean Sea. *Mount Hermon, which is capped with snow, is a place of abundant moisture. *A blessing is God's life-giving power, a guarantee of his
PSALM 134
A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

1 Oh, praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
you who serve at night in the house of the Lord.
2 Lift up holy hands in prayer, and praise the Lord.
3 May the Lord, who made heaven and earth,
bless you from Jerusalem.

PSALM 135
1 Praise the Lord!
Praise the name of the Lord! Praise him, you who serve the Lord,
you who serve in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God.
Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; celebrate his lovely name with music.
For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel for his own special treasure.
I know the greatness of the Lord—that our Lord is greater than any other god.
The Lord does whatever pleases him throughout all heaven and earth, and on the seas and in their depths.
He causes the clouds to rise over the whole earth.
He sends the lightning with the rain and releases the wind from his storehouses.
He destroyed the firstborn in each Egyptian home, both people and animals.

He performed miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt against Pharaoh and all his people.
He struck down great nations and slaughtered mighty kings—
Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan, and all the kings of Canaan.
He gave their land as an inheritance, a special possession to his people Israel.
Your name, O Lord, endures forever; your fame, O Lord, is known to every generation.
For the Lord will give justice to his people and have compassion on his servants.
The idols of the nations are merely things of silver and gold, shaped by human hands.
They have mouths but cannot speak, and eyes but cannot see.
They have ears but cannot hear, and noses but cannot smell.
And those who make idols are just like them, as are all who trust in them.
O Israel, praise the Lord! O priests—descendants of Aaron—praise the Lord!
O Levites, praise the Lord! All you who fear the Lord, praise the Lord!
The Lord be praised from Zion, for he lives here in Jerusalem.
Praise the Lord!

provision and protection (5:12; 41:2), secured by his presence (21:6; 67:1).
Even the other nations will ultimately be blessed (Ps 67; 72:17). Zion is the focal point of God’s blessing (134:3; 147:13). • God gives life everlasting to human beings.
Ps 134 In the last of the pilgrims’ songs (Ps 120–134), the travelers call the Temple workers to praise the Lord. In return, they will receive a much-anticipated blessing.
134:1-2 Those who serve at night were the priests and Levites (see also 135:2).
134:3 Jerusalem: Hebrew Zion (see “Mount Zion, the City of God” at Ps 48, p. 947).
Ps 135 God, the Creator and the Lord of history, “made heaven and earth” (134:3). He deserves praise because, unlike idols, he redeems his people.
135:4 The synonyms Jacob and Israel include all twelve tribes. The Lord cherishes his chosen people. They are his treasure out of all the kingdoms of the world (Exod 19:5-6).
135:5 The Lord is superior to any real or imagined supernatural being (see 95:3-5; 115:4-8).
135:6 God is sovereign over the whole created order—he does whatever pleases him. • The phrase heaven and earth refers to all of creation.
135:7 The psalmist tells of God’s sovereignty over the weather (Ps 29; 77:17-18; 78:26; 104:4; 147:8-9; 148:5-6).
135:8-12 The Lord was sovereign over the Exodus and the conquest of the Promised Land.
135:8-11 In the tenth and culminating plague against Egypt, God destroyed the firstborn of each family. • The miraculous signs and wonders are the ten plagues (see Exod 7–11; Deut 4:34; Neh 9:10).
135:13-18 The Lord’s name and character stand in contrast to idols.
135:15-20 This entire section is repeated in 115:4-11.
135:15-18 Idols corrupt the thinking because they are merely things made by humans; they cannot speak, see, hear, or smell (Isa 41:22-24; 44:9, 18; Rom 1:21-23).
135:19-21 The groups named here comprised the covenant community (see 115:9-11).
PSALM 136

1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
   His faithful love endures forever.
2 Give thanks to the God of gods.
   His faithful love endures forever.
3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords.
   His faithful love endures forever.
4 Give thanks to him who alone does mighty miracles.
   His faithful love endures forever.
5 Give thanks to him who made the heavens so skillfully.
   His faithful love endures forever.
6 Give thanks to him who placed the earth among the waters.
   His faithful love endures forever.
7 Give thanks to him who made the heavenly lights—
   His faithful love endures forever.
8 the sun to rule the day,
   His faithful love endures forever.
9 and the moon and stars to rule the night.
   His faithful love endures forever.
10 Give thanks to him who killed the firstborn of Egypt.
   His faithful love endures forever.
11 He brought Israel out of Egypt.
   His faithful love endures forever.
12 He acted with a strong hand and powerful arm.
   His faithful love endures forever.
13 Give thanks to him who parted the Red Sea.
   His faithful love endures forever.
14 He led Israel safely through,
   His faithful love endures forever.
15 but he hurled Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea.
   His faithful love endures forever.
16 Give thanks to him who led his people through the wilderness.
   His faithful love endures forever.
17 Give thanks to him who struck down mighty kings.
   His faithful love endures forever.
18 He killed powerful kings—
   His faithful love endures forever.
19 Sihon king of the Amorites,
   His faithful love endures forever.
20 and Og king of Bashan.
   His faithful love endures forever.
21 God gave the land of these kings as an inheritance—
   His faithful love endures forever.
22 a special possession to his servant Israel.
   His faithful love endures forever.
23 He remembered us in our weakness.
   His faithful love endures forever.
24 He saved us from our enemies.
   His faithful love endures forever.
25 He gives food to every living thing.
   His faithful love endures forever.
26 Give thanks to the God of heaven.
   His faithful love endures forever.

PSALM 137

1 Beside the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept
   as we thought of Jerusalem.
2 We put away our harps,
   hanging them on the branches of poplar trees.
3 For our captors demanded a song from us.
   Our tormentors insisted on a joyful hymn:
   “Sing us one of those songs of Jerusalem!”
4 But how can we sing the songs of the Lord
   while in a pagan land?
5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
   let my right hand forget how to play the harp.
6 May my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth
   until I sing songs to the Lord.

Ps 136 This is the last of the Great Hallel psalms (Pss 120–136; see note on Book Five at Ps 107). It distinctively repeats the refrain His faithful love endures forever in every verse. The hymn is framed by a call to praise (136:1–3, 26). It proclaims the Lord as the Creator of all and the Redeemer of Israel, both in the distant (136:10–22) and in the recent past (136:23–24).

136:1-3 The psalmist invites the community to praise the Lord, who is good and full of love, the true Lord of humanity. Verse 1 alludes to the poetic expression in 2 Chr 5:13.

136:10-22 The psalmist recounts the early history of Israel’s redemption.


136:23-24 The psalmist relates the recent history of Israel’s redemption, although the circumstances are not specified.

136:25 The Lord provides for all of his creatures.

136:26 The phrase God of heaven is an exilic and postexilic designation for the Lord; it is found in Ezra (Ezra 1:2; 5:11, 12; 6:9, 10; 7:12, etc.), Nehemiah (Neh 1:5; 2:4, 20; etc.), and Daniel (Dan 2:18, 19, 37, 44).

Ps 137 In response to the pain of exile (137:1–4), the psalmist resolves to remember Jerusalem even though the memories cause him pain (137:4–6). He also writes an astounding imprecation, or prayer for vengeance (137:7–9).

137:1 Jerusalem: Hebrew Zion; also in 137:3 (see “Mount Zion, the City of God” at Ps 48, p. 947).

137:2-4 Because the music of Jerusalem was tied to the joys of life in the Promised Land, the Exile removed any occasion for singing joyous songs. The Babylonians wanted the Judeans to sing and dance for them, but the exiles’ grief made doing so either distasteful or impossible. The songs celebrating the Lord speak of his power and goodness, but his people were filled with doubts and questions. They hung their harps in trees, perhaps signifying the death of their joy under God’s curse (Deut 21:23).
if I fail to remember you,  
if I don’t make Jerusalem my greatest joy.

7 O L ORD, remember what the Edomites did  
on the day the armies of Babylon captured Jerusalem.

“Destroy it!” they yelled.  
“Level it to the ground!”

8 O Babylon, you will be destroyed.  
Happy is the one who pays you back  
for what you have done to us.

9 Happy is the one who takes your babies  
and smashes them against the rocks!

PSALM 138  
A psalm of David.

1 I give you thanks, O L ORD, with all my heart;  
I will sing your praises before the gods.

2 I bow before your holy Temple as I worship.  
I praise your name for your unfailing love and faithfulness;  
for your promises are backed by all the honor of your name.

3 As soon as I pray, you answer me;  
you encourage me by giving me strength.

Prayers for Vengeance (Ps 137)

The psalmists sometimes asked the Lord to execute vengeance against their adversaries. It was not unusual for a psalmist to pray for the violent destruction of his enemies as a manifestation of divine justice.

How does one defend this kind of prayer? Is this a form of Jewish or Christian jihad (an Arabic word meaning “striving,” sometimes meaning “holy war”)? In contrast with jihad, the psalmist called on God, not humans, to act.

Divine justice is defined in Ps 1:6: The Lord loves the righteous and destroys the wicked. The wicked are subversive, corrupt, and thoroughly committed to evil; they live in opposition to God and to everything that God does. The wicked shake the foundations of God’s kingdom, of ethics, and of society.

Prayers for termination of the wicked arose out of the psalmists’ concern with justice and righteousness and out of their confidence in God. They argued that evil is inconsistent with God’s nature and that the removal of evil is the only way for his kingdom to thrive. The poets of Israel did not simply invoke God’s judgment on anyone with whom they could not get along. God charges the gods and their followers with the evil of injustice in Ps 82 and holds all humans accountable to his divine standard of justice and righteousness. These were also the standards that guided the psalmists.

The psalmists were intimately acquainted with grief. They had suffered and been oppressed and marginalized by bullies, leaders, and kings from inside and outside of Israel. Their prayers were full of faith and hope, asking how long the Lord would tolerate their suffering and confessing that the Lord alone could rescue them from evil. They expressed deep longing for his redemption. Through these prayers for justice and vindication, the godly may rest in peace as they await God’s rescue. By the principle of retribution, they asked the Lord to inflict upon the wicked the suffering that they had endured (5:10; 6:10; 7:9; 8:2; 9:19-20; 28:4; 37:8-10, 36; 56:7; 104:35; 137:9; 139:19).

Prayers for the end of evil are appropriate as long as God is recognized as arbiter, judge, and executor. Do we truly see evil as evil, or do we perceive it merely as an inconvenience? The prayer for the coming of God’s kingdom implies the removal of evil. The cruelty inflicted on the wicked has been transformed through the cruel crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jesus will judge and bring an end to evil (see Rev 19:11-21). Christians are to love as Christ loved (John 13:34), pray for their enemies, and forgive them (Matt 5:38-48; Col 3:13).
The psalmist expresses confidence in God's holiness and excellence are very great.

4 Every king in all the earth will thank you, Lord, for all of them will hear your words.

5 Yes, they will sing about the Lord's ways, for the glory of the Lord is very great.

6 Though the Lord is great, he cares for the humble, but he keeps his distance from the proud.

7 Though I am surrounded by troubles, you will protect me from the anger of my enemies.

You reach out your hand, and the power of your right hand saves me.

8 The Lord will work out his plans for my life—

for your faithful love, O Lord, endures forever.

Don't abandon me, for you made me.

PSALM 139
For the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me.

2 You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.

3 You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do.

4 You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord.

5 You go before me and follow me. You know everything about me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!

7 I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!

8 If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there.

9 If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

10 I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night—but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.

To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you.

11 You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb.

12 Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

13 You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.

14 Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

15 You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.

16 You saw me before I was born.

Every day of my life was recorded in your book.

Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

17 How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered!
The psalmist's prayer against Rejection of evil is a mark of wisdom (see 1:1; 5:4-6).

18 I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!

19 O God, if only you would destroy the wicked! Get out of my life, you murderers!

20 They blaspheme you; your enemies misuse your name.

21 O LORD, shouldn't I hate those who hate you? Shouldn't I despise those who oppose you?

22 Yes, I hate them with total hatred, for your enemies are my enemies.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

24 Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

The Heart (Ps 139)

The Hebrew words leb and lebab (both meaning "heart") are hard to translate because they rarely refer to the physical human heart. Rather, the heart is the center of one's being, an image for a person's thought life, reflections, and will. The story of the heart reveals a person's commitment and direction in life.

The hearts of the wicked are cunning and scheming (58:2; 64:6; 140:2). They are deceptive, hypocritical (28:3; 41:6; 55:21; 62:4), lacking in integrity, greedy, and jealous (10:3; 62:10; 141:4). As time goes on, they become more arrogant (14:1; 101:5; 131:1), callous, and stubborn (17:10; 73:7; 73:8; 81:12; 95:8, 10; 119:70). Their only commitment is to themselves (78:37); their destructive way of life (5:9; 101:4) leads to their own destruction.

The psalmists openly confess their sorrow, trouble, anguish, and despair (13:2; 22:14; 25:17; 38:8, 10; 40:12; 55:4; 61:2; 69:20; 73:21, 26; 109:22; 143:4; 147:3). Through their pain, their hearts grow. They pray intensely (62:8; 119:80, 145), long for God (84:2), trust in him (28:7), and open their hearts to God's examination (7:9; 17:3; 26:2; 139:1-6, 23). Their commitment does not waver, and their lives are pure (24:4; 51:10; 73:1, 13) and contented (131:1), even when broken.

As their broken hearts (34:17-18; 51:17) are healed by the Lord (147:3), they become strong, confident (27:3, 14; 31:24; 57:7; 108:1; 112:7-8; 138:3), and vital (22:26; 69:32; 119:32). In the end, the Lord gives them the desires of their hearts (20:4; 21:2; 37:4) and then satisfies them. This fills the godly with joy and praise (4:7; 9:1; 13:5; 16:7, 9; 19:8; 30:12; 33:21; 86:12; 89:50; 102:4; 104:15; 105:3; 111:1; 119:7, 111; 138:1).

139:19-24 The psalmist’s sense of awe leads him to consider the wicked and to reflect on himself. The Lord, as the examiner of all people, judges the wicked for their destructive acts and speech; thus, the psalmist prays that he will not be among them.

139:21 I hate: Rejection of evil is a mark of wisdom (see 1:1; 5:4-6).

139:23-24 The psalmist’s prayer against the wicked leads him also to reflect on himself; he does not presume that he is righteous. This prayer has been repeated by believers over the centuries.

PSALM 140
For the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 O LORD, rescue me from evil people. Protect me from those who are violent, and stir up trouble all day long.

2 Those who plot evil in their hearts and stretch out a net; Their tongues sting like a snake; the venom of a viper drips from their lips.

3 Their tongues sting like a snake; the venom of a viper drips from their lips.

4 O LORD, keep me out of the hands of the wicked. Protect me from those who are violent, they have set a trap to catch me; they have stretched out a net; they have placed traps all along the way.

5 The proud have set a trap to catch me; they have stretched out a net; they have placed traps all along the way.

6 I said to the LORD, “You are my God!” Listen, O LORD, to my cries for mercy!

7 O Sovereign Lord, the strong one who rescued me,
you protected me on the day of battle.
8 LORD, do not let evil people have their way. Do not let their evil schemes succeed, or they will become proud.

9 Let my enemies be destroyed by the very evil they have planned for me.
10 Let burning coals fall down on their heads. Let them be thrown into the fire or into watery pits from which they can't escape.
11 Don't let liars prosper here in our land. Cause great disasters to fall on the violent.
12 But I know the LORD will help those they persecute; he will give justice to the poor.
13 Surely righteous people are praising your name; the godly will live in your presence.

PSALM 142
A psalm of David, regarding his experience in the cave. A prayer.

1 I cry out to the LORD; I plead for the LORD's mercy.
2 I pour out my complaints before him and tell him all my troubles.
3 When I am overwhelmed, my enemies have set traps for me.
4 I look for someone to come and help me, but no one gives me a passing thought! No one will help me; no one cares a bit what happens to me.
5 Then I pray to you, O LORD. I say, "You are my place of refuge. You are all I really want in life."
6 Hear my cry, for I am very low. Rescue me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me.

If they correct me, it is soothing medicine. Don't let me refuse it.
But I pray constantly against the wicked and their deeds.
When their leaders are thrown down from a cliff, the wicked will listen to my words and find them true.
Like rocks brought up by a plow, the bones of the wicked will lie scattered without burial.
8 I look to you for help, O Sovereign LORD. You are my refuge; don't let them kill me.
9 Keep me from the traps they have set for me, from the snares of those who do wrong.
10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets, but let me escape.

The poet wants fire to descend by the very evil they have planned for me.
9 Let my enemies be destroyed by the very evil they have planned for me.
10 Let burning coals fall down on their heads. Let them be thrown into the fire or into watery pits from which they can't escape.
11 Don't let liars prosper here in our land. Cause great disasters to fall on the violent.
12 But I know the LORD will help those they persecute; he will give justice to the poor.
13 Surely righteous people are praising your name; the godly will live in your presence.

PSALM 141
A psalm of David.

1 O LORD, I am calling to you. Please hurry! Listen when I cry to you for help!
2 Accept my prayer as incense offered to you, and my upraised hands as an evening offering.
3 Take control of what I say, O LORD, and guard my lips.
4 Don't let me drift toward evil or take part in acts of wickedness. Don't let me share in the delicacies of those who do wrong.
5 Let the godly strike me! It will be a kindness!
6 When their leaders are thrown down from a cliff, the wicked will listen to my words and find them true.
7 Like rocks brought up by a plow, the bones of the wicked will lie scattered without burial.
8 I look to you for help, O Sovereign LORD. You are my refuge; don't let them kill me.
9 Keep me from the traps they have set for me, from the snares of those who do wrong.
10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets, but let me escape.

The principle of retribution (5:9-10; 140:5; 141:9; 142:3) is the reality that those elements represent (cp. Isa 1:13; Rev 5:8). • Upraised hands are a posture of prayer (28:2; 88:9; 143:6; Exod 9:29; 1 Tim 2:8).
141:3-5 Wisdom sometimes requires protection from oneself. One could say or think things that lead to the evil path (Prov 13:3; 21:23). • Wisdom opens itself to correction from godly people (see Prov 3:11; 9:8; 15:31; 19:25).
141:7 scattered without burial: Literally scattered at the mouth of Sheol. See note on 6:5.
Ps 142 The psalmist faces severe persecution, so he cries to the Lord, and the Lord will rescue him.
142:title psalm: Hebrew maskil. This may be a literary or musical term.

regarding his experience in the cave:
See note on 57:title.

142:1-3 Though overwhelmed by his persecutors (142:6), the psalmist looks to the Lord for wisdom.
142:3-4 The psalmist reaches a point of despair (see 77:3), and the Lord cares for him in his distress. The psalmist commits himself to the Lord's wisdom (see Ps 139) but laments his entrapment by the wicked (5:9-10; 140:5; 141:9; 142:3).
142:5 Though he is alone, the psalmist's trust remains in the Lord, who is his life (see 9:9; 16:5; 27:13).
142:6-7 Though overwhelmed by loneliness and trouble, the psalmist focuses on the Lord's goodness and protection.
PSALM 143
A psalm of David.

1 Hear my prayer, O LORD; listen to my plea! Answer me because you are faithful and righteous.

2 Don’t put your servant on trial, for no one is innocent before you.

3 My enemy has chased me. He has knocked me to the ground and forces me to live in darkness like those in the grave.

4 I am losing all hope; I am paralyzed with fear.

5 I remember the days of old. I ponder all your great works and think about what you have done.

6 I lift my hands to you in prayer. I thirst for you as parched land thirsts for rain.

7 Come quickly, LORD, and answer me, for my depression deepens. Don’t turn away from me, or I will die.

8 Let me hear of your unfailing love each morning, for I am trusting you.

9 Rescue me from my enemies, LORD; I run to you to hide me.

10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.

May your gracious Spirit lead me forward on a firm footing.

11 For the glory of your name, O LORD, preserve my life. Because of your faithfulness, bring me out of this distress.

12 In your unfailing love, silence all my enemies and destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.

PSALM 144
A psalm of David.

1 Praise the LORD, who is my stronghold. He trains my hands for war and gives my fingers skill for battle.

2 He is my loving ally and my fortress, my tower of safety, my rescuer. He is my shield, and I take refuge in him. He makes the nations submit to me.

3 O LORD, what are human beings that you should notice them, mere mortals that you should think about them?

4 For they are like a breath of air; their days are like a passing shadow.

5 Open the heavens, LORD, and come down. Touch the mountains so they billow smoke.

6 Hurl your lightning bolts and scatter your enemies! Shoot your arrows and confuse them!

7 Reach down from the power of my enemies! Rescue me from deep waters, from the power of my enemies.

8 Their mouths are full of lies; they swear to tell the truth, but they lie instead.

He knows that the Lord alone is his Redeemer, so he offers his praise.

142:7 His experience of confinement and duress is like being in prison (see 107:10).

Ps 143 In this lament, the psalmist feels overwhelmed by constant harassment from his foes, so he turns to the Lord’s love, righteousness, and faithfulness. He remembers God’s acts in the past and yearns for the renewal of the Lord’s love. He opens himself to God’s wisdom because he knows that instruction will lead to life.

143:1-2 The psalmist prays for God’s love and mercy.

143:2 All people are guilty before God (Rom 3:20-24).

143:3-4 I am losing all hope: The psalmist confesses his desperation as his life slips away under oppressive and ruthless foes.

143:5-6 Remembering God’s acts from the past reassures the psalmist of God’s faithfulness (42:4; 63:6; 77:3, 6; 119:55).

143:6 The psalmist’s thirst is a deep longing for God’s redemption (see 42:1-2).

143:7-10 The psalmist petitions the Lord for a renewal of his love.

143:7 The psalmist experiences depression. He feels that he is dying from anguish (31:10; 119:87), exhausted (39:10; 71:9; 119:81), fainting with longing (84:2), and overwhelmed by the weariness of life (90:7, 9).

143:8-10 The psalmist prays for wisdom (see 5:8; 25:4-6; Ps 138; 143:10). *your gracious Spirit: The Spirit brings God’s goodness (see 23:6).

143:11 To preserve means in this case to restore from despair (80:19; 85:6; 138:7).

143:12 A prayer for vindication and renewal of life concludes the psalm.

Ps 144 This lament begins with an exclamation of love for the Lord. The community then reflects on the transitory nature of life (144:3-4). The psalmist prays for divine intervention and anticipates victory (144:5-11). A new song (144:9-10) and a prayer for rescue (144:11) open up the theme of the Lord’s blessing through his provisions and protection (144:12-15).

144:1-2 The psalmist’s descriptive names for the Lord reveal his deep love for him.

144:2 the nations: Some manuscripts read my people.

144:3-4 what are human beings? The same question in 8:4-6 elicits the answer that humans are mere mortals but are also glorious rulers. The psalmist depicts humans as having a transitory, empty existence (see 90:3, 7-10; 102:11; 109:23; 146:4).

144:5-8 The psalmist prays for God’s intervention against his enemies (cp. 18:7-19).
9 I will sing a new song to you, O God!
   I will sing your praises with a
ten-stringed harp.

10 For you grant victory to kings!
   You rescued your servant David from
the fatal sword.

11 Save me!
   Rescue me from the power of my
enemies.

Their mouths are full of lies;
they swear to tell the truth, but they
lie instead.

12 May our sons flourish in their youth
   like well-nurture plants.
May our daughters be like graceful pillars,
carved to beautify a palace.

13 May our barns be filled
   with crops of every kind.
   May the flocks in our fields multiply by
   the thousands,
   even tens of thousands,
   and may our oxen be loaded down
   with produce.

May there be no enemy breaking
through our walls,
no going into captivity,
no cries of alarm in our town squares.

15 Yes, joyful are those who live like this!
   Joyful indeed are those whose God is
   the Lord.

PSALM 145
A psalm of praise of David.

1 I will exalt you, my God and King,
   and praise your name forever and ever.

2 I will praise you every day;
   yes, I will praise you forever.

3 Great is the Lord! He is most worthy of
   praise!
   No one can measure his greatness.

4 Let each generation tell its children of
   your mighty acts;
   let them proclaim your power.

5 I will meditate on your majestic,
   ‘glorious splendor
   and your wonderful miracles.

6 Your awe-inspiring deeds will be on
   every tongue;
   I will proclaim your greatness.

7 Everyone will share the story of your
   wonderful goodness;
   they will sing with joy about your
   righteousness.

8 The Lord is merciful and compassionate,
   slow to get angry and filled with
   unfailing love.

9 The Lord is good to everyone.
   He showers compassion on all his
   creation.

10 All of your works will thank you, Lord,
   and your faithful followers will praise
   you.

11 They will speak of the glory of your
   kingdom;
   they will give examples of your power.

12 They will tell about your mighty deeds
   and about the majesty and glory of
   your reign.

13 For your kingdom is an everlasting
   kingdom.
You rule throughout all generations.

The Lord always keeps his promises;
   he is gracious in all he does.

14 The Lord helps the fallen
   and lifts those bent beneath their loads.

15 The eyes of all look to you in hope;
   you give them their food as they need it.

16 When you open your hand,
   you satisfy the hunger and thirst of
   every living thing.

17 The Lord is righteous in everything he
   does;
   he is filled with kindness.

18 The Lord is close to all who call on him,
   yes, to all who call on him in truth.

19 He grants the desires of those who fear
   him;
   he hears their cries for help and
   rescues them.
145:20 The Lord cares for those who love him and fear him. God-fearers love the Lord and find refuge in him (5:11); they seek him as their only true Savior (40:16; 70:4). They will experience a grand future (69:36), as well as God’s peace (69:15; 119:165).

Ps 146–150 The Psalter ends with five hallelujah psalms, so named because each begins and ends with Praise the Lord! (Hebrew halelu-yah).

Ps 146 The call to praise (146:1–2) leads into a warning against folly and false confidence (146:3–4). The psalm concludes with a blessing for all who place their hope in the Lord (146:5–7).

146:1 This verse is reminiscent of 103:1, 2, 22; 104:1, 35.

146:5–7 the God of Israel: Literally of Jacob. See note on 44:4; see also 20:1.

146:8–9 The fourfold repetition of the name of the Lord emphasizes that only he heals, unburdens, loves, and protects.

146:10 Jerusalem: Hebrew Zion (see “Mount Zion, the City of God” at Ps 48, p. 947).

Ps 147 The psalmist calls for the Lord to be praised for restoring and blessing Zion, caring for the poor, displaying his power over nature, and revealing himself to his people.

147:1 This verse is a call to worship.

147:2–6 The psalmist recalls the restoration of Jerusalem and the Lord’s afflicted exiles.

147:4–5 The Lord created the heavens.

10 The Lord will reign forever. He will be your God, O Jerusalem, throughout the generations.

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 147

1 Praise the Lord!

How good to sing praises to our God! How delightful and how fitting!

2 The Lord is rebuilding Jerusalem and bringing the exiles back to Israel.

3 He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds. He counts the stars and calls them all by name.

4 How great is our Lord! His power is absolute! His understanding is beyond comprehension!

5 The Lord supports the humble, but he brings the wicked down into the dust.

6 Sing out your thanks to the Lord, sing praises to our God with a harp. He gives food to the wild animals or in human might.

7 Sing out your thanks to the Lord; sing praises to our God with a harp. He covers the heavens with clouds, provides rain for the earth, and makes the grass grow in mountain pastures.

8 He gives food to the wild animals and feeds the young ravens when they cry.

9 He takes no pleasure in the strength of a horse or in human might.

10 The Lord protects all those who love him, but he destroys the wicked.

21 I will praise the Lord, and may everyone on earth bless his holy name forever and ever.

PSALM 146

1 Praise the Lord!

Let all that I am praise the Lord.

2 I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God with my dying breath.

3 Don’t put your confidence in powerful people; there is no help for you there.

4 When they breathe their last, they return to the earth, and all their plans die with them.

5 But joyful are those who have the God of Israel as their helper, whose hope is in the Lord their God.

6 He made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. He keeps every promise forever.

7 He gives justice to the oppressed and food to the hungry.

8 The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

9 The Lord protects the foreigners among us. He cares for the orphans and widows, but he frustrates the plans of the wicked.

10 The Lord will reign forever. He will be your God, O Jerusalem, throughout the generations.

Praise the Lord!

He counts the stars: God’s people can feel secure in knowing that the Lord attends to every detail of his creation; he knows all that belongs to him.


147:7–11 Human achievements fail to impress the God who commands nature; rather, he takes pleasure in those who fear him.

147:8 God holds sovereign power over the weather (77:17–18; 78:26; 104:4; 148:5–6).

147:9–11 human might: Any physical or intellectual achievement is a gift from the Lord, just like the strength of a horse. These gifts are a reason to praise the Lord, not to boast (Jer 9:23–24).
For he has strengthened the bars of your gates
and blessed your children within your walls.
He sends peace across your nation and satisfies your hunger with the finest wheat.
He sends his orders to the world—how swiftly his word flies!
He sends the snow like white wool; he scatters frost upon the ground like ashes.
He hurls the hail like stones. Who can stand against his freezing cold?
Then, at his command, it all melts.
He sends his winds, and the ice thaws.
Simply by speaking, he sets them in place forever and ever.
It all melts. How swiftly his word flies!
Let them praise the name of the Lord. For his name is very great; his glory towers over the earth and heaven!
He has made his people strong, honoring his faithful ones—the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the Lord!

**PSALM 149**

1 Praise the Lord!
2 Sing to the Lord a new song. Sing his praises in the assembly of the faithful.
3 O Israel, rejoice in your Maker. O people of Jerusalem, exult in your King.
4 Praise his name with dancing, accompanied by tambourine and harp.
5 Let the faithful rejoice that he honors his faithful people, the people of Israel who are close to him.
6 He has made his people strong, honoring his faithful ones—the people of Israel who are close to him.
7 Let the praises of God be in their mouths, a sharp sword in their hands.
8 To execute vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, fire and hail, snow and clouds, wind and weather that obey him, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all livestock, small scurrying animals and birds, kings of the earth and all people, rulers and judges of the earth, young men and young women, old men and children.
9 His faithful ones are his trusting and devoted servants who can stand against his freezing cold. Who can stand against his freezing cold? He has made his people strong, honoring his faithful ones—the people of Israel who are close to him.
10 Wild animals and all livestock, small scurrying animals and birds, kings of the earth and all people, rulers and judges of the earth, young men and young women, old men and children.
11 Let them praise the name of the Lord. For his name is very great; his glory towers over the earth and heaven!
12 Kings of Israel and all people, young men and young women, old men and children.
13 Let them praise the name of the Lord. For his name is very great; his glory towers over the earth and heaven!
14 He has made his people strong, honoring his faithful ones—the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the Lord!
Praise the LORD:

Ps 150

1 Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heaven!

2 Praise him for his mighty works; praise his unequaled greatness!

3 Praise him with a blast of the ram’s horn; praise him with the lyre and harp!

4 Praise him with the tambourine and dancing; praise him with strings and flutes!

5 Praise him with a clash of cymbals; praise him with loud clanging cymbals.

6 Let everything that breathes sing praises to the LORD!

Praise the LORD!

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### Instrument References Explanation

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<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stringed Instruments</strong> (minnim, Ps 150:4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harp or Lyre (kinnor)</td>
<td>Ps 81:2; 1 Sam 10:5; 16:16, 23; 2 Sam 6:5; Isa 5:12</td>
<td>The kinnor, the most frequently mentioned musical instrument in the Bible, was a hand-held harp or lyre. The strings were made of sheep gut, and the sounding box was at the bottom of the instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harp (nebel)</td>
<td>Ps 57:8; 2 Sam 6:5; 1 Kgs 10:12; Neh 12:27; Amos 5:23</td>
<td>The nebel was a larger and louder instrument than the kinnor. It was probably shaped like a bottle, with the belly-shaped sounding box on the bottom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten-stringed Harp (nebel 'asor)</td>
<td>Ps 33:2; 92:3; 144:9</td>
<td>The nebel 'asor is often identified with the Phoenician zither, which had ten strings.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wind Instruments</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ram’s horn (shofar)</td>
<td>Ps 98:6; 150:3; 2 Sam 6:15; 15:10; 1 Kgs 1:34; 2 Kgs 9:13; 1 Chr 15:28; 2 Chr 15:14</td>
<td>The shofar, mentioned in the Bible more than any other Hebrew instrument, is the only instrument of ancient Israel that survives and is still used in Jewish liturgy. The early shofar was simply a hollowed ram’s horn. Later shofars might have mouthpieces added, and some are straightened with a bend near the bell of the horn. The shofar was used for signaling important events, not for playing music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flute ('ugab)</td>
<td>Ps 150:4; Gen 4:21; Job 21:12; 30:31</td>
<td>The 'ugab was a type of flute. Its only sacred use is recorded in Ps 150:4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trumpet (khatsotsirah)</td>
<td>Ps 98:6; Num 10:1-10; 1 Chr 15:28; 2 Chr 15:14; Hos 5:8</td>
<td>The khatsotsirah was a sort of trumpet. Similar instruments were known in Egypt, Assyria, the Hittite Empire, and Greece. The khatsotsirah became an important part of the Temple service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flute or Oboe (khali)</td>
<td>Jer 48:36; 1 Sam 10:5; Isa 5:12</td>
<td>The khali was similar to the Greek aulos, a primitive oboe (see Matt 9:23; 1 Cor 14:7; Rev 18:22). The khali had a double-reed mouthpiece and probably produced a shrill, penetrating sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percussion Instruments</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Castanet (mena'an'im)</td>
<td>2 Sam 6:5</td>
<td>The mena'an'im was probably a form of the Egyptian sistrum, a loud metal rattle, made from rods and loose rings that rattled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bells (pa'amonim)</td>
<td>Exod 28:33-34; 39:25-26</td>
<td>The pa'amonim were bells attached to the hem of the priest’s garment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tambourine or Hand Drum (tof)</td>
<td>Ps 81:2; Exod 15:20; 1 Sam 10:5; 2 Sam 6:5</td>
<td>The tof was a loud hand drum used in merrymaking. A wooden or metal hoop was covered with the skin of a ram or goat and was played with the hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cymbals (tseltselim and metsiltayim)</td>
<td>Ps 150:5; 2 Sam 6:5; 1 Chr 13:8; 15:19</td>
<td>The tseltselim and metsiltayim were cymbals, probably played in a pair by one musician. The cymbals were used as signals for the singing to begin and between the sections of the psalms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cymbal (shalish)</td>
<td>1 Sam 18:6</td>
<td>The shalish might have been a type of cymbal or rattle.</td>
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Musical Instruments in Israel (Ps 150).

Vengeance is the Lord’s business (see 2:3; 94:1; 102:20; 142:7; 146:7).

Ps 150 Everything that breathes is commanded to praise the Lord as he deserves. The whole Psalter describes the greatness of the Lord, so this psalm is a fitting conclusion.

Ps 150:1 The phrase mighty heaven alludes to Gen 1 and to God’s glorious work in filling the emptiness.

Ps 150:3-5 The psalmist calls all people to praise God with instruments and dancing. Flutes: These wind instruments are not mentioned as being used in Temple worship. Clanging cymbals: Temple musicians clapped two bronze bowls together as percussion instruments.

Ps 150:6 Praise the Lord! This refrain is a fitting conclusion to the entire book of Psalms.
John wrote his Gospel to inspire faith. John knew Jesus intimately, and John’s Gospel provides an intimate portrait of the Lord. John referred to himself as “the disciple Jesus loved.” His Gospel has become the “beloved Gospel” of the church. Here we meet Nicodemus, doubting Thomas, Lazarus, and the Samaritan woman at the well. John records for us Jesus’ most memorable sayings, his longest sermons, and his most profound miracles. Here we meet God face to face.

SETTING
A small community of Christians lived in ancient Ephesus during the late first century AD. They had learned the remarkable story of Jesus from the apostles Paul and John. This early church became strong in faith under the leadership of these men. While many stories circulated about Jesus, the apostle John had his own recollections and insights. In the later years of his life, John wrote these stories down, providing his followers—and us—with the fourth Gospel.

As an evangelist, pastor, and theologian, John’s desire above all was for his followers to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (20:31). He realized that they had not had the privilege of seeing Jesus’ many signs and miracles as he had (20:29). John’s authority and deep experience with Jesus ring out from every story he told. As a valued eyewitness to Jesus’ life (19:35), John was the source of many stories from faraway Galilee and Judea. John had heard, seen, and touched the Word of life (see 1 Jn 1:1-4). He told about Nicodemus and rebirth, described Jesus’ miracle at Cana, and recorded many other episodes.

As the Christians of Ephesus told their fellow citizens about Jesus, they quickly found themselves debating about Jesus with rabbis in the local synagogues. Was Jesus truly the Son of God? How could he...
be the Messiah? Can Christians legitimately claim to be “children of Abraham”? Could anyone prove that Jesus’ claim of being sent from God was true? Guided by the Holy Spirit in his teaching and writing, John brilliantly led his Christian readers through these debates.

Tensions grew. As more Jews converted, small churches grew up alongside synagogues and began converting their members. Opposition to the Christian believers was inevitable. However, John stood by the church during terrible persecution and conflict. When it seemed that the fledgling church’s struggle with the prestigious synagogue community would overwhelm them, John courageously gave witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ. When false teachers later brought internal controversy and conflict to the church, John again gave the community strength. Writing letters to encourage and exhort (see 1, 2, and 3 John), John became the heroic pastor-theologian of Asia Minor.

John’s writing is as beloved today as it was in the earliest years of the church. Few books of the Bible have influenced Christian life and thought like John’s profound and dynamic Gospel. By combining intimacy of expression with penetrating insight, John provides a deeply satisfying portrait of Christ.

**SUMMARY**

John divided his Gospel into two main sections: chs 1–12 and chs 13–21. The first section, which has been called “The Book of Signs,” tells about Jesus’ public ministry of revealing himself to the Jewish world. The second section, sometimes called “The Book of Glory,” records Jesus’ private words to his disciples and tells of his death and resurrection.

**Chapters 1–12.** The Gospel prologue (1:1-18) artfully summarizes the entrance of God’s Word into the world. Jesus was baptized and called his earliest followers (1:19-51). Then a series of remarkable events (chs 2-4) highlights Jesus’ revelation of himself to the Jews. At a wedding in Cana, Jesus turned water into wine. In Jerusalem, he used a whip to drive corruption and money-dealing out of the Temple. He debated the meaning of spiritual rebirth with a rabbi named Nicodemus. At a well in Samaria, he met a woman with a checkered marital history and offered her “living water,” which no well can ever duplicate. In each of these events, Jesus unveiled his identity.

In the following section (chs 5–10), Jesus appears at a number of Jewish festivals, using ancient OT symbols and practices to reveal himself to God’s people. On the Sabbath, Jesus worked by healing a lame man. On Passover, Jesus provided bread for 5,000. In the symbolic light of the Festival of Shelters, Jesus healed a blind man, reinforcing his own identity as the light...
of the world. John’s clear message is that Jesus came to fulfill what Judaism had promised since OT times.

Then Jesus began to prepare for his death and resurrection. John describes Jesus’ arrival in Bethany, a town just east of Jerusalem (ch 11). His friend Lazarus had died, and Jesus raised him to life. Following this event (ch 12), Jesus made his final public appeal to the world to believe in him and his mission.

Chapters 13–21. John turns to Jesus’ death and resurrection, reminding readers that the cross is not a sign of despair but a picture of glory and wonder. Jesus was returning to the Father and needed to prepare his disciples for his departure. At his final Passover meal (chs 13–17), Jesus disclosed to his disciples the things nearest to his heart. He told them candidly about his death and departure to the Father. He reassured them that he would not abandon them, but that he would return and turn their sorrow into joy. He promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Finally, Jesus prayed for them.

Following this Passover meal, Jesus led his followers east of the city and across a valley to an olive grove called Gethsemane (ch 18). Judas soon appeared with a large contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards. Following his arrest, Jesus stood before the Jewish high council to be interrogated, first by Annas and then by Caiaphas, the reigning high priest. By morning, the Jewish leaders took Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, who asked probing questions about Jesus’ identity. Pilate, coaxed by the Jewish leaders, decided to crucify Jesus (ch 19).

The climax of John’s Gospel is Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (ch 20). This event begins a series of dramatic stories in which Jesus appeared to his followers and encouraged them. He gave them the Holy Spirit and commissioned them to represent him to the world. Jesus then gave his disciples their marching orders (ch 21). He reminded them of his power (21:1-14), reinstated Peter (21:15-17), and instructed him to follow him in his mission (21:18-23).

AUTHOR AND DATE
As with the other Gospels, John provides no explicit evidence as to its author, although the enigmatic figure of the “beloved disciple” provides clear clues (see 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2-10; 21:7, 20-24). The Gospel of John must be connected with this person, for he is identified as the eyewitness source of this record of Jesus’ life (19:35; 21:24).

Who was this beloved disciple? Leaders in the early church, beginning in AD 125, wrote that it was the apostle John, the son of Zebedee (see, e.g., Eusebius, Church History 3.23). This traditional view is sound and fully defensible. John was one of the Twelve and, along with James (his brother) and Peter, formed an inner circle around Jesus (Mark 3:17; Acts 1:13). The Gospel reflects this close perspective as it highlights Peter and John. Most scholars believe that John completed writing his Gospel by AD 90.

RECIPIENTS
John most likely wrote his Gospel for Jewish Christians living abroad in the Mediterranean world; with their grasp of Hebrew slipping, these believers were caught between the Jewish and Greek cultures.
John’s knowledge of Palestine and Judaism is reflected throughout his Gospel.

John assumed that his audience was unfamiliar with some particulars of Jesus’ world. For example, he explained that rabbi is a Hebrew word meaning “teacher” (1:38), and he gave an alternate name for the Sea of Galilee (6:1). At the same time, John assumed that his readers were familiar with Jewish traditions, concepts, and festivals. They probably were also familiar with the basic story presented in Mark’s Gospel. For example, John refers to John the Baptist’s imprisonment (3:24) without ever telling the complete story.

**MEANING AND MESSAGE**

Revelation and Redemption. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it” (1:5). The light of God has inhabited the world: Christ reveals the Father (14:9). In Christ we see the glory of God in a human being. Even though Jesus was persecuted, tried, and crucified, the light cannot be extinguished. Jesus’ purpose in revealing God is to redeem people: “The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone” (1:4). Those who embrace Christ’s revelation and redemption with faith will gain eternal life.

Worship and the Spirit. Worship must take place “in spirit and in truth” (4:24), energized and formed by the Spirit of God. Nicodemus had to be born of “water and Spirit” to enter the Kingdom of God (3:5). In Galilee, after feeding the 5,000, Jesus told the crowd that living bread is available in his body, which was to be sacrificed. He instructed them to consume his body and blood, symbolic of the Lord’s Supper (6:51-59). Yet worship focusing only on the individual elements and not accompanied by the Spirit of God is worth nothing (6:63).

Jesus Christ. John recorded Jesus’ descriptions about his nature, origin, and relationship to the Father. Jesus affirmed his oneness with the Father (10:30; 14:9-10) and their unity of purpose (5:17; 8:42), as well as their personal distinctiveness (14:28; 17:1-5). Jesus even used the very title (“I AM”) that God used for himself in the OT, thus affirming his own deity (8:58; 18:5; Exod 3:14).

The Holy Spirit. John’s Gospel underscores the Holy Spirit as a central feature of Jesus’ human experience (chs 4, 7) and of our lives (ch 3). The transforming power of God’s Spirit is a hallmark of true discipleship.

The Mission of the Church. God sent Jesus into the world (8:18) to proclaim his glory and to testify to the Good News of redemption. In his departure, the Son passed this mission on to the Spirit (16:5-11), who in turn would fill the church and empower believers to fulfill the mission of Jesus in the world (20:20-23; Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:7-8).

The End Times. Early Christians anticipated the return of Christ, and John affirms this anticipation. Yet in the meantime, believers can experience Jesus’ longed-for presence in the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ announcement of the Spirit’s coming echoes the language of his own second coming (see 14:15-23). In a vital way, Jesus is already with us in the Spirit as we continue to look forward to Christ’s personal return at the end of history.

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**FURTHER READING**

CRAIG L. BLOMBERG
The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: Issues and Commentary (2001)

F. F. BRUCE

GARY M. BURGE
John (2000)

PHILIP W. COMFORT
I Am the Way: A Spiritual Journey through the Gospel of John (2001)

PHILIP W. COMFORT AND WENDELL C. HAWLEY
Opening John’s Gospel and Epistles (2009)

GRANT OSBORNE

RODNEY A. WHITACRE
John (1999)
1. PRÓLOGUE: CHRIST, THE ETERNAL WORD (1:1-18)

1 In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He existed in the beginning with God.

3 God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.

4 The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

6 God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The One who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

7 He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. 12 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. 13 They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

14 So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

15 John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

16 From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.

1:1-18 The beginning of this prologue (1:1-5) might be a poem or hymn sung by the earliest Christians. The prologue's themes—the coming of the light into the world, the rejection of the light, and its gift of new life to believers—prepares readers for the story that follows.

1:1 Echoing Gen 1:1, John's Gospel introduces Jesus Christ, through whom God created everything (1:3); Jesus also creates new life in those who believe (1:12-13). The Gospel opens with its central affirmation, that Jesus Christ, the Word (Greek logos), not only revealed God but was God. In Greek thought, the logos was the rational principle guiding the universe and making life coherent. For Jewish people, the logos was the word of the Lord, an expression of God's wisdom and creative power. By Jesus' time, the logos was viewed as coming from God and having his personality (see Ps 33:6, 9; Prov 8:22-31); John affirmed this understanding (1:14).

1:3-4 and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created: Or and nothing that was created was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything. The Greek grammar allows either possibility.

1:3-18 God is the logos (1:1-2); all that God does, the logos likewise does. Throughout his Gospel, John rightly viewed Jesus' actions as divine activity.


1:4 The Word gave life: Life was God's original gift to his creatures (Gen 1:20-28; 2:7). Now the logos would give these creatures the possibility of new life through rebirth (1:13). As one of his first creative acts, God brought light (Gen 1:3). Now, in the re-creation of humanity through Jesus Christ, God offered light and life anew. Light is a key theme in John's Gospel.

1:5 The darkness can never extinguish it: Or the darkness has not understood it; literally the darkness cannot grasp it. The Greek word katalambano ("grasp") can mean either "understand" or "be hostile"; in John's Gospel, it means hostility. The darkness would try to destroy Jesus (the light), but it would fail. The light would successfully bring salvation to the world.

1:6-9 God sent a man, John the Baptist (literally a man named John) to herald Jesus' coming and to prepare God's people to receive Jesus as God's Son and Messiah (see 1:19-37; Luke 1:5-25, 57-80; 3:1-22; see also Isa 40:3; Mal 4:5-6).

1:8 Some Jews speculated that John the Baptist was the Messiah; some of his followers were even reluctant to follow Jesus (3:22-30). However, John the Baptist was not the light; his role was to announce Jesus (1:19-34).

1:10 The world cannot recognize the true light even when it encounters its Creator. The world lives in rebellion, loving darkness more than light (3:19; see "The World" at 17:5-26, p. 1807).

1:12 Only through divine renewal can people follow the light and enter God's family (3:1-17). • Individuals must believe in Christ to become children of God (12:35-36).

1:13 a birth that comes from God: People can escape the darkness only by God's grace (8:12; 12:35-36, 44-46).

1:14 the word became human: Literally became flesh stunned both Greeks and Jews. Greeks separated the sphere of God from the mundane world of humanity, which they called flesh (Greek sarx). John wrote that God himself became flesh in Christ (cp. 1:1). Jesus' humanity and divinity were complete, not partial. The two ideas—Jesus as 100-percent divine and 100-percent human—form the bedrock of a Christian understanding of Christ. • the Word . . . made his home: Greeks skênô, "pitched his tent" among us: This Greek word is related to the word used for the OT Tabernacle (Greek skênê, "tent, tabernacle"), the tent in the wilderness where the Lord's glory resided and where Israel came to worship (Exod 25:8-9). The Father's glory in the Tabernacle (Exod 40:34-38) was now present in Jesus Christ (2:11; 12:23-28, 41; 17:1-5). • Jesus offered God's unfailing love and faithfulness. Despite the world's hostile darkness, Jesus entered the world to save it (3:15-17).

1:15 he existed long before me: In a society where age was respected and honored (Lev 19:32; contrast Isa 3:5), John the Baptist emphasized Jesus' honor by pointing to his existence even before creation (1:1-3).

1:16 received one gracious blessing after another: Or received the grace of Christ rather than the grace of the law; a literal translation is received grace upon grace.
The Word (1:1-18)

John raises the curtain on his Gospel with a stunning description of Jesus Christ as “the Word” (Greek logos, 1:1). Both Greek and Jewish listeners in the first century would immediately recognize the profound meaning of this title. Greeks would have thought of the seminal forces that sustain the universe. Jewish minds would have thought back to God creating the world with his word (Gen 1:3-28). In Jesus’ day, the word of God took on creative personal attributes (Ps 33:6, 9). Jews viewed God’s word as personifying divine wisdom. Through Wisdom, God extended himself into the cosmos, creating the world (Prov 8:22-31).

In John’s drama, Jesus shares the same essence as God; the Son existed before time, and he was the agent of all creation. John anchors the divinity of Jesus in this ancient Jewish concept of Wisdom. The divine Wisdom that has existed from before time with God can now be known in Jesus Christ. In perhaps the most outrageous verse penned by an apostle, John writes that this Logos, this Wisdom, became flesh and lived among us as a human (1:14). What God is, the Logos is. The Logos is Jesus Christ.

1:17 the law: That is, the Torah, the first five books of the Bible (Genesis through Deuteronomy). Although God’s unfailing love and faithfulness (or grace and truth) are in the Torah, these qualities are fully revealed in Christ (3:16; 13:1).

1:18 Moses was denied his desire to see God directly (Exod 33:18-20). Only Jesus has seen the Father, so he alone completely knows him and can tell us about him (3:32-35; 14:9-10). But the unique One, who is himself God (some manuscripts read But the one and only Son): The Son, who sees the Father, is himself God—not simply a messenger who knows something about God. John explicitly affirms Christ’s deity. Jesus shares the substance of God’s being.

1:19–12:50 Jesus reveals himself to the world through his miraculous signs and sermons. Audiences were divided: Some wanted to believe in him; others opposed him. This division intensifies as the book unfolds. Jesus ended his public ministry with a final appeal for people to believe in him (12:44-50).

1:19-51 John’s Gospel gives limited attention to John the Baptist compared to the synoptic Gospels (Matt 3:1-6; Mark 1:6-8; Luke 1:18-25; 3:1-13). Yet the apostle John wants us to see that John the Baptist correctly identified and exalted Jesus. John the Baptist’s disciples leave him and follow Jesus; Jesus took over the ministry John began, increasing as John decreased (3:30).


1:20 The Jews expected the Messiah (the Hebrew form of the Greek word Christ) to bring spiritual leadership and political redemption to Israel (see Deut 18:15; see also the Jewish intertestamental book Psalms of Solomon).

1:21 Elijah was to be the Messiah’s forerunner (Mal 4:5). John the Baptist fulfilled the forerunner’s role, though he denied being the prophet Elijah (see Matt 11:14; Luke 1:17). • Are you the Prophet we are expecting? Literally Are you the Prophet? See Deut 18:15, 18; Mal 4:5-6; see also John 6:14, 7:40-41.

1:22-23 Then who are you? John the Baptist simply wanted to be known as a voice shouting in the wilderness (see Isa 40:3).

1:24 The Pharisees were deeply devoted to the Scriptures and earnestly desired a righteous life (see “Pharisees” at Matt 3:7, p. 1581). They also believed in the coming Messiah, which explains their inquiries here. Some Pharisees became believers in Jesus (Acts 15:5), including the apostle Paul (Acts 26:5; Phil 3:5).

1:25-26 Jewish baptisms were ritual washings for becoming ceremonially pure following contact with impurity (Lev 8:6; Num 19:7). John’s announcement of the Messiah’s arrival required that participants confess their sins and be baptized (Matt 3:6). Baptism later became the symbol of membership in Jesus’ kingdom (Acts 2:38; see also John 4:1-2), • with: Or in; also in 1:31, 33.
do not recognize. Though his ministry follows mine, I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals.”

This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

Jesus, the Lamb of God

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The \( \text{λόφος} \) of God who takes away the sin of the world!

He is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.’ I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Then John testified, “I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I didn’t know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water and rest upon him. I didn’t know he was the Chosen One of God.”

The First Disciples

The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, “Look! There is the \( \text{λόφος} \) of God!” When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them.

They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

Come and see,” he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the \( \text{μεσσιας} \) (which means “Christ”).

Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, “Your name is Simon, son of John— but you will be called Cephas” (which means “Peter”).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.” Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.

Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

“Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

“Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied.

As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”

“How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”
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1:49
2 Sam 7:14
Ps 2:2
John 1:14; 20:31
rabbî (4461)
• John 3:2

1:51
Gen 28:12

Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!” Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.”

John THE BAPTIST (1:19-37)

John the Baptist was a fiery open-air preacher who called people to repent and be baptized, to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. John acted in the role of Elijah, to prepare people for “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal 4:4-5; see Matt 11:14; 17:12; Mark 9:13).

John’s birth, like that of Jesus, was miraculous. His parents had been unable to have children and were elderly (Luke 1:5-25). His mother, Elizabeth, was a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:36), so John was related to Jesus. The two miraculous births near the same time signaled the beginning of God’s redeeming work.

John was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth and devoted his life to preparing people for the coming of the Lord (Luke 1:15-17). Living in the desert (Luke 1:80), he began preaching when he was about thirty years old. Dressed like a prophet and subsisting on desert food (locusts and wild honey, Matt 3:4; Mark 1:6), he called everyone to repent and be baptized (Matt 3:1-2; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:1-3). He even castigated the religious leaders who came to hear him (Matt 3:7).

Though John reluctantly baptized Jesus (Matt 3:13-17; Luke 3:21), he considered Jesus his superior, the one who would “baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (1:33; Matt 3:11; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:16; cp. 3:23-30). He encouraged his followers to become Jesus’ disciples—and many did, including Andrew and possibly John (1:35-40), as well as Apollos (Acts 18:24-26) and the twelve disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7).

Herod Antipas received harsh judgment from John because of Herod’s unlawful marriage to Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. To please Herodias, Herod imprisoned John and then beheaded him (Matt 14:3-12; Mark 6:17-29; Luke 3:19-20). John’s imprisonment marked the beginning of Jesus’ public preaching (Matt 4:12; Mark 1:14).

Shortly before his death, John seemed to be confused about Jesus and sent messengers from prison to ask him if he really was the Messiah. Jesus did not do what most people anticipated the Messiah to do. Rather than bringing judgment and a visible kingdom, he brought forgiveness, healing, and a spiritual kingdom. To reassure John, Jesus spoke of the miraculous things God was doing through him (Luke 7:18-23).

John remained faithful to his calling throughout his life, consistently preaching repentance and the judgment of God, even to people who had no desire to hear it. Jesus referred to John as one of the greatest servants of God who had ever lived (Matt 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-35), the end of a long line of prophets anticipating the coming of the Kingdom of God (Luke 16:16). John stood on the threshold of the new age, proclaiming its coming to all who would hear.

1:51 I tell you the truth [Greek amēn amēn]: Jesus often used this expression to emphasize what he was about to say. In John’s Gospel, the Greek word amēn is always doubled. • you will all see heaven open: Jesus made the comparison with Jacob explicit (see note on 1:47; see Gen 28:10-22). Like Jacob, Nathanael would see God at work. Jesus himself is the new Bethel (“house of God,” Gen 28:19), the place where God lives. • going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth: Literally going up and down on the Son of Man; see Gen 28:10-17. “Son of Man” is a title Jesus used for himself (see note on 9:35; see also Dan 7:13-14; Mark 8:31). • John the apostle used several names for Jesus (Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah). Knowing Jesus’ true identity is necessary to fully understanding and following him.

2:1-10:42 Jesus illustrated his identity and work through the institutions and festivals of Judaism (see 2:2; 5:1). 2:1-25 Jesus appeared at two symbolic Jewish ceremonies. At a wedding in Cana (2:1-12), he replaced the ritual cleansing water with his own superior wine. Later he cleansed the Temple (2:13-25).

2:1 The next day: Literally On the third day; see 1:35, 43. • The ceremonies surrounding a wedding celebration could last as long as a week; weddings often included dramatic processions in which the groom would bring the bride to his home for the festivities (Matt 25:1-13). 2:3 When the wine supply ran out, the host’s family would face embarrassment for failure to plan properly. Perhaps Jesus arrived unexpectedly (cp. Matt 25:1-13), bringing his circle of
“Dear woman, that’s not our problem,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”

But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled, he said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed his instructions.

When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. 10 "A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a bit to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!”

This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples.

The Jerusalem Temple Is Cleansed


It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle,

Miraculous Signs (2:1-11)

The Gospels use three words to describe Jesus’ miraculous works. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Greek word dunamis ("power") describes an act of raw force that amazes observers and leads to the inevitable conclusion that God must be at work in Jesus (see Mark 6:2).

In John, however, this response of amazement is absent. John does not use the popular term dunamis. Instead, he labels each of Jesus’ miracles as a “sign” (Greek semeion), an event that has a deeper meaning. John also describes Jesus’ miracles as “works” (Greek erga, see 10:25; see 7:3, “miracles”; 9:3, “power”). Christ’s miracles were part of the work that God gave him to do (17:4), revealing the Father to the world.

John selectively records seven miraculous signs that occurred during Jesus’ ministry: (1) changing water to wine (2:1-11); (2) healing the official’s son (4:46-54); (3) healing a paralyzed man (5:1-17); (4) feeding 5,000 (6:1-15); (5) walking on water (6:16-21); (6) healing a blind man (9:1-41); and (7) raising Lazarus from the dead (11:38-44). John also records the miraculous catch of fish after Jesus’ resurrection (21:4-14). Most of the seven signs were met with belief (2:11; 4:48, 53; 11:45-48). However, the sign itself was not Jesus’ purpose. Instead, the message behind the sign is always in view, so the signs are usually matched to a discourse by Jesus. Jesus fed the 5,000, for example, not just to meet their needs, but so that people would see him as the bread of life (6:35), given for them when he died on the cross (6:51).

disciples, which might explain why his mother brought the problem to him.

* A wedding banquet was a primary celebration in Jewish village life, and this episode also symbolized the joy of the Messiah’s arrival.

2:4 Jesus initially distanced himself from the problem. His mission and its timing could not be set by a human agenda. * Jesus’ time (literally hour) would come in the future when he was glorified as he was lifted up on the cross (12:23; 17:1).

2:6 Carved from solid rock, the stone water jars were used for religious washing ceremonies (see Mark 7:1-4). Jesus was about to fill Jewish ceremonial with new content. * twenty to thirty gallons: Greek 2 or 3 measures [75 to 113 liters].

2:9-10 The master of ceremonies cited a proverb. The best wine was always served first when palates were most sensitive; yet this miraculous wine, served last, was the very best imaginable. Good wine symbolized God’s blessing (Amos 9:13-14). The Messiah, God’s greatest blessing, had arrived at last.

2:11 Jesus had offered his first miraculous sign (see “Miraculous Signs” at 2:1-11, above). In it, he revealed the glory of God (see also 1:14; 11:4, 40).

2:13 Passover, an annual spring festival, commemorated Israel’s rescue from slavery in Egypt (Exod 12). Jews traveled to Jerusalem to participate in the festival (Deut 16:1-16). Because John refers to three Passover Festivals (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), many experts conclude that Jesus had a three-year public ministry.

2:14-17 Those who came for Passover needed to have approved sacrifices for worship. From this need grew a considerable industry for selling animals and exchanging money, but this business was being conducted in the Temple. Jesus, like a prophet, demanded that God’s house be returned to its intended uses—worship, prayer, instruction, and sacrifice. This put Jesus at odds with the Temple leadership. * The synoptic Gospels place the clearing of the Temple near the end of Jesus’ ministry (Matt 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46). John might have placed his account of the event here to emphasize a connection with the miracle that transformed the water in purification jars into wine (2:1-11). The Temple and the stone jars were both instruments of purification in Judaism. Stone jars filled with water for ritual washing
scattered the money changers’ coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. 16 Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, “Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father’s house into a marketplace!”

Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: “Passion for God’s house will consume me.”

But the Jewish leaders demanded, “What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it.”

“All right,” Jesus replied. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

“What!” they exclaimed. “It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?”

But when Jesus said “this temple,” he meant his own body. 21 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.

Nicodemus: A Religious Leader Visits Jesus

Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. 24 But Jesus didn’t trust them, because he knew human nature. 25 No one needed to tell him what mankind is really like.

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. 2 After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.”

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are reborn again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus (3:1–9)

Nicodemus was a highly respected Jewish Pharisee (3:1), one of the prominent members of the high council, who appears to have become a convert of Jesus. He is mentioned only in the Gospel of John.

Intrigued by the authority of Jesus and the miracles he was doing, Nicodemus went to see him secretly, at night, in a serious attempt to discover who he really was. Jesus challenged him with the need to be born again, if he wished to be in the Kingdom of God (3:1–8). The Gospel does not give us Nicodemus’s response.

Later, however, in opposition to his colleagues on the Jewish high council, he strongly argued that Jesus should be given a fair trial (7:50). After Jesus was crucified, he bought seventy-five pounds of expensive perfumed ointment for his burial, took it to the tomb, and assisted Joseph of Arimathea in burying him (19:39–42). Thus, Nicodemus appears to be an example of a Jewish Pharisee who came to believe in Jesus and was willing to express that commitment publicly after his death.

now contained Jesus’ wine, and a stone Temple dedicated to sacrificial purification would be replaced by Christ himself (2:19–21). Another view is that Jesus cleared the Temple at the beginning and again at the end of his ministry.

2:17 Passion for God’s house will consume me: Or “Concern for God’s house will be my undoing.” See Ps 69:9.

2:19 Destroy this temple: Herod the Great began reconstructing the Temple’s magnificent structure in 20 bc, and work on it continued until 64 AD. This explains why Jesus’ audience was amazed when he claimed he could destroy and rebuild it in a few days. However, Jesus spoke figuratively of his body as the temple where God was present (see 1:14; 1:51)—his body was destroyed and restored in three days through the resurrection, rendering the Jerusalem Temple and its services obsolete. Later, at his trial, Jesus’ symbolic reference to destroying the Temple was used as evidence of blasphemy (Mark 14:58).

2:22 they believed: Witnessing a miracle from God can inspire belief, but it is not the deepest faith possible (20:29).

2:24 Jesus didn’t trust them: John uses a play on words here. Because of his signs, many people trusted in Jesus (2:23), but Jesus didn’t trust them. This did not refer to specific people Jesus met in Jerusalem, but to his knowledge of all humanity.

3:1 John links 2:25 and 3:1 by referring to humanity as a whole (“man-kind,” 2:25) and then to one specific man using the same Greek word (anthropos) in both verses. *Nicodemus* was saturated in religious knowledge and had witnessed Jesus’ work (2:13–24), but he had not experienced spiritual rebirth. *a Pharisee: See note on 1:24. He was elite, proud of his spiritual purity, and well educated in Jewish law.*

3:2 After dark: Nicodemus might have feared public association with Jesus. Night also symbolizes the realm of evil, untruth, and unbelief (9:4; 11:10; 13:30).

3:3 born again: Or born from above; also in 3:7. John’s expression “from above” (3:19; 19:11) means “from God.” To experience spiritual rebirth, a person must be completely renewed through God’s power. *Nicodemus interpreted Jesus’ words physically; he demonstrated that those in darkness, who do not have spiritual rebirth, cannot understand Jesus or other “heavenly things” (3:12). Jesus sometimes used ironic misunderstanding as a teaching strategy (see “Misunderstanding” at 7:32–36, p. 1785).
“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”

Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and of the Spirit. 6Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. 7So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ 8The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”

“How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked.

Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? 11 I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. 12 But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

18 “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. 19 And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. 20 All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. 21 But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”

John the Baptist Exalts Jesus

22 Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.

At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. 24 (This was before John was thrown into prison.) A debate broke out between John’s disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing. So John’s disciples came to him and said, “Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the...”

3:5 water and the Spirit (or and spirit); the Greek word Spirit can also be translated wind; see note on 3:8: John the Baptist baptized with water; Jesus baptizes with the Spirit (1:33).

3:6 the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life: Literally what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

3:7 The Greek word translated You is plural; also in 3:12.

3:8 Wind translates the same word in Greek as Spirit (Greek pneuma). The wind is an apt image for the Spirit, who is sent from heaven and cannot be contained or controlled.

3:13 There is great distance between this world and heaven (see 1:51; 3:31; 6:38, 42). Jesus bridged that distance, validating his divine status by defeating death and returning to heaven (16:5-11).

Son of Man: Some manuscripts add who lives in heaven. “Son of Man” is a title Jesus used for himself.

3:14-15 Jesus was lifted up on the cross so that all people could understand the way of salvation, look to him in faith, and have eternal life.

3:15 everyone who believes in him will have eternal life: Or everyone who believes will have eternal life in him. The Greek syntax allows for either interpretation.

3:16-21 Because there are no quotation marks around Jesus’ speech in Greek, translators debate where Jesus’ speech ends and John’s commentary begins; 3:16-21 might be John’s commentary.

3:16 The truth that God loved the world is basic to Christian understanding (1 Jn 4:9-10). God’s love extends beyond the limits of race and nation, even to those who oppose him (see “The World” at 17:5-26, p. 1807). • The Son came to save—not condemn (3:17)—men and women who habitually embrace the darkness (3:19-21).

3:18 As light penetrates and exposes the world’s darkness, God’s judgment on the world has already begun. Those who see this light and recognize the tragedy of their own situation have the responsibility of believing in God’s . . . Son (3:16-17).

3:19-20 When people live in spiritual darkness, they do not desire to be enlightened by Jesus, “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5). Evil and darkness do not ignore the light; they wage war against it, trying to bring it down. But the darkness cannot extinguish the light (1:5). Those who refuse to believe live in darkness (cp. 13:30) and stumble because they cannot see (11:10). In the end, however, their sins will be exposed (5:28-30; Rev 20:11-15).

3:21 can see that they are doing what God wants: Or can see God at work in what he is doing. The Greek syntax allows for either interpretation.

3:22-36 John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the one who is truly from above (3:31); this requires John’s followers to shift their allegiance to Jesus.

3:22 Jesus spent some time . . . baptizing: See 4:2, which clarifies that Jesus’ disciples did the baptizing.

3:24 Before John was thrown into prison (see Matt 14:1-12; Mark 1:14; 6:14-29; Luke 3:19-20), he and Jesus worked together at the Jordan River. Once John was arrested, Jesus moved north into Galilee (Mark 1:14).


3:26 everybody is going to him: Jesus’ popularity made some of John’s followers envious.
Believing (3:10-18)

Believing occupies a central place in John’s Gospel. John does not use the noun faith that appears frequently elsewhere in the NT (e.g., see Matt 8:8-10; Mark 11:22-24; Acts 20:21; Rom 1:17; 3:27-31; 4:3-5; Heb 11:1-39; Jas 2:14-24; 1 Pet 1:5-7). John prefers the verb believe to underscore that faith is not static like a doctrine or a dogma, but dynamic, requiring action.

In John’s Gospel, “believing” in Jesus is the trait of all true disciples.

In the Gospel of John, the verb translated “believe” is often followed by the Greek preposition εἰς (“into”). No parallel exists for this in ancient Greek usage. For John, faith is not a status, but an investment in the person of Jesus. Faith means accepting who Jesus is and what he claims to be. Faith constitutes a commitment to let his call change the way we live. Faith is the work God wants from us (6:29) as we abide in Jesus’ word, as we love him, and as we obey his commands (8:31; 15:1-17; see 1 Jn 5:10).

3:27-35 John the Baptist’s speech was inspired by two issues: (1) Some had questioned the legitimacy of his baptism (see 1:26); and (2) his disciples were concerned that people were beginning to follow Jesus instead of John (3:26).

3:29 John the Baptist saw Jesus as the bridegroom and himself as the best man. His response deflected glory from himself and elevated Jesus’ stature. 3:31 Jesus had come from above, so he was uniquely able to reveal the Father (1:18; 3:13). • Some manuscripts do not include and is greater than anyone else.

3:34-35 The Father gives the Son the Spirit without limit as a sign of his profound love (3:35). It also illustrates Jesus’ divinity. John presents the one God as three persons (cp. 1 Jn 5:5-12).

3:36 God gave the gift of eternal life, promising new life and intimacy in a present experience with God. • Those who reject the Son will not see life. The world in its darkness stands under God’s angry judgment (Rom 1–3).

4:1-42 At a historic well in Samaria, Jesus offered himself as living water. Jesus engaged and confronted people with the revelation of God, and they either followed or fell away. • The Samaritan woman contrasted with Nicodemus at every turn: a woman (not a man), a Samaritan (not a Jew), a sinner (not righteous), and an outcast (not one of Israel’s rabbis). While Nicodemus fell silent and never responded to Jesus’ challenges (3:1-21), this woman acknowledged Jesus as Lord, remained in the light, and exhibited signs of discipleship (see 1:35-51).

4:1 Jesus: Some manuscripts read The Lord.

4:2 Jesus himself didn’t baptize anyone, but left water baptism to his disciples. After his glorification on the cross (7:37-39), Jesus baptized in the Holy Spirit (1:33; Acts 2:4).

4:3 After John the Baptist had been imprisoned (see Mark 6:14-29), Jesus left Judea (cp. Mark 1:14).

4:4-6 In going north to Galilee, Jesus took the less-preferred route through Samaria. Samaria had a long history of tension with Judea (see 2 Kgs 17:24-41; Ezra 4:1-5; Neh 4:1-23; 6:1-19). In Jesus’ day, harsh racial and cultural conflict existed between Jews and Samaritans. Jews normally avoided Samaria by first going east to Jericho, then following the Jordan Valley north. • Sychar was probably in the region of Shechem. Jesus had come to Jacob’s well; Jacob had owned land near Shechem (Gen 33:18-19).

4:7 Due to the heat, it was customary for the women to draw water in early morning or evening. However, this woman lived in isolation, separated from her community. Jesus was compassionate toward outcasts.
9 The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?”

10 Jesus replied, “If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.”

11 But sir, you don’t have a rope or a bucket,” she said, “and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you’re greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?”

12 Jesus replied, “Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.”

13 “Please, sir,” the woman said, “give me this water! Then I’ll never be thirsty again, and I won’t have to come here to get water.”

14 “Go and get your husband,” Jesus told her.

15 “I don’t have a husband,” the woman replied.

16 Jesus said, “You’re right! You don’t have a husband—and for you have had five husbands, and you aren’t even married to the man you’re living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!”

17 “Sir,” the woman said, “you must be a prophet.

18 So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?”

19 Jesus replied, “Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. 20 You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews.

21 But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. 22 For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”

23 The woman said, “I know the ‘Messiah’ is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

24 Then Jesus told her, “I AM the Messiah!”

25 Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, “What do you want with her?” or “Why are you talking to her?”

4:9 The woman was surprised because social taboos would keep a Jewish teacher like Jesus from speaking to her (4:18). However, Jesus did not let social taboos constrain him from giving her what she truly needed. Some manuscripts do not include the first sentence of this verse.

4:10 Shechem had no rivers and thus no living water (see “Living Water,” facing page). However, Jesus was speaking symbolically. This gift from God was the Holy Spirit (7:37-39).

4:11 Jacob’s well was more than 100 feet (30 meters) deep, and required a long rope for drawing water. The woman misunderstood Jesus’ words because she was still in darkness (see “Misunderstanding” at 7:32-36, p. 1785).

4:12 Our ancestor Jacob: The Samaritan woman appealed with reverence to the sacred traditions attached to the well rather than to the presence of God before her.

4:14 The notion of a fresh, bubbling spring was a powerful image in the dry climate of Israel. Those who come to God will neither hunger nor thirst (see Isa 49:10; 55:1-3; Jer 2:13).

4:15 The woman asked Jesus for this water, but she did not grasp the spiritual implications of his words. To overcome the spiritual barrier, Jesus addressed her sin (4:16-18).

4:16-18 Immorality blocked the woman’s understanding. Her marital affairs, including having five husbands, underscored her sinful life.

4:19-20 The woman dodged Jesus’ moral probing and brought up the historical ethnic division between Jews and Samaritans.

4:19 A prophet: Jesus revealed knowledge about the woman (4:16-18) that was inaccessible to the average person (cp. 1:48). As the woman’s understanding of Jesus unfolded, her names for him became increasingly well informed. Earlier she recognized him as a Jew (4:9) and called him sir (4:11, 15, 19). Later she thought he might be the Messiah (4:29). Finally, the people of the village recognized him as Savior of the world (4:42). Her growing understanding of Jesus’ identity is a testimony to John’s readers (see 20:31).

4:20 The Samaritans worshiped at Mount Gerizim (literally on this mountain), which towered above Shechem. Both were important OT locations (see Gen 12:6-7; 33:19; Deut 11:29; Josh 8:33; 24:1, 25, 32).

4:21-22 Jesus affirmed that the Jews had preserved the right understanding of the one you worship. • Salvation comes through the Jews: God gave the Jews a special relationship with him, and the Messiah was to be a Jew (see also Rom 9:4-5).

4:24 In spirit and in truth: One Greek preposition governs both words (literally in spirit and truth) and makes them a single concept. True worship occurs as God’s Spirit reveals God’s truth and reality to the worshiper. Jesus Christ is the Truth (14:6; cp. 14:17, 15:26).

4:26 I am the Messiah (or “I am the Messiah” here), or “I am the Lord”; Greek reads “I am, the one speaking to you”; see Exod 3:14; Jesus’ phrase was unusual and emphatic, and it suggests identity with God (see 8:38; Exod 3:14).

4:27-30 The woman was tentative about Jesus’ identity (4:29), yet she ran to the village and told everyone to come and see. Testifying to others is a mark of discipleship (see 1:39, 46).
her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, 29"Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?" 30So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

31Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, "Rabbi, eat something." 32But Jesus replied, "I have a kind of food you know nothing about." 33"Did someone bring him food while we were gone?" the disciples asked each other.

34Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. 35You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. 36The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! 37You know the saying, 'One plants and another harvests.' And it's true. 38I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest."

Many Samaritans Believe 39Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I ever did!" 40When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, 41long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. 42Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world."

Jesus Heals a Government Official's Son 43At the end of the two days, Jesus went on to Galilee. 44He himself had said that a prophet is not honored in his own hometown. 45Yet the Galileans welcomed him, for they had been in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration and had seen everything he did there.

46As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick. 47When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged

### Living Water (4:10-14)

In Israel, a land that frequently experienced drought, people were keenly aware of water sources and water quality. Springs and rivers that ran all year were few, so the land relied on cisterns to catch and store the winter rains and wells to tap underground water tables. In Jewish culture, “dead water” referred to standing and stored water. “Living water” referred to moving water, as in rivers, springs, and rainfall. Such water was precious because it was fresh. Because it came directly from God, it was used for ritual washings (see Lev 14:5-6, 50-51; 15:13; Num 19:17-19).

The distinction between “dead” and “living” water explains why the woman of Samaria was so perplexed when Jesus offered her living water (4:12). Samaria has no river. If Jacob had to dig a well there, how could Jesus offer superior water? Jesus mentioned living water again in Jerusalem at the autumn Festival of Shelters (7:37-39). The festival, which fell during a dry time of year, included an emphasis on water. In this setting, Jesus stepped forward and made an extravagant claim: Anyone looking for living water should come to him and drink. Jesus is the source of living water; he came directly from God and brought divine renewal.

4:32-34 While Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman, the disciples were gone buying food (4:8); now they urged Jesus to eat. Jesus continued to speak symbolically, but they did not understand him (4:33). Later, when the disciples received theizabeth Spirit, they understood (2:22). Jesus received his nourishment from doing what his Father told him to do (see 5:30; 6:38; 7:18; 8:50; 9:4; 10:37-38; 12:49-50).

4:35 Four months between planting and harvest: Jesus cited a local parable to contrast the natural harvest with his own. It was harvest time in Samaria, and the fields were ripe (literally white). Jesus, however, had planted seed at the well and now was already reaping the harvest of belief among the Samaritans (4:39-42).

4:38 others: Jesus might have meant John the Baptist, or he might have been referring to the work he had just done with the Samaritan woman.

4:39-40 Many Samaritans: The religiously sophisticated “chosen people” in Jerusalem did not respond to Jesus with faith (ch 3). By contrast, many believed in Jesus because of the testimony of this outcast woman.

4:42 The Samaritans had experienced for themselves that Jesus was true. Their name for Jesus, Savior of the world (also used in 1 Jn 4:14), demonstrated that the Samaritans were keenly aware of their distance from Judaism. Jesus’ ministry was not simply for Jews, but for all people (1:4-12; cp. 12:20-26).

4:44-45 Unlike Jesus’ fellow Jews, the Galileans welcomed him, but their welcome was based on awe of Jesus’ miracles (cp. 2:23-25), not true faith.
Jesus and the Sabbath (5:1-47)

Jesus Heals a Man on the Sabbath

5 Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. 2Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. 3Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. 6When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?"

7"I can't, sir," the sick man said, "for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me."

8Jesus told him, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!"

9Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, 10so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, "You can't work on the Sabbath! The law doesn't allow you to carry that sleeping mat!"

11But he replied, "The man who healed me told me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' "

12Who said such a thing as that?" they demanded.

13The man didn't know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. 14But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, "Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you."

15Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

Jesus Claims to Be the Son of God

16So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules. 17But Jesus sharply criticized the Galileans who desired miraculous signs and wonders before they would believe (see "Miraculous Signs" at 2:1-11, p. 1772; see also 6:30).

4:48 Your son will live! Jesus also healed the centurion's slave (Matt 8:5-13) and the Phoenician woman's daughter (Matt 15:21-28) from a distance.

4:50 Just like many others (2:23; 4:39), the official and his household believed in Jesus because of the miracle.

4:53 second miraculous sign . . . in Galilee: Two miracles at Cana (2:11; 4:46) frame this section of John's Gospel.

5:1-10:42 In this section Jesus appears at a series of Jewish festivals and uses their imagery to reveal more profound truths about himself. He appears at Sabbath (ch 5), Passover (ch 6), the Festival of Shelters (chs 7-9), and Hanukkah (ch 10). In each case, Jesus himself replaces some vital element in the ceremonies of the festival.

5:1-40 This chapter reads like a courtroom drama, with a description of the crime (5:1-15), followed by a decision to prosecute (5:16), a description of the charges (5:18), and Jesus' defense (5:17, 19-40).

5:1 one of the Jewish holy days: Because Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the celebration, it was probably one of the three pilgrimage festivals of Judaism (see Exod 23:14-17; Deut 16:16). These festivals lasted one week.

5:2 Greek copyists who had never been to Jerusalem had difficulty interpreting and spelling the name Bethesda: Other manuscripts read Beth-zatha; still others read Bethsaida. The best choice is Beth-es-da ("house of flowing").

5:3 The pool of Bethesda had become a healing sanctuary for crowds of sick people who believed miraculous cures were possible. Some manuscripts add an expanded conclusion to verse 3 and all of verse 4: waiting for a certain movement of the water, 'for an angel of the Lord came from time to time and stirred up the water. And the first person to step in after the water was stirred was healed of whatever disease he had. Most scholars believe this was not part of John's original text, but it represents an ancient tradition that provided helpful background information.

5:5 No social program helped this man, who had been ill for thirty-eight years. Hygiene and mobility were impossible, and he likely begged for a living from people who came to use the pool (see 5:7). His situation seemed hopeless.

5:8-9 Jesus healed the sick man instantly, only asking for his obedience. As proof of healing, Jesus told him to pick up his mat and walk. *Jesus worked this miracle on the Sabbath*, a weekly day of rest on which all work was prohibited (based on Gen 2:2; Exod 20:8). Jewish tradition outlined thirty-nine categories of work that were not allowed (Mishnah Shabbat 7:2). Carrying something such as a sleeping mat from one place to another was banned (5:10). Therefore, the healed man broke the tradition by obeying Jesus' command.

5:12 Who said such a thing? The story ominously turns from a miraculous wonder to a Sabbath crime requiring the identity of the healer who breached tradition.

5:14 stop sinning: Though the man had been healed physically, he still needed to learn obedience to the Lord. The man's next action (5:15) might indicate that he didn't listen.

5:16 harassing: Or persecuting.
Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” 18 So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

19 So Jesus explained, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.

20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished. 21 For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants. 22 In addition, the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge. 23 So that everyone will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him.

24 I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.

25 And I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it’s here now, when the dead will hear my voice—the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen will live. 26 The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. 27 And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. 28 Don’t be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God’s Son, 29 and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment. 30 I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will.

Wit nesses to Jesus
31 “If I were to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid. 32 But someone else is also testifying about me, and I assure you that everything he says about me is true. 33 In fact, you sent investigators

The Jewish Leaders (5:9-18)

Jesus experienced numerous conflicts with Jewish leaders throughout his public ministry. These opponents viewed themselves as defending the Temple and its sacrifices or the synagogue and its teachings. In Jesus’ final week in Jerusalem, these debates intensified (Matt 23) and contributed to the case against him.

When John wrote his Gospel, Christians were being persecuted by local Jewish synagogues, and the language of their debate spilled over into John’s Gospel (see Acts 14:19; 1 Thes 2:14; cp. Gal 1:13-14). The Greek term translated “the Jewish leaders” could be literally translated “the Jews.” This word took on a technical meaning: It refers to the Temple leadership who confronted Jesus, judged him, and orchestrated his crucifixion (see 1:19; 2:18; 5:9-18; 9:18-22).

This is important because the NT—and particularly John’s Gospel—has often been seen as anti-Semitic. But the truth is that Jesus, who was himself a Jew, did not wrestle with “Jews” in general. His antagonists were the “Jewish leaders”—the brokers of religious power in first-century Jerusalem.

5:17 My Father is always working, and so am I: Although work was prohibited on the Sabbath, even rabbis agreed that God worked on the Sabbath in giving life (births) and in taking life (deaths). The heart of Jesus’ defense was to compare himself to God; the Jewish leaders objected to this claim of divine privilege.

5:19-30 Jesus claimed that his work on the Sabbath was the same as God’s work on the Sabbath. Jesus claimed to be equal with God, doing the things God does. Yet he submitted to God’s will, doing only what . . . the Father willed.

5:21 Most Jews firmly believed in resurrection but viewed it as something God alone could accomplish. Jesus claimed that he gives life.

5:22 In addition to giving life, Jesus claimed the absolute authority to judge, which belongs to God alone.

5:23 the Father . . . sent him: In the ancient world, a person could send an authorized representative to seal a contract or make an authoritative decision. Jesus claimed to be God’s representative, so obeying him is the same as obeying God, and dishonoring Jesus is dishonoring God.

5:24 Jesus is the giver of life as well as the judge (see 5:21-22), but he never worked independently of the Father.

5:27 Son of Man is a title Jesus used for himself.

5:31-40 God’s law requires more than one witness in a trial (Deut 17:6), so Jesus acknowledged that his own testimony was admissible only when confirmed by other witnesses. Thus, he introduced a series of witnesses for his defense.

5:32 The first witness for Jesus’ defense was God himself. Jesus might have had in mind God’s voice at his baptism (Mark 1:11) or the presence of God that enabled Jesus to perform miracles.
to listen to the Baptists, and his testimony about me was true. 34 Of course, I have no need of human witnesses, but I say these things so you might be saved. 35 John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were excited for a while about his message. 36 But I have a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles. The Father gave me these works to accomplish, and they prove that he sent me. 37 And the Father who sent me has testified about me himself. You have never heard his voice or seen him face to face, 38 and you do not have his message in your hearts, because you do not believe me—the one he sent to you. 39 You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! 40 Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

41 Your approval means nothing to me, because I know you don’t have God’s love within you. 42 For I have come to you in my Father’s name, and you have rejected me. Yet if others come in their own name, you gladly welcome them. 43 No wonder you can’t believe! For you gladly honor each other, but you don’t care about the honor that comes from the one who alone is God.

45 Yet it isn’t I who will accuse you before the Father. Moses will accuse you! Yes, Moses, in whom you put your hopes. 46 If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. 47 But since you don’t believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?"

Jesus and Passover (6:1-71)

**Jesus Feeds Five Thousand**


6 After this, Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. 2A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick. 3 Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him. (It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration.) 4 Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, “Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?” 5 He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.

“Philip replied, “Even if we worked for months, we wouldn’t have enough money to feed them!”

8 Then Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up. 9 “There’s a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?”

10 “Tell everyone to sit down,” Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. 12 After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, “Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted.” 13 So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the
people who had eaten from the five barley loaves. 14 When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, “Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!” 15 When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.  

Jesus Walks on Water  
John 6:16-21  
//Matt 14:22-33 //Mark 6:44-52  
16 That evening Jesus’ disciples went down to the shore to wait for him. 17 But as darkness fell and Jesus still hadn’t come back, they got into the boat and headed across the lake toward Capernaum. 18 Soon a gale swept down upon them, and the sea grew very rough. 19 They had rowed three or four miles when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. They were terrified, 20 but he called out to them, “Don’t be afraid. I am here!” 21 Then they were eager to let him in the boat, and immediately they arrived at their destination!  

Jesus, the Bread of Life  
22 The next day the crowd that had stayed on the far shore saw that the disciples had taken the only boat, and they realized Jesus had not gone with them. 23 Several boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the Lord had blessed the bread and the people had eaten. 24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went across to Capernaum to look for him. 25 They found him on the other side of the lake and asked, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” 26 Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. 27 But don’t be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval.” 28 They replied, “We want to perform God’s works, too. What should we do?” 29 Jesus told them, “This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.” 30 They answered, “Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do? 31 After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, ‘Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” 32 Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, Moses didn’t give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. 33 The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” 34 “Sir,” they said, “give us that bread every day.” 35 Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” 36 But you haven’t believed in me
even though you have seen me. 37 However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. 38 For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. 39 And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. 40 For it is my Father’s will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day.”

41 Then the people began to murmur in disagreement because he had said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” 42 They said, “Isn’t this Jesus, the son of Joseph? We know his father and mother. How can he say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”

43 But Jesus replied, “Stop complaining about what I said. 44 For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them up. 45 As it is written in the Scriptures, ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 (Not that anyone has ever seen the Father; only I, who was sent from God, have seen him.)

47 I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. 48 Yes, I am the bread of life! 49 Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. 50 Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.”

52 Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” they asked.

53 So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. 54 But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever.”

59 He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Many Disciples Desert Jesus

60 Many of his disciples said, “This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?”

61 Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining, so he said to them, “Does this offend you? 62 Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again? 63 The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But some of you do not believe me.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning which ones didn’t believe, and he knew who would betray him.)

65 Then he said, “That is why I said that people can’t come to me unless the Father gives them to me.”
Jesus and the Festival of Shelters (7:1–8:59) Jesus and His Brothers

After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, and Jesus’ brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can’t become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!” For even his brothers didn’t believe in him.

Jesus replied, “Now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime. The world can’t hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil. You go on. I’m not going to this festival, because my time has not yet come.” After saying these things, Jesus remained in Galilee.

Jesus Teaches Openly at the Temple

But after his brothers left for the festival, Jesus also went, though secretly, staying out of public view. The Jewish leaders tried to find him at the festival and kept asking if anyone had seen him. There was a lot of grumbling about him among the crowds. Some argued, “He’s a good man,” but others said, “He’s nothing but a fraud who deceives the people.” But no one had the courage to speak favorably about him in public, for they were afraid of getting into trouble with the Jewish leaders.

Then, midway through the festival, Jesus went up to the Temple and began to teach. The people were surprised when they heard him. “How does he know so much when he hasn’t been trained?” they asked.

So Jesus told them, “My message is not my own; it comes from God who sent me. Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own. Those who speak for themselves want glory only for themselves, but a person who seeks to honor the one who sent him speaks truth, not lies. Moses gave you the law, but none of you obeys it! In fact, you are trying to kill me.”

The crowd replied, “You’re demon possessed! Who’s trying to kill you?”

Jesus replied, “I did one miracle on the Sabbath, and you were amazed. But you work on the Sabbath, too, when you obey Moses’ law of circumcision. Actually, this tradition of circumcision began with the patriarchs, long before the law of Moses.” For if the correct time for circumcision your son falls on the Sabbath, you go ahead and do it so as not to break the law of Moses. So why should you be angry with me for healing God’s light can penetrate the profound darkness of the world.

6:68-69 Simon Peter often served as spokesman for the Twelve (see also Matt 14:28-29; 16:16; 17:4; 18:21; 19:27; 26:33-35). You are the Holy One of God: Other manuscripts read you are the Christ, the Holy One of God; still others read you are the Christ, the Son of God; and still others read you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. See Mark 1:24.

6:70-71 Once again Jesus demonstrated supernatural knowledge (see 1:47-49; 4:16-19). Judas would work for evil and betray Jesus to the authorities (12:4; 13:2; Matt 26:14-16). Iscariot means “man from Kerioth,” the home village of Judas’s family.

7:1-52 This chapter is another account of Jesus during a Jewish festival, the Festival of Shelters. Jesus used elements of the festival to reveal his true identity to his Jewish contemporaries and to show that he had fulfilled the festival’s essential meaning (see 7:37-39; 8:12). 7:2 Jewish men were required to come to the Temple for the Festival of Shelters (Exod 23:14-17; Deut 16:16), an annual seven-day autumn harvest festival in Jerusalem six months after Passover (6:4). People lived in temporary shelters for the seven days as a reminder of the tents Israel used for forty years in the wilderness.

7:3-5 Jesus’ brothers (see also Mark 3:31) reminded him of his religious obligation to celebrate the festival. Their words were cynical because at this time they didn’t believe in him (7:5).

7:6-8 Jesus said that it was not the right time for him to go publicly to Jerusalem, although he later went secretly (12:1-19; see note on 12:23).

7:8 not going: Some manuscripts read not yet going.

7:15 people: Literally Jewish people. The leaders wanted Jesus to show his credentials. Jesus had not been trained under a rabbi but was taught by his heavenly Father (cp. Peter and John, Acts 4:13; contrast Paul, Acts 22:3).

7:17 Those who truly want to do the will of God receive and accept Jesus and his teaching (see also 5:42-47). Those who focus on the world, by contrast, are not receptive to Christ.

7:19 Moses gave you the law, but none of you obeys it! The Jewish leaders were proud of the law of Moses, but ironically, in trying to kill Jesus, they were breaking the law (Exod 20:13).

7:20 You’re demon possessed! See also 8:48-52; 10:20-21.

7:22 The law required circumcision on the eighth day (Lev 12:3) and permitted a boy to be circumcised even if that day fell on the Sabbath. Jesus argued as a rabbi would, from “the lesser to the greater,” using circumcision as a precedent for healing, both of which are religious works.
a man on the Sabbath? 24Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly.”

Is Jesus the Messiah?
25Some of the people who lived in Jerusalem started to ask each other, “Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill? 26But here he is, speaking in public, and they say nothing to him. Could our leaders possibly believe that he is the Messiah? 27But how could he be? For we know where this man comes from. When the Messiah comes, he will simply appear; no one will know where he comes from.”

28While Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he called out, “Yes, you know me, and you know where I come from. But I’m not here on my own. The one who sent me is true, and you don’t know him. 29But I know him because I come from him, and he sent me to you.” 30Then the leaders tried to arrest him; but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.

31Many among the crowds at the Temple believed in him. “After all,” they said, “would you expect the Messiah to do more miraculous signs than this man has done?”

32When the Pharisees heard that the crowds were whispering such things, they and the leading priests sent Temple guards to arrest Jesus. 33But Jesus told them, “I will be with you only a little longer. Then I will return to the one who sent me. 34You will search for me but not find me. And you cannot go where I am going.”

35The Jewish leaders were puzzled by this statement. “Where is he planning to go?” they asked. “Is he thinking of leaving the country and going to the Jews in other lands? Maybe he will even teach the Greeks! 36What does he mean when he says, ‘You will search for me but not find me,’ and ‘You cannot go where I am going?’

Jesus Promises Living Water
37On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! 38Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.’” 39(When he said “living water,” he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)

40When the crowds heard him say this, some of them declared, “Surely this man is the Prophet we’ve been expecting.” 41Others said, “He is the Messiah.” Still others said, “But he can’t be! Will the Messiah come from Galilee? 42For the Scriptures clearly state that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, the village where King David was born.” 43So the crowd was divided about him. 44Some even wanted him arrested, but no one laid a hand on him.

45When the Temple guards returned without having arrested Jesus, the leading
Nicodemus (ch 3) was probably in the process of coming to faith (see 19:39). Contrary to the implication of 7:48, some of the Pharisees—not just the ignorant crowd—believed in Jesus.

7:52 no prophet ever comes [some manuscripts read the prophet does not come] from Galilee! The Jewish leaders were apparently unaware that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea, not in Galilee (see Matt 2:1; Luke 2:1-7).

7:53–8:11 This story, a later addition to the Gospel of John, does not appear in the earliest Greek manuscripts. However, it is likely an authentic story from Jesus’ life.

8:3 The teachers of religious law were Jewish scholars who specialized in knowing the OT law and the oral traditions that interpreted the law.

8:4 The form of the Greek sentence emphasizes the legal claim against the woman. She had been caught while committing the sin of adultery. The law required two witnesses and carefully outlined what evidence was needed.

8:5 The requirement of the law . . . to stone her indicates that the woman was engaged or married (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:23-24). The law also stated that her lover should be killed with her, but these religious leaders apparently ignored their obligation to that part of the statute. These men could have dealt with the woman privately and kept her from public shame, but Jesus was their real target as they demanded, What do you say? Would he neglect the law since he had a reputation for mercy? Or would he ignore the woman’s tragedy?

8:6 It is impossible to know what Jesus . . . wrote in the dust. It has been suggested that he wrote the sins of the accusers.

8:7 Jesus’ answer did not mean that an accuser had to be morally perfect to make legal accusations. His reference to the one who has never sinned points to the motives of the accusers.

8:8 The jury crumbled as they slipped away. One accuser departed, followed by another, and then a succession of bystanders.

8:11 Neither do I: Jesus’ words of assurance did not suggest that the woman was innocent. Jesus views sin and judgment seriously, yet he looks graciously and forgivingly on those caught in sin’s grip.
Jesus, the Light of the World

Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, “I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.”

The Pharisees replied, “You are making those claims about yourself! Such testimony is not valid.”

Jesus told them, “These claims are valid even though I make them about myself. For I know where I came from and where I am going, but you don’t know this about me. You judge me by human standards, but I do not judge anyone. And if I did, my judgment would be correct in every respect because I am not alone. The Father who sent me is with me. Your own law says that if two people agree about something, their witness is accepted as fact. I am one witness, and my Father who sent me is the other.”

“Where is your father?” they asked.

Jesus answered, “Since you don’t know who I am, you don’t know who my Father is. If you knew me, you would also know my Father.”

Jesus made these statements while he was teaching in the section of the Temple known as the Treasury. But he was not arrested, because his time had not yet come.

The Unbelieving People Warned

Later Jesus said to them again, “I am going away. You will search for me but will die in your sin. You cannot come where I am going.”

The people asked, “Is he planning to commit suicide? What does he mean, ‘You cannot come where I am going’?”

Jesus continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You belong to this world; I do not. That is why I said that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am the One who claims to be, you will die in your sins.”

“Who are you?” they demanded.

Jesus replied, “The one I have always claimed to be. I have much to say about you and much to condemn, but I won’t. For I say only what I have heard from the one who sent me, and he is completely truthful.”

But they still didn’t understand that he was talking about his Father.

So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I AM he. I do nothing on my own; but the Father is with me. I do only what I hear from the Father. That is why the people are persecuting me. They do not know the One who sent me, but you do. A ruler does not judge except when someone has been handed over to him for judgment. A ruler sits in judgment because he is a representative of the One who sent him. That is why the Judeans are persecuting me; for they do not have any representative of the One who sent me, but I do. He who sent me is with me so that the world may know that I have come from the Father and that the Father has sent me.”

Herod’s Temple (John 8:20).

Herod the Great, king of Judea at the time of Jesus’ birth (37–4 BC), rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. The new structure replaced and expanded on the Second Temple that had been built during the time of Haggai, after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon (see Ezra 1–6). Herod’s massive project began in 20 BC, and the core of the new structure was finished in a decade, but the work was not fully completed until AD 64. This Temple was destroyed in AD 70, just six years after its completion. Many events of Jesus’ life and ministry took place within the Temple compound (see also 1:19; 2:14-15, 19-21; 5:14; 7:14, 28-32; 8:2, 59; 10:23; 11:56; Matt 4:5; 21:12-15, 23; 24:1-2; 27:5-6, 51; Mark 11:11, 15-17; 12:35, 41; 13:1-2; 15:38; Luke 1:8, 23; 2:27, 36-37, 46; 4:9; 10:32; 19:45-47; 20:1; 21:1, 5, 37-38; 23:45; 24:53; Acts 2:46; 3:1-8; 4:1; 5:12, 20-26, 42; 21:23-30).
own but say only what the Father taught me. 29And the one who sent me is with me—he has not deserted me. For I always do what pleases him.” 30Then many who heard him say these things believed in him.

Jesus and Abraham: True Freedom

31Jesus said to the people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you re-
main faithful to my teachings. 32And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

33“But we are descendants of Abraham,” they said. “We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, ‘You will be set free?’”

34Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. 35A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free. 37Yes, I realize that you are descendants of Abra-
ham. And yet some of you are trying to kill me because there’s no room in your hearts for my message. 38I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. But you are following the advice of your father.”

39“Our father is Abraham!” they declared.

“No,” Jesus replied, “for if you were really the children of Abraham, you would follow his example. 40Instead, you are trying to kill me because I told you the truth, which I heard from God. Abraham never did such a thing. 41No, you are imitating your real father.”

They replied, “We aren’t illegitimate chil-
dren! God himself is our true Father.”

42Jesus told them, “If God were your Fa-
ther, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but he sent me. 43Why can’t you under-
stand what I am saying? It’s because you can’t even hear me! 44For you are the chil-
dren of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a mur-
derer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45So when I tell the truth, you just natu-

raly don’t believe me! 46Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin? And since I am tell-
ing you the truth, why don’t you believe me? 47Anyone who belongs to God listens
gladly to the words of God. But you don’t lis-
ten because you don’t belong to God.”

48The people retorted, “You Samaritan
devil! Didn’t we say all along that you were possessed by a demon?”

49“No,” Jesus said, “I have no demon in me. For I honor my Father—and you dishonor me. 50And though I have no wish to glory myself, God is going to glorify me. He is the true judge. 51I tell you the truth, anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!”

52The people said, “Now we know you are possessed by a demon. Even Abraham and the prophets died, but you say, ‘Anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!’ 53Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, 8:29 John 4:34; 6:38; 8:16; 14:10; 16:32
8:30 John 7:31 3rdrdo (4100) • John 12:11
8:31 John 15:7 2 Jn 1:9
8:32 Rom 8:2 2 Cor 3:17 Gal 5:1, 13
8:33 Matt 3:9 Luke 3:8
8:34 Rom 6:16, 20 2 Pet 2:19
8:35 Gen 21:10 1 Jn 4:30
8:39 Matt 3:9 John 8:33 Gal 3:7, 14, 29
8:41 Deut 32:6 Isa 63:16; 64:8 Mal 1:6
8:42 1 Jn 5:1
8:44 Gen 3:4; 4:9 1 Jn 3:8 ἀδιαβόλοι (1228) • Eph 4:27
8:45 John 18:37
8:47 1 Jn 4:6
8:50 John 5:41
8:51 John 5:24; 11:25-26
8:53 John 4:12
and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

54Jesus answered, “If I want glory for myself, it doesn’t count. But it is my Father who will glorify me. You say, ‘He is our God.’ \(^5^5\) but you don’t even know him. I know him. If I said otherwise, I would be as great a liar as you! But I do know him and obey him. \(^5^6\) Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad.”

57The people said, “You aren’t even fifty years old. How can you say you have seen Abraham?”

58Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I Am!” \(^5^9\) At that point they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple.

Jesus Brings Light to the Blind

9As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.

2“Rabbi,” his disciples asked him, “why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?”

3“It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.

4We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. \(^5^\) But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.”

6Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man’s eyes. \(^7^\) He told him, “Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam” (Siloam means ‘sent’). So the man went and washed and came back seeing!

8His neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, “Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?”

9Some said he was, and others said, “No, he just looks like him!”

Disciples of Jesus (9:1-41)

In the first half of John’s Gospel, he introduces a variety of people who model true discipleship (see 1:19-51; 4:1-42; 9:1-41). Taken together, John provides a profile of the mature follower, or “disciple,” of Christ.

What is this profile of a disciple? (1) Disciples know who Jesus is. In each story, titles for Jesus identify him correctly (see, e.g., 1:25, 34, 36, 38, 41; 4:19, 25, 31; 9:2, 17, 22). (2) Disciples believe in Jesus. They see Jesus’ mighty works, listen to his profound words, and believe (see 1:50; 4:39-41; 9:35-38; see also 20:8, 25-31). (3) Jesus’ disciples understand that they must follow him if their discipleship is to be successful (1:37-43; 8:12; 10:4-5, 27; 12:26; 21:19-22). Following implies genuine devotion, leaving what we have to embrace the journey with Jesus.

8:53 Who do you think you are? This question was antagonistic and aggressive. However, if Jesus is immortal, ruling over life and death, then he is greater than Abraham, the prophets, or any of the greatest people in Israel’s history (8:58).

8:54 our God: Some manuscripts read your God.

8:56 Like his opponents, Jesus appealed to Abraham. \(^5^\) Rabbis taught that God had given Abraham prophetic insight, teaching him about the coming age of the Messiah.

8:57 How can you say you have seen Abraham? (Some manuscripts read How can you say Abraham has seen you?): The Jewish leaders misunderstood Jesus: He was talking about his divine pre-existence, not his physical age.

8:58 before Abraham was even born, I Am! (Or before Abraham was even born, I have always been alive; Greek reads before Abraham was, I am.) Jesus’ life spans the past from before creation (1:1-2) and sweeps beyond the present into eternity. \(^5^\) I Am: This title is reminiscent of God’s name given on Mount Sinai (Exod 3:14; cp. John 4:26; Isa 43:11-13; 48:12).

8:59 Jesus’ audience finally understood his claim to divinity (8:58), and they were furious. They believed they had heard blasphemy and picked up stones to throw at him, which was the proper legal response (Lev 24:16). \(^5^\) Jesus was hidden from them because God had appointed a different time for his death (see note on 12:23; see also 7:30, 44; Luke 4:29-30).

9:1-41 At the Festival of Shelters (chs 7–8), Jesus claimed to be the light of the world (8:12). Now John tells us about Jesus giving light, both physically and spiritually, to a blind man who lived in darkness (see 9:5). The story ends with a splendid reversal of roles: The blind man who was assumed to be in spiritual darkness could see God’s light, whereas the Pharisees, who could see physically and were thought to be enlightened, were shown to be spiritually blind.

9:2 The disciples assumed that someone’s sin—the man’s or his parents’—had caused him to be born blind. Jesus corrected this common belief (9:3).

9:4 We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us: Other manuscripts read I must quickly carry out the tasks assigned me by the one who sent me; still others read We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent me.

9:5 I am the light of the world: See note on 8:12.

9:6 During the NT era, saliva was used for medical purposes (see Mark 7:32-35; 8:22-25).

9:7 Siloam, a pool at the south end of the city of Jerusalem, was the source of water for the ceremonies at the Festival of Shelters. \(^5^\) Siloam means “sent”: This phrase contained a double meaning: Jesus, who has been sent by God (4:34; 5:23; 37; 7:28; 8:26; 12:44; 14:24), told the blind man to wash in the pool called “sent.”
But the beggar kept saying, “Yes, I am the same one!”

10 They asked, “Who healed you? What happened?”

11 He told them, “The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.’ So I went and washed, and now I can see!”

12 “Where is he now?” they asked. “I don’t know,” he replied.

13 Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees, because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him. The Pharisees asked the man all about it. So he told them, “He put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!”

16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man Jesus is not from God, for he is working on the Sabbath.” Others said, “But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?” So there was a deep division of opinion among them.

17 Then the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and made him say, “What’s your opinion about this man who healed you?”

The man replied, “I think he must be a prophet.”

18 The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents. They asked them, “Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he now see?”

20 His parents replied, “We know this is our son and that he was born blind, but we don’t know how he can see or who healed him. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself.”

22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. That’s why they said, “He is old enough. Ask him.”

24 So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, “Go to the pool of Siloam and wash, and now I can see!”

25 “I don’t know whether he is a sinner,” the man replied. “But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!”

26 “But what did he do?” they asked. “How did he heal you?”

27 “Look!” the man exclaimed. “I told you once. Didn’t you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?”

28 Then they cursed him and said, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! We know God spoke to Moses, but we don’t even know where this man comes from.”

30 Why, that’s very strange!” the man replied. “He healed my eyes, and yet you don’t know where he comes from? 31 We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. 32 Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he couldn’t have done it.”

34 “You were born a total sinner!” they answered. “Are you trying to teach us?” And they threw him out of the synagogue.

Spiritual Blindness

35 When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”
The man answered, “Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.”
37 You have seen him,” Jesus said, “and he is speaking to you!”
38 “Yes, Lord, I believe!” the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.
39 Then Jesus told him, “I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.”

Jesus and the Festival of Dedication (10:1-42)
The Good Shepherd and His Sheep
10 I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber. 2But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. 5They won’t follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don’t know his voice.”

Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, 7so he explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true shepherd did not listen to them. 9Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. 10The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.
11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. 12A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf want to be lieve in him.”

Jesus reverence due only to God (9:38; cp. 20:28).
9:35 Son of Man: Some manuscripts read the Son of God. “Son of Man” is a title Jesus used for himself (1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28). The Greek translates a Hebrew and Aramaic phrase meaning “human being.” People were not completely sure what Jesus meant by it (see 12:34). However, it signifies Jesus’ identity as both human and as the Messiah (cp. Dan 7:13-14).

9:38-39 Some manuscripts do not include “Yes, Lord, I believe!” the man said. And he worshiped Jesus. Then Jesus told him.
9:39 those who think they see: Literally those who see.

9:40-41 Are you saying we’re blind? Jesus answered that those who claim to hold all religious truth will discover that they are blind, while those who recognize their spiritual poverty will find true sight. In the story, the blind man and his family frequently confessed that they did not know, while the Pharisees repeatedly stated their confidence and remained guilty because of their religious pride. If they had confessed their ignorance and admitted their spiritual blindness, they would be guiltless. Instead, their conscious and willful rejection of Jesus established their guilt.

10:1-42 Chapter 10 continues the series of festival sermons (see note on 5:1–10:42). Jesus now moves to Hanukkah (the Festival of Dedication), the timing of which is crucial to understanding the story (see note on 10:22).
coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. 13 The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me. 15 Just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

17 “The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.”

19 When he said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. 20 Some said, “He’s demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?” 21 Others said, “This doesn’t sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

Jesus at Hanukkah

22 It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication. 23 He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon’s Colonnade. 24 The people surrounded him and asked, “How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

25 Jesus replied, “I have already told you, and you don’t believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father’s name. 26 But you don’t believe me because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, 29 for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand. 30 The Father and I are one.”

10:13 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . ..
kill him. The problem was not Jesus’ good works, but his claim to divinity (see 6:42, 66; 7:29-30). Committing blasphemy was punishable by stoning (Lev 24:16; see John 8:59).

10:34-36 your own Scriptures: Literally your own law. See Ps 82:6. *I say, you are gods!* If the word god could be applied to people other than the Lord, then Jesus was not breaking the law by referring to himself in this way. Yet Jesus is not just any son of God; he is the Son of God who was sent . . . into the world.

10:38 Jesus’ miraculous works should help true believers know and understand that the full reality of God dwells in Jesus.

10:40 His revelation to the Jewish leaders now complete, Jesus retired to the region beyond the Jordan River where John the Baptist had once worked and where Jesus was baptized.

10:41 everything he said about this man has come true: See 1:19-51; 3:22-36. The fulfillment of John the Baptist’s predictions confirms both that he was a prophet and that what he said about Jesus was true.

10:42 This is a note of irony. While Jesus found little faith among the religious leaders in the holy city of Jerusalem, in the desert he found many who . . . believed.

11:1-57 The raising of Lazarus fore shadows Jesus’ own coming death and resurrection. Even the description of Lazarus’ grave (11:38, 44) prefigures Jesus’ grave (20:1, 7). Shortly after this event, Jesus was anointed for burial (12:3) and the hour of his glorification began (12:23).

11:1 In Hebrew, Lazarus is a shortened form of Eleazar (“God helps”). Among Jews in the first century, it was the fourth-most-common name for a man (see also Luke 16:19-31).

11:4 Jesus’ response paralleled his words about the man born blind (9:1-5). Jesus already knew that Lazarus was dead (11:14); he was talking about Lazarus’ resurrection (11:43), which would bring glory to God.

11:6 The trip from where Jesus was staying (see 10:40) to Jerusalem would have taken only one day, but Jesus followed his own sense of timing (2:4; 7:5-9) and would not be compelled by others.

11:8 The disciples were rightly worried about the risk (7:25; 8:37; 44, 59; 10:31, 39). *people*: Literally Jewish people; also in 11:19, 31, 33, 36, 45, 54.
12The disciples said, “Lord, if he is sleeping, he will soon get better!” 13They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died.

14So he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15And for your sakes, I’m glad I wasn’t there, for now you will really believe. Come, let’s go see him.”

16Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let’s go, too—and die with Jesus.”

17When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. 18Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss. 20When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. 21Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.”

23Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24“Yes,” Martha said, “he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day.”

25Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. 26Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this, Martha?”

27“Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.” 28Then she returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and told her, “The Teacher is here and wants to see you.” 29So Mary immediately went to him.

30Jesus had stayed outside the village, at the place where Martha met him. 31When the people who were at the house consoling Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus’s grave to weep. So they followed her there. 32When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

33When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. 34“How long will you keep me waiting? Where have you put him?” he asked them.

35They told him, “Lord, come and see.” 36The people who were standing nearby said, “See how much he loved him!” 37But some said, “This man healed a blind man. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?”

38Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. 39“Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them.

But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.”
Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?”

So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.” Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”

The Plot to Kill Jesus

Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen. But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. “What are we going to do?” they asked each other. “This man certainly performs many miraculous signs.

If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation.”

Caiphas, who was high priest at that time, said, “You don’t know what you’re talking about. You don’t realize that it’s better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.”

He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation.

And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world.

So from that time on, the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus’ death. As a result, Jesus stopped his public ministry among the people and left Jerusalem. He went to a place near the wilderness, to the village of Ephraim, and stayed there with his disciples.

It was now almost time for the Jewish Passover celebration, and many people from all over the country arrived in Jerusalem several days early so they could go through the purification ceremony before Passover began. They kept looking for Jesus, but as they stood around in the

The high council: Greek the Sanhedrin.

The council’s deliberations unveiled their fears that everyone would believe in him. If people believed that the Messiah had come, the political implications would be threatening. The Romans viewed Jewish messiahs with suspicion, and the movement surrounding Jesus might inspire them to invade and destroy Jerusalem and its Temple.
Temple, they said to each other, “What do you think? He won’t come for Passover, will he?” 57Meanwhile, the leading priests and Pharisees had publicly ordered that anyone seeing Jesus must report it immediately so they could arrest him.

Jesus Anointed at Bethany  

12 Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. 2A dinner was prepared in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him. 3Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she “anointed Jesus’ feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

4But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, “That perfume was worth a year’s wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor.” 5Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples’ money, he often stole some for himself.

6Jesus replied, “Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. 8You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

9When all the people heard of Jesus’ rival, they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. 10Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, 11for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus.

Jesus’ Messianic Entry into Jerusalem  

12The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted,

“Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!”

14Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said:

15“Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey’s colt.”

16His disciples didn’t understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy.
But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him.

17 Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and they were telling others about it. 18 That was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign. 19 Then the Pharisees said to each other, "There's nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him!"

Jesus Predicts His Death

20 Some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration 21 paid a visit to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee. They said, "Sir, we want to meet Jesus." 22 Philip told Andrew about it, and they went together to ask Jesus.

23 Jesus replied, "Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. 24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. 25 Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. 26 Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.

27 "Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, 'Father, save me from this hour'? But this is the very reason I came! 28 Father, bring glory to your name."

Then a voice spoke from heaven, saying, "I have already brought glory to my name, and I will do so again." 29 When the crowd heard the voice, some thought it was thunder, while others declared an angel had spoken to him.

30 Then Jesus told them, "The voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. 32 And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." 33 He said this to indicate how he was going to die.

34 The crowd responded, "We understood from Scripture that the Messiah would live forever. How can you say the Son of Man..."
will die? Just who is this Son of Man, anyway?"

35 Jesus replied, "My light will shine for you just a little longer. Walk in the light while you can, so the darkness will not overtake you. Those who walk in the darkness cannot see where they are going. 36 Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light."

After saying these things, Jesus went away and was hidden from them.

The Unbelief of the People

37 But despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him. 38 This is exactly what Isaiah the prophet had predicted:

"LORD, who has believed our message? To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm?"

39 But the people couldn’t believe, for as Isaiah also said,

40 "The Lord has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts—so that their eyes cannot see, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and have me heal them."

41 Isaiah was referring to Jesus when he said this, because he saw the future and spoke of the Messiah’s glory. 42 Many people did believe in him, however, including some of the Jewish leaders. But they wouldn’t admit it for fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue. 43 For they loved human praise more than the praise of God. 44 Jesus shouted to the crowds, "If you trust me, you are trusting not only me, but also God who sent me. 45 For when you see me, you are seeing the one who sent me. 46 I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark. 47 I will not judge those who hear me but don’t obey me, for I have come to save the world and not to judge it. 48 But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken. 49 I don’t speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it. 50 And I know his commands lead to eternal life; so I say whatever the Father tells me to say."


The Passover Meal (13:1–30)

Jesus Washes His Disciples’ Feet

13 Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. 2 It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from...
Jesus referred to an ultimate purpose in being a disciple: to serve. The act of washing feet was common in the Hellenistic and Jewish cultures as a gesture of hospitality, but it also had symbolic significance. According to John 13:4-5, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, saying, “I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done for you.” This act was to be a model of service and humility, as Jesus reminded his disciples: “You do not understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.”

When Jesus washed Peter’s feet, Peter couldn’t accept this act and protested, “Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!” Jesus responded, “A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you.” For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

After washing their feet, Jesus made a profound statement about service and sacrifice. “I tell you the truth, anyone who is not quick to serve others will never be quick to win the right to rule.”

Jesus Predicts Judas’s Betrayal


Now Jesus was deeply troubled, and he exclaimed, “Tell you the truth, one of you will betray me!”

The disciples looked at each other, wondering whom he could mean. The disciple Jesus loved was sitting next to Jesus at the table. Simon Peter motioned to him to ask, “Who’s he talking about?” So that disciple

13:4-5 Foot washing, common in the Hellenistic and Jewish cultures as a daily routine and as a gesture of hospitality (see Luke 7:36-50), was a lowly, menial task reserved for servants. When Jesus began to wash the disciples’ feet, he took the posture of a slave.

13:8 Based on the depth of his devotion to Jesus, it is understandable that Peter protested. But Jesus was not simply giving Peter a model of service; this was a symbolic pre-enactment of his greater act of sacrifice on the cross (13:7). Receiving Jesus’ spiritual cleansing is a condition for discipleship, so if Peter could not accept this act, he could not be Jesus’ disciple at all.

13:9 Wash your hands and head as well: Peter misunderstood Jesus (cp. 2:19-20; 3:3-4). Peter thought that to have more water was to have more of Jesus. Only when Peter received the Spirit did everything become clear (e.g., see Acts 2:14-36).

13:10 Jesus referred to an ultimate cleansing through his sacrifice which makes a person clean all over. Some manuscripts do not include except for the feet.

13:14-15 Jesus’ acts of service, such as washing feet and dying on the cross, provided an example of personal sacrifice to follow.
The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because of him. 32 And since God receives glory because of the Son, he will soon give glory to the Son. 33 Dear children, I will be with you only a little longer. And as I told the Jewish leaders, you will search for me, but you can't come where I am going. 34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

Simon Peter asked, “Lord, where are you going?” And Jesus replied, “You can’t go with me now, but you will follow me later.”

But why can’t I come now, Lord?” he asked. “I’m ready to die for you.”

Jesus answered, “Die for me? I tell you the truth, Peter—before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.

Jesus, the Way to the Father

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. 2There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, I would have told you that I am going to prepare a place there for you. 3And I will come again and take you to be with me, so that where I am, you also may be.

Jesus promised to his disciples that he would prepare a place for them and come to take them to be with him. This is the beginning of the Upper Room Discourse, since the meal was taken in an “upstairs room” (Luke 22:39).

Jesus' Final Farewell (13:31–17:26)

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial


As soon as Judas left the room, Jesus said, “The time has come: 26 Jesus responded, “It is the one to whom I give the bread I dip in the bowl.” And when he had dipped it, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. 27When Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus told him, “Hurry and do what you’re going to do.” 28 None of the others at the table knew what Jesus meant. 29 Since Judas supposed the passover evening was one of the only nights when the city gates were left open. The night was spent in prayer and meditation, money was given to the poor, and provisions were always needed for this complex meal.

13:26 Meals were eaten with flat bread, which diners would dip into a common bowl. When Jesus gave a morsel to Judas (cp. Ruth 2:14), the disciples might have thought Jesus was honoring him. They did not understand what was occurring. They even thought that Judas’s departure (13:29) fulfilled an assumed by the darkness. Satan uses such people as pawns in a wider struggle against the light. • Hurry and do what you’re going to do: In issuing this command, Jesus once again showed that he was in control, not human beings or Satan (see note on 7:30).

13:28-29 None of the others suspected that something odd was happening. Passover evening was one of the only nights when the city gates were left open. The night was spent in prayer and meditation, money was given to the poor, and provisions were always needed for this complex meal.

13:30 out into the night: Judas’s departure was emblematic. The darkness had swallowed him completely (see note on 13:2; cp. 3:19). Jesus, the light of the world, is the antithesis of the night.

13:31–17:26 The OT and later Jewish literature include numerous examples of farewells in which a dying person offers last words to intimate friends (see Gen 49:1-27; Deut 31–34; Josh 23–24; 1 Sam 12; 1 Chr 28–29). Such farewells used a standard form. The dying person, surrounded by his loved ones, comforted them and exhorted them to obey the law. He prayed and blessed them and often left behind some writings. In some cases, the departing person passed on his “spirit” to his followers or his successor (see Num 27:18; Deut 34:9; 2 Kgs 2:9-14). Each of these elements is present in Jesus’ farewell. • This section is often called the Upper Room Discourse, since the meal was taken in an “upstairs room” (Luke 22:39).

13:31 The time has come: Judas’s departure into the night marks a solemn divide in the plot of the Gospel. Jesus was left with his intimate friends as the hour of glory was dawning. This time was launched by Judas’s betrayal, and it culminated in the resurrection. • Son of Man is a title Jesus used for himself.

13:32 Some manuscripts do not include And since God receives glory because of the Son.

13:33 Jesus addressed the apostles as his children, marking the start of his farewell address.

13:34-35 That the disciples were to love one another was not a new commandment (see Lev 19:18). However, that they were to love each other with the sort of love modeled by Jesus was dramatic. Jesus’ love for God was expressed in perfect obedience (14:31); now this kind of love was his command—that disciples express their love for Jesus in commended obedience.

13:37 Peter claimed to be ready to die for Jesus, yet his denials are well known in the synoptic Gospels (Matt 26:32-34; Mark 14:27-30; Luke 22:31-34). Although Peter’s verve and devotion failed, he was restored (21:15-19).

14:1-31 Jesus provided answers to his disciples’ many spoken and unspoken concerns.

14:1 Jesus had himself been troubled (Greek tarassō) on three occasions (11:33; 12:27; 13:21). His confidence in God’s power made it possible for him to face these crises. Faced with the upsetting words of 13:33, the disciples confronted similar feelings. • Trust (or believe, or have faith) in God: Only trusting God would help them through his hour of death.

14:2 There is more than enough room in my Father’s home (or There are many rooms in my Father’s house): God’s house is the dwelling place where he resides (Rev 21:9–22:5). The word translated “room” is related to the Greek verb meaning “remain, abide, dwell.” Jesus promises that his followers will have a place to “dwell” alongside him, wherever he is. Later, this “dwelling” becomes a place of “indwelling” as Jesus makes his home in his followers’ hearts through the Spirit (14:23). • If these were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for...
place for you?  

3When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going.”

5“No, we don’t know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

6Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.  

7If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!”

8Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

9Jesus replied, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?  

10Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me.  

11Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.

12“I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am through Jesus. Other religions and philosophies propose different avenues to God, but Jesus asserted that he is the one exclusive path to God.  

* Jesus is the truth because God is truth.  

* God is the source of eternal life. At Lazarus’s tomb, Jesus showed his divine power over life and death (11:25).

14:7 If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is: Some manuscripts read If you have really known me, you will know who my Father is.

14:8 Philip did not yet understand that in Jesus he was seeing the full embodiment of God (14:9).

14:9 Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!”

Cp. 1:1-2. Jesus Christ is God-in-the-flesh (1:14), which explains his capacity to accomplish divine works.

Jesus did not simply teach about God; in him God can be found. Jesus’ remarkable statement echoed what he had said at Hanukkah: “The Father and I are one” (10:30). This claim is at the root of the world’s opposition to Christ (5:18).

14:10 Jesus’ claims were astonishing (10:30, 37-38). Yet true faith recognizes Jesus’ union with God the Father.

14:12 Jesus promised that anyone who believes in him would perform great miracles and experience answers to

John, brother of James and son of Zebedee, was one of the twelve apostles. Early tradition identifies him as the author of the Gospel of John, the Letters of John, and the book of Revelation.

John and his brother James were among those closest to Jesus (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33). His mother, Salome, might have been a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (cp. 19:25; Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1). John’s name usually occurs after James’s, which suggests that John was younger. James and John were fishermen like their father (Matt 4:21; Mark 1:19). They fished with Peter and Andrew, another pair of brothers who became disciples (Luke 5:10). They were among the first whom Jesus called as disciples, and they left everything to follow him (Matt 4:22; Mark 1:20; Luke 5:11; cp. John 1:35-40). Jesus named them “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17), which might imply that they were loud or short-tempered (cp. Luke 9:54). At one point, the two brothers evoked the indignation of the other disciples when they asked for special positions of privilege in the coming kingdom (Matt 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; cp. Luke 22:24-27).


John’s name occurs three times in Acts; each time he was working with Peter (Acts 3:1-11; 4:1-22; 5:17-42; 8:14-25). Paul referred to him as one of the “pillars” of the church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9).

The most widespread tradition about John’s later life is that he moved to Ephesus, where he eventually became the bishop of Asia Minor, lived to an old age, and died peacefully in the company of friends. His Gospel provides the most profound portrait that we have of Jesus, his letters provide one of the finest depictions of the Christian life (1 John).
No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Since I live, you also will live.

When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.”

Judas (not Judas Iscariot, but the other disciple with that name) said to him, “Lord, why are you going to reveal yourself only to us and not to the world at large?”

Jesus replied, “All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. Anyone who doesn’t love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me. I am telling them.

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

“If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Since I live, you also will live.

When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.”

22 Jesus answered Judas’s question, explaining that his coming would be a profound spiritual revelation beyond the world’s grasp. Jesus’ coming would occur in three experiences: his resurrection, the coming of the Spirit, and his second coming. When he comes in the Spirit, he and the Father will reside within believers, making a home with each of them (see note on 14:2).
you these things now while I am still with you. 26 But when the Father sends the one who represents me—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

27 "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. The peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid. 28 Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am. 29 I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe.

30 "I don’t have much more time to talk to you, because the ruler of this world approaches. He has no power over me, 31 but I will do what the Father requires of me, so that the world will know that I love the Father. Come, let’s be going.

Jesus, the True Vine of Israel

15 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch of mine that does not produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. 3 You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

5 "Yes, I am the true vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. 7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! 8 When you produce...
much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father. 9I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. 11I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! 12This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. 13There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command. 15I no longer call you ‘slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his ‘slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. 16You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. 17This is my command: Love each other.

Jesus’ Disciples and the World

18If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. 19The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you out of the world, so it hates you. 20Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. 21They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me. 22They would not be guilty if I had not come and spoken to them. But now they have no excuse for their sin. 23Anyone who hates me also hates my Father. 24If I hadn’t done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father. 25This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures: ‘They hated me without cause.’

26But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. 27And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry.

16“I have told you these things so that you won’t abandon your faith. 2For you will be expelled from the synagogues, and the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing a holy service for God. 3This is because they have never known the Father or me. 4Yes, I’m telling you these things now, so that when they happen, you will remember my warning. I didn’t tell you earlier because I was going to be with you for a while longer.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

5But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. 6Instead, you grieve because of what I’ve told you. 7But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Advocate won’t come. If I do go away,
then I will send him to you. 8And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, of and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. 9The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. 10Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. 11Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged.

12“There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can’t bear it now. 13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you about the future. 14He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. 15All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, ‘The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.’

Sadness Will Be Turned to Joy
16“In a little while you won’t see me anymore. But a little while after that, you will see me again.”

17Some of the disciples asked each other, “What does he mean when he says, ‘In a little while you won’t see me, but then you will see me,’ and ‘I am going to the Father’? 18And what does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand.”

19Jesus realized they wanted to ask him about it, so he said, “Are you asking yourselves what I meant? I said in a little while you won’t see me, but a little while after that you will see me again. 20I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn over what is going to happen to me, but the world will rejoice. You will grieve, but your grief will suddenly turn to wonderful joy. 21It will be like a woman suffering the pains of labor. When her child is born, her anguish gives way to joy because she has brought a new baby into the world. 22So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy. 23At that time you won’t need to ask me for anything. I tell you the truth, you will ask the Father directly, and he will grant your request because you use my name. 24You haven’t done this before. Ask, using my name, and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy. 25“I have spoken of these matters in figures of speech, but soon I will stop speaking figuratively and will tell you plainly all about the Father. 26Then you will ask in my name. I’m not saying I will ask the Father on your behalf, 27for the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God. 28Yes, I came from the Father into the world, and now I will leave the world and return to the Father.”

29Then his disciples said, “At last you are speaking plainly and not figuratively. 30Now we understand that you know everything, and there’s no need to question you. From this we believe that you came from God.”

31Jesus asked, “Do you finally believe? 32But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. 33I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you could expect the Spirit to reveal things they had not heard before about the present and the future (see 14:26). 16:16-33 a little while: This refrain reassured the disciples that their separation from Jesus would be short lived. 16:16 Jesus reassured the disciples that his departure (on the cross) would be short and his return (in the resurrection) would be soon. When they saw him again, the disciples would experience overwhelming joy and intimacy with him in the Spirit. 16:20 At the crucifixion, the world thought it had won a victory over the light. The shock of the cross would cause the disciples to weep and mourn, but their sorrow would change to joy when Jesus defeated the grave (20:20). 16:21 the pains of labor: This metaphor symbolizes anguish that is followed by God’s blessing and wonder (cp. Isa 21:2-3; 26:16-21; 66:7-10; Jer 13:21).
will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

**Jesus’ Final Prayer**

17 After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. 2For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. 3And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. 4I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. 5Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.

6“I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me.

9“My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. 10All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. 11Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. 12During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold.

13Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. 14I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world. 15I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. 16They do not belong to this world any more than I do. 17Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. 18Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. 19And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.

Now he added that his disciples can discover peace even when surrounded by threats; they can be tranquil despite those who are hostile to their faith.

17:1-26 This chapter records Jesus’ longest prayer, which is often called his “high priestly prayer.” It provides an intimate glimpse into his heart. In this prayer, which closes the farewell that began at 13:31, Jesus expressed his own concerns to his Father (17:1-8) and then turned to concerns for the church and its future (17:9-26).

17:1 Jesus looked up to heaven, assuming the traditional Jewish posture for prayer (11:41; Ps 123:1). He probably also raised his hands (Exod 9:33; 17:11; Ps 28:2). Prayers like this were said aloud so that followers could hear (11:41-42; 12:27-30; also Matt 11:25-30; Luke 10:21-22).  

Father was Jesus’ usual way to address God, which he did six times in this prayer (see also 11:41; 12:27). This title—unusual in Judaism—reflected Jesus’ intimacy with God.  

This hour included Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, torture, death, and resurrection (see note on 12:23). 

Glory your Son: In the Gospel of John, the cross is a place of honor. Jesus’ oneness with the Father means that if the Son is glorified, the Father will also be glorified.

17:2 All authority has been placed in Jesus’ hands (3:35); he can give eternal life as only God can (3:15; 5:21, 25-26).  

17:3 to know you: The Hebrew idea of knowing encompassed experience and intimacy, which for Christians means love for God and obedience to him. 

sent to earth: Jesus originated in heaven and was returning there (17:5), so he exercises divine authority as the agent of God. 

17:4 Jesus’ miracles displayed God’s glory for the world to see (1:14). This task was finished; Jesus’ life and obedience had glorified God.

17:5 Jesus prayed to return to the position he had with God before the world began (1:1). 

17:6 This verse summarizes Christ’s mission. He revealed the true person of God to the world, gathered up God’s people into his flock, and instructed them in obedience. The result of this work is the church. 

have revealed you: Literally have revealed your name; also in 17:26. 

17:8 Jesus revealed himself widely to the world. Those who embraced his message became children of God (11:12; 11:52), and he revealed God’s word to them.

17:9-19 Jesus prayed for his disciples, who must carry on after his departure.

17:10 Just as the Son brings glory to the Father (17:1, 4-5), the disciples bring the Son glory (17:22). The love and obedience that brought glory to God in Jesus’ life become features of his disciples’ lives.

17:11 you have given me your name: Some manuscripts read you have given me these [i.e., these disciples]. 

Jesus’ first concern for his disciples was that they . . . be united with an intimacy similar to the oneness shared by Jesus and the Father.

17:12-13 I protected them by the power of the name you gave me: Some manuscripts read I protected those you gave me, by the power of your name. 

Until now, Jesus had placed his followers. Now he was concerned for their strength and survival in his absence, because the world would be hostile toward them (15:18-27) and their mission of challenging the world by heralding the truth (16:8-11). After Jesus’ departure, the Spirit would protect them (15:26) and bring them joy.

17:14 God’s word, which Jesus had given his disciples, also provides a defense against the world. The Spirit would preserve and recall God’s word in the church (14:26), equipping the church for its encounter with the world.

17:16-18 Being holy refers to purity gained by separation from the world, and living a life so aligned with God that it reflects his passions. Disciples are set apart by God, equipped by the Spirit, and readied by God’s word to enter the world without being victimized by its darkness.

17:19 I give myself as a holy sacrifice (literally I sanctify myself): Priests and
One of the most frequently used words in John is “world” (Greek kosmos). In Greek-speaking Jewish thought, kosmos refers to the heavens and the earth as created by God (Gen 1; see also John 1:3, 10; 17:5, 24). John extends the concept to include the world of humanity (e.g., 1:10; 3:16).

Although it was created as good, the human world is hostile to God (1:10-11; 3:19-20; 12:37-41). It is controlled by a darkness that cannot comprehend the light and resists the light (3:19). The world is dead and needs life (6:33, 51), yet it hates the one who can save it (7:7). The world is under the dominion of Satan (12:31), who will one day be judged.

God loves the world of humanity, despite its hostility and rebellion against him. Jesus died to take away the sin of the world (1:29; 3:16-17). God’s love for the world he created stands above the world (3:18-21, 36; 5:27-30; 12:47-48). Christ’s followers experience this same tension in their mission. We are called into the world to bring the message of God’s love, but we will experience conflict, because the world will be hostile to our message (see 14:27-31; 15:18-27; 17:13-26).

prophets were similarly set apart for service to God (Lev 8:30; Jer 1:5). Jesus re-committed himself to his mission, acknowledging that he was set apart for the purpose of the cross. The disciples would benefit because his death would enable them to experience new holiness in a deep attachment to God.

17:20 Jesus was praying for other sheep who were not yet in his flock (10:16). These are the believers through the centuries who have come to faith through the witness of Jesus’ disciples.

17:21 For believers, becoming one with one another is an outgrowth of the union they enjoy with Jesus himself, a union modeled on the oneness of the Father and the Son. *may they be in us:* Through the power of the Spirit, believers would experience a profound spiritual intimacy with the Father and the Son and be transformed (14:20, 23; 1 Jn 4:13). *Disciples of Jesus represent him, so their conduct and relationships with each other reflect the credibility of Christ in the world.* When there is disunity, inhaling, and intolerance, their testimony to the world is unconvincing. When people observe the community of believers, they know that it represents Jesus; a unified loving community convinces the world to believe (13:35; 1 Jn 3:11).

17:22 The community of believers should display the same glory that Jesus displayed from the Father.

17:23 that the world will know: If the church lives in the Spirit, reflects God’s glory and love, and shows unity sustained by a shared knowledge of God, then its testimony will astonish the world.

17:24 I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. 21I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

22I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. 23I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. 24Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!

25O righteous Father, the world doesn’t know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. 26I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them.”

18 After saying these things, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees. 2Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had often gone there with his disciples. 3The leading priests and...
Pharisees had given Judas a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove.

Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. "Who are you looking for?" he asked.

"I Am he," Jesus said. (Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.) 6As Jesus said "I Am he," they all drew back and fell to the ground! 7Once more he asked them, "Who are you looking for?"

And again they replied, "Jesus the Nazarene."

"I told you that I Am he," Jesus said. "And since I am the one you want, let these others go." 9He did this to fulfill his own statement: "I did not lose a single one of those you have given me."

10Then Simon Peter drew a sword and slashed off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest’s slave. 11But Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Shall I not drink from the cup of suffering the Father has given me?"

12So the soldiers, their commanding officer, and the Temple guards arrested Jesus and tied him up.

Peter’s First Denial of Jesus
13First they took him to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest at that time. 14Caiaphas was the one who had told the

ANNAS AND CAIAPHAS (18:13-14, 19-24, 28)

Annas and Caiaphas were both spoken of as high priests during the time of Jesus; they were instrumental in getting Jesus condemned to death.

Annas was the Jewish high priest about AD 6–15. Even after he was officially deposed by the Roman procurator of Judea, he retained considerable power and influence in the Jewish high council and was still spoken of as “high priest” fifteen to twenty years later (Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6)—perhaps because of the Jewish view that high priests retain their position for life. Five of his sons and his son-in-law Caiaphas became high priests after him. According to the Gospel of John, when Jesus was arrested, he was brought to Annas for his initial interrogation before he was turned over to Caiaphas for the official trial (18:13-24).

Caiaphas was the official Jewish high priest about AD 18–36. He worked closely with his powerful father-in-law, Annas. Caiaphas was the one who argued in the high council that it would be better for Jesus to be sacrificed than for the entire nation to be destroyed (11:49-50; cp. Matt 26:3-4). These prophetic words were given him by God because of his role as high priest (11:51-52). It was Caiaphas who tore his robes at Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God (Matt 26:57, 65) and urged the high council to condemn him for blasphemy.

Not long after the execution of Jesus, the Jewish authorities became increasingly disturbed over the rapidly growing numbers of believers in Christ. Annas and Caiaphas also actively involved themselves in the interrogation of Peter and John over their healing a crippled beggar and their preaching about the resurrection of the dead (Acts 4:5-7).

the arrest, the Roman detachment stood by to prevent a riot. The Roman detachment was large enough to warrant a commander (18:12) and came armed, anticipating a struggle (18:10). Numerous men had claimed to be the Messiah, and often they had made politically explosive attempts to expel the Romans.

18:5 Jesus the Nazarene: Or Jesus of Nazareth; also in 18:7. *I Am he* (or “The I Am is here”; or “I am the Lord”); literally *I am*; also in 18:6, 8: Jesus identified himself by the divine name God had revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 3:14; see also 4:26; 8:24, 58).

18:6 The soldiers and guards *all drew back* before the Lord (cp. Isa 6:5; Ezek 1:28; Dan 10:9; Acts 9:4; Rev 1:17). Even Roman soldiers, who were trained not to fall, *fell to the ground* before Christ. Although they submitted to God, they didn’t really understand what had occurred and proceeded with the arrest.

18:8 I Am: Jesus used God’s divine name for the second time (see note on 18:9).

18:9 His own statement: See 6:39; 17:12. *I did not lose a single one*: Jesus continued to be a good shepherd, offering his life for the sheep and protecting them from the wolves (10:11-15). From the beginning, however, Judas Iscariot had not been a true disciple of Jesus (17:12).

18:10-11 Simon Peter drew a short sword or a long knife that was generally worn with everyday garments. *The Hebrew name Malchus means “king,” a detail that John might have included for its wordplay on Jesus’ true identity (see 18:36-37; 19:19). *Put your sword back*: Jesus’ mission was not to fight for his life, but to die for ours.

18:12-14 Jesus was bound by the soldiers and returned to Jerusalem. *First they took him to Annas*, who had been the high priest and remained highly influential (five of his sons also became high priests). *Caiaphas*, his son-in-law, was the official high priest at that time (literally that year; see 18:24).

18:14 one man should die for the people: Caiaphas had previously made this political analysis (11:49-50). John points out the irony of this statement. Jesus’ death did not bring Israel political salvation—it brought spiritual salvation to all who believe.
other Jewish leaders, “It’s better that one man should die for the people.”

15Simon Peter followed Jesus, as did another of the disciples. That other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the high priest’s courtyard with Jesus. 16Peter had to stay outside the gate. Then the disciple who knew the high priest spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in. 17The woman asked Peter, “You’re not one of that man’s disciples, are you?” 18“No,” he said, “I am not.”

19Because it was cold, the household servants and the guards had made a charcoal fire. They stood around it, warming themselves, and Peter stood with them, warming himself.

The High Priest Questions Jesus

19Inside, the high priest began asking Jesus about his followers and what he had been teaching them. 20Jesus replied, “Everyone knows what I teach. I have preached regularly in the synagogues and the Temple, where the people gather. I have not spoken in secret. 21Why are you asking me this question? Ask those who heard me. They know what I said.”

22Then one of the Temple guards standing nearby slapped Jesus across the face. “Is that the way to answer the high priest?” he demanded.

23Jesus replied, “If I said anything wrong, you must prove it. But if I’m speaking the truth, why are you beating me?”

24Then Annas bound Jesus and sent him to Caiaphas, the high priest.

Peter’s Second and Third Denials

25Meanwhile, as Simon Peter was standing by the fire warming himself, they asked him again, “You’re not one of his disciples, are you?”

He denied it, saying, “No, I am not.”

26But one of the household slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Didn’t I see you out there in the olive grove with Jesus?”

27Again Peter denied it. And immediately a rooster crowed.

Jesus’ Trial before Pilate

28Jesus’ trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman...
So Pilate, probably fearing a riot, went outside to meet them. • The Passover meal itself had occurred the night before (see 13:1; Mark 14:14-16). The following day, another meal began the weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:5-6).

18:29 Pilate, the fifth Roman governor of Judea, ruled the country from AD 26 to 36. He usually lived on the coast in Caesarea, but kept troops stationed in a fortress in Jerusalem where he appeared personally for major festivals. He was a brutal ruler whose atrocities against the Jews were legendary (e.g., Luke 13:1; Josephus, War 2.9.2-4).

18:31-32 Pilate found the charges unsatisfying and told the Sanhedrin, judge him by your own law. Pilate saw this as a Jewish squabble, which he refused to investigate. The Jewish leaders, however, insisted that an execution was necessary. • fulfilled Jesus’ prediction about the way he would die (see 12:32-33): The Jews would have employed stoning; the Romans used crucifixion. If Pilate delivered Jesus’ sentence, he would be crucified.

18:33 Pilate was personally responsible for capital crimes in which the interests and security of the Roman empire were at stake, so he began his formal legal inquiry. • Are you the king of the Jews? To get the governor’s attention, Caiafas had charged that Jesus had urged people not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and had claimed to be a king (Luke 23:2). To Pilate, Jesus might have been just another Jewish terrorist–revolutionary (see Luke 23:18-19; Acts 5:36-37) with another Jewish terrorist–revolutionary. • The Passover meal itself had occurred the night before (see 13:1; Mark 14:14-16). The following day, another meal began the weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:5-6).

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18:34-35 Jesus’ reply forced the governor to show the origin of his question. The Temple leadership was behind these charges. Pilate only wanted to know if Jesus was a rebel who might threaten Roman interests.

18:36-37 Jesus was willing to accept the title of king. But he made it clear that he did not govern an earthly kingdom that might rival Rome. Jesus’ kingship is not of this world. Rather than being a political ruler, he rules through the devotion and obedience of his followers.

18:38-39 What is truth? Truth was not a foreign idea to Pilate, but he did not wait for an answer to his question because he did not believe there was one. • Pilate returned to the council members waiting outside and delivered his verdict: not guilty. Although he referred to Jesus as “King of the Jews” (see also 19:19), the title meant nothing more to Pilate than a mocking expression of contempt. Pilate’s offer of amnesty revealed his desire to let Jesus go.

18:40 Jesus was no threat to Rome, but Barabbas was a revolutionary, a violent man who took part in political uprisings (see Luke 23:19), with a proven capacity to challenge the Roman military occupation of Israel.

19:1-16 Jesus was also beaten after his sentencing (Mark 15:15), but here John records an earlier beating, which was likely Pilate’s attempt to show that Jesus had been punished and could be released (19:4). When this failed, Pilate passed his sentence and handed Jesus over to the Jewish leaders for crucifixion (19:16).

19:2 The crown of thorns might have come from a date palm (cp. 12:13-14), whose thorns can exceed twelve inches. There are Greek coin images showing such crowns, with the stems woven and the thorns radiating upward above the crown. • The purple robe was probably a soldier’s robe—dark red to complete the picture of mock royalty.

19:4-6 Pilate’s intention was to bring Jesus out to display the marks of his punishment to sway the crowd to let him go. After being flogged with a lead-tipped whip, Jesus was bleeding profusely. • Pilate announced his verdict
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of not guilty a second time, but he was met with a strident call for Jesus’ death (19:6).

19:6 Pilate knew that a riot could happen when a man popular with the masses was executed, so he shifted responsibility to crucify Jesus to the Temple leaders.

19:7 During the trial before Caiaphas, the charge of blasphemy—calling himself the Son of God—was determined to be Jesus’ true crime (see Mark 14:61-65). The leaders had already tried pitting Roman imperial interests against Jesus (18:33), and would do so again (19:12). Now they challenged the governor on another level: Pilate must keep the peace by upholding local law, even when it was irrelevant to Rome. Claiming to be God’s son was not illegal, because Israel’s kings did this (Ps 2:7; 89:22-27). However, Jesus claimed to have the divine authority of God himself (see 5:18), which they saw as blasphemy.

19:8-9 Pilate . . . was more frightened than ever: He was superstitious, and the idea of gods appearing in the world was not uncommon [Acts 14:11]. He sensed that more than a political fight was going on, so he asked Jesus, Where are you from? He did not mean Jesus’ birthplace, but whether Jesus was a divine man who had descended from heaven. • the headquarters: Greek the Praetorium. • Why Jesus gave no answer is unclear. Perhaps it was because Pilate would not have been able to understand the answer—that true power comes only from God, and God had empowered Jesus (cp. 19:11).

19:10-11 You would have no power over me: Although Pilate had the power to . . . crucify Jesus, it was only because God had given him this temporary power so Jesus could advance toward the cross (see 10:18).

19:12 Each time he had a conversation with Jesus, Pilate tried to release him: He kept trying, but his repeated efforts were fruitless. • Friend of Caesar is a technical term that refers to an ally of the emperor. It was an official title given to individuals such as senators who showed exceptional loyalty and service to the emperor. The Jewish leaders were implying that they would ruin Pilate’s career by reporting that he was not working in Rome’s interests. They probably knew that Pilate was also having a personal crisis. His patron in Rome, Sejanus (the chief administrator of the Empire under Tiberius Caesar), had fallen from favor and was executed in AD 31. Pilate had every reason to be afraid.


The Stone Pavement was the platform holding the judgment seat; from there Pilate now spoke with the authority of his office.

19:14 the day of preparation for the Passover (or the day of preparation during the Passover): Here, Passover does not refer to the Jewish Passover meal, which had taken place the night before, but to the whole Festival of Unleavened Bread. It was now Friday, the day of preparation for the Passover Sabbath, which would begin at sundown (cp. Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54). • people: Literally Jewish people; also one who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar.

19:15 The final words of the priests, We have no king but Caesar, stood in direct contradiction to the OT understanding that God was Israel’s king (cp. Judg 8:23; 1 Sam 8:7; 10:19). Jerusalem and its leaders were in the process of killing their true king (18:37) while paying homage to Caesar, the pagan king of Rome.

19:16 Pilate turned Jesus over to the Roman garrison, who prepared Jesus for crucifixion by a second flogging (Mark 15:15), which brought him near death. Bleeding profusely, his clothes soaked in blood, his thorn-laced crown now digging deeply into his head, and nearly in shock, Jesus was marched to a site outside the city.

19:17 The vertical beam (Latin staticulum) of the cross was generally kept at the crucifixion site, and the victim was forced to carry only the heavy crossbeam (Latin patibulum). • Crucifixions were public executions that took place near major roadways. They were designed to shock and warn the people. • Place of the Skull (Hebrew and Aramaic Golgotha; Latin calvariae, “Calvary”): See map on p. 1809. Most archaeologists agree that Jesus’ crucifixion was at the site of the present-day Church of the Holy Sepulchre, located in the Christian Quarter of the old walled city of Jerusalem (see First-Century Jerusalem, p. 1753). An alternate site, Gordon’s Calvary (north of the Damascus Gate), is a model of what the scene possibly looked like, but it holds only a tomb from the 500s bc and therefore cannot be the authentic site of Jesus’ crucifixion and burial.
Hebrew, Golgotha). 18There they nailed him to the cross. Two others were crucified with him, one on either side, with Jesus between them. 19And Pilate posted a sign on the cross that read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 20The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so that many people could read it.

21Then the leading priests objected and said to Pilate, "Change it from 'The King of the Jews' to 'He said, I am King of the Jews.'"

22Pilate replied, "No, what I have written, I have written."

23When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes among the four of them. They also took his robe, but it was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24So they said, "Rather than tearing it apart, let’s throw dice for it." This fulfilled the Scripture that says, "They divided my garments among themselves and threw dice for my clothing." So that is what they did.

25Standing near the cross were Jesus’ mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene.

26When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, "Dear woman, here is your son." 27And he said to this disciple, "Here is your mother." And from then on this disciple took her into his home.

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The Cross and Passover (19:17-36)

At the beginning of John’s Gospel, John the Baptist introduced Jesus by calling him the “Lamb of God” (1:29, 36). This odd phrase might refer to the sacrificial lamb that was killed daily in the Temple (Exod 29:38-46) or to the sacrificial lamb of Isa 53:7 (cp. Acts 8:32-35; Rev 5:5-14). Both rituals of sacrifice spoke of rescue and forgiveness from sin.

However, this was not all that John had in mind. John presented Jesus as the Passover lamb whose death marks the central event of the Passover season (see Exod 12:46; Luke 22:7; 1 Cor 5:7). In the first century, Jews made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem each spring to celebrate the Passover and to reread the story of the Exodus (see Exod 12–15). When Israel was being rescued from Egypt, the blood of a lamb was sprinkled on the doorposts of each Jewish home in Egypt and saved those inside from death (Exod 12). Jews who came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover needed to supply a perfect young lamb for sacrifice. The animal could not be diseased or have broken bones.

Jesus used his final Passover meal to show that his sacrificial death would give new meaning to the festival (Mark 14:17-31). In John, the cross became an altar where Christ, the Passover lamb, was slain. Jesus’ legs were not broken (19:33), fulfilling a Passover rule (19:36; Exod 12:46). Blood ran freely from his wound (19:34), showing that his life was being exchanged for others. Just as a lamb died to save the lives of Jewish families at the Passover in Egypt, so, too, this one death of the Son of God on the cross serves to bring salvation to the world.
The Death of Jesus

Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, “I am thirsty.”

A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. When Jesus had tasted it, he said, “It is finished!” Then he bowed his head and released his spirit.

It was the day of preparation, and the Jewish leaders didn’t want the bodies hanging there the next day, which was the Sabbath (and a very special Sabbath, because it was the Passover). So they asked Pilate to hasten their deaths by ordering that their legs be broken. Then their bodies could be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they didn’t break his legs. One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out. (This report is from an eyewitness giving an accurate account. He speaks the truth so that you also can believe.) These things happened in fulfillment of the Scriptures that say, “Not one of his bones will be broken,” and “They will look on the one they pierced.”

The Burial of Jesus

Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus’ body. When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away. With him came

First-century Judean Tombs (John 19:41). Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb, where Jesus was buried (see Matt 27:57-60), was like other first-century Judean tombs. This drawing is based on sixty-one such “rolling-stone” tombs that have been discovered. These tombs, carved in limestone, were affordable only by wealthy families, and they were constructed according to the laws of Judaism (see Mishnah Baba Batra 6:8). After preparation for burial, bodies were placed in the kokh (niche) which was then sealed with a rolling closure stone. Much later the dried bones were stored in ossuaries (stone boxes) within the tomb.

used in Egypt to brush lamb’s blood on the doorposts and lintels during the first Passover (Exod 12:22). Jesus is God’s Passover lamb (1:29, 36), and his blood likewise saves.

Jesus called out in triumph and exhaustion that he had finished the work he set out to do. On the cross he was not a victim, but a servant doing God’s bidding.

The Jewish authorities, eager to complete the crucifixion before Sabbath began at dusk, asked Pilate to break the legs of the men. Breaking the legs with a mallet was common: It promoted asphyxiation and hemorrhaging, because the victim could no longer push himself up to breathe.

To confirm that Jesus was dead, a Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear. Blood and water flowed out:

This has several levels of meaning: (1) The spear probably punctured Jesus’ pericardium, the sac around the heart, releasing these fluids. (2) John might have been thinking of more Passover symbolism. The Passover lamb’s blood had to flow as it died. (3) The living water, flowing from Jesus’ side, reminds readers of earlier language that Jesus used to describe himself (see 7:37-39; “Living Water” at 4:10-14, p. 1777).

John was at the foot of the cross (19:26). He was not simply a collector of traditions about Jesus, but an eyewitness giving an accurate account of the events of Jesus’ life (cp. 21:24). This same confidence can be seen in the opening of John’s first letter (1 Jn 1:1-4) • can believe: Some manuscripts read can continue to believe.

Not one of his bones will be broken:” Exod 12:46; Num 9:12; Ps 34:20. The Passover lamb could have no broken bones; Jesus was the perfect Passover lamb (see also 1 Cor 5:7).

“They will look on the one they pierced”: Zechariah 12:10 describes how Israel would look on a prophet or the Messiah and lament their own fatal lack of faith.

According to Luke, Joseph of Arimathea was a courageous man who was waiting for the Kingdom of God (Luke 23:50-51). He was a wealthy (Matt 27:57) and influential leader in Jerusalem and a member of the high council (Mark 15:43) who disagreed with the decision to kill Jesus. He asked Pilate for the favor of burying Jesus in his personal tomb. Joseph was a secret disciple (cp. 12:42-43), but his bold deed brought him out in public support of Jesus.
Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought about seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes. Following Jewish burial custom, they wrapped Jesus’ body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth. The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before. And so, because it was the day of preparation for the Jewish Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Jesus’ Resurrection (20:1-31)
The Empty Tomb

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance.

She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—

For until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Then they went home.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene
John 20:11-18; cp. Matt 28:8-10; Mark 16:9-11

Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her.

“Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?”

She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”

“Mary!” Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”).
Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Jesus Appears to Thomas

24 One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus first appeared to his disciples after his death, Thomas was not present. When Thomas heard the report from the others, he did not believe it, insisting he would have to see the evidence of the crucifixion in Jesus’ body with his own eyes and feel it with his own hands (20:19-23). A week later, when Jesus once again appeared to the disciples, he especially addressed Thomas, telling him to examine the marks of the nails and the spear in his body and challenging him to believe and not be skeptical. Thomas’s response represents one of the strongest statements of Jesus’ deity in the New Testament, and the culmination of the Gospel of John’s portrayal of Jesus: “My Lord and my God!” (20:28).

Later tradition speaks of Thomas working as a missionary in the East: in Parthia (Eusebius), Persia (Jerome), and India (Acts of Thomas). The Mar Thoma church on the west coast of India traces its roots back to the early missionary work of Thomas. The historical reliability of these accounts is uncertain.

Thomas’s name is unreliably linked to several later apocryphal writings: the Acts of Thomas, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Apocalypse of Thomas, the Book of Thomas the Athlete, and especially the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, a Gnostic collection of Jesus’ sayings.

Thomas, also known as “the twin,” was one of the twelve apostles (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). He is remembered for his unbelieving response to Jesus’ resurrection.

Nothing is known of how Jesus first met and called Thomas to be his disciple. The only personal accounts of Thomas are found in the Gospel of John. Thomas voiced his willingness to follow Jesus, even if it meant death (11:16); he openly told Jesus that he didn’t understand what he was saying (14:5); and he was one of the seven disciples who returned to fishing after the resurrection, when Jesus appeared to them (21:2).

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when Jesus came. 25 They told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he replied, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.”

26 Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”

28 “My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed.

29 Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”

Purpose of the Book

The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”

This is how it happened. Several of the disciples were there—Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples.

Simon Peter said, “I’m going fishing.”

“We’ll come, too,” they all said. So they went out in the boat, but they caught nothing all night.

At dawn Jesus was standing on the beach, but the disciples couldn’t see who he was. 3 He called out, “Fellows, have you caught any fish?”

“No,” they replied.

Then he said, “Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you’ll get some!” So they did, and they couldn’t haul in the net because there were so many fish in it.

Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he had stripped for work), jumped into the water, and headed to shore. The others stayed with the boat and pulled the loaded net to the shore, for they were only about a hundred yards from shore. When they got there, they found breakfast waiting for them—fish cooking over a charcoal fire, and some bread.

“Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught,” Jesus said. So Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore. There were 153 large fish, and yet the net hadn’t torn.

20:26-27 Eight days later was Sunday, one week after Jesus’ resurrection (it was customary to include the current day when counting forward). Jesus’ appearance on the following Sunday helps explain the disciples’ meeting on “the Lord’s Day” (see Rev 1:10). • Peace be with you: This scene was exactly like Jesus’ first appearance (20:19-20). Jesus had already heard Thomas’ complaint and now answered directly. • Believe! Jesus challenged Thomas to believe in the resurrection like the others.

20:28 “My Lord and my God!” This was not an astonished exclamation but a proclamation of heartfelt belief. It concludes John’s study of Jesus’ deity that has framed the whole book (see 1:1-18).

20:29 Jesus points to the generations of Christians who, through the testimony of others, would believe without seeing.

20:30-31 Many scholars view these words as the conclusion of John’s Gospel, viewing ch 21 as an appendix. John’s account is only a selection from Jesus’ many . . . miraculous signs.

20:31 that you may continue to believe: Some manuscripts use the present tense, indicating that John wrote to encourage believers. Other manuscripts read that you may come to believe, suggesting that John wrote to stimulate new faith (cp. 1:7).

21:1-25 This final chapter adds an account about the resurrected Jesus in Galilee (21:1-14) and records the exchange between Peter and Jesus concerning Peter’s love (21:15-23). The chapter ends by summarizing the authority and importance of John’s eyewitness report (21:24-25).

21:1 Sea of Galilee: Greek Sea of Tiberias, another name for the Sea of Galilee (see 6:1).

21:2 Several of the disciples returned to fishing in the Sea of Galilee. This was not a sign that their faith had weakened—even rabbis who regularly preached kept practicing their occupations (see Acts 18:3; 20:34; 1 Cor 4:12). • Thomas (nicknamed the Twin): Literally Thomas, who was called Didymus. • The sons of Zebedee were James and John (see Matt 4:21).

21:3 Fishing was usually successful in the early hours of the morning. However, this trip was useless and they caught nothing all night.
1817

21:14 John 20:19, 26
21:15 Matt 26:33
21:16 Acts 20:28
Heb 11:20-21
1 Pet 5:2-3
poimaino (4165) • Acts 20:28
21:17 John 13:37-38; 16:30
21:19 John 13:36
2 Pet 1:14
21:22 Matt 16:27
1 Jn 1:1-3
3 Jn 1:12
21:25 John 20:30
biblion (0975) • 2 Tim 4:13

12“Now come and have some breakfast!” Jesus said. None of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. 13Then Jesus served them the bread and the fish. 14This was the third time Jesus had appeared to his disciples since he had been raised from the dead.

Peter’s Restoration

15After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.”

“Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him.

16Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.”

“Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said.

17A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.

18“I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don’t want to go.” 19Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, “Follow me.”

20Peter turned around and saw behind them the disciple Jesus loved—the one who had leaned over to Jesus during supper and asked, “Lord, who will betray you?” 21Peter asked Jesus, “What about him, Lord?” 22Jesus replied, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me.” 23So the rumor spread among the community of believers that this disciple wouldn’t die. But that isn’t what Jesus said at all. He only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”

Concluding Remarks

24This disciple is the one who testifies to these events and has recorded them here. And we know that his account of these things is accurate.

25Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written.
Romans has been called the greatest theological document ever written. In this letter, the apostle Paul explains the Good News—the climactic revelation of God to the world through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul reflects on the human condition, on the meaning of our lives on earth, and on our hope for the world to come. He constantly moves us back to the fundamentals of God’s truth revealed in Christ, and he teaches us to deal with the problems, failures, and disputes that characterize life in this world.

SETTING

We do not know who first brought the Good News to Rome. Perhaps Jews from Rome who were converted when God first poured out his Spirit on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:10) took the message back to their home city. Several “house churches” quickly grew up, made up primarily of converts from Judaism.

In AD 49, the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome—including Jewish Christians (see Acts 18:2). Although Paul had never visited Rome (1:13), in his travels he met some of these Roman Christians, such as Priscilla and Aquila (16:3-4; cp. Acts 18:2).

Claudius’s decree eventually lapsed, so by the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, many Jewish Christians had returned to Rome. However, in their absence the Gentile Christians had taken the lead in the Christian community in Rome. Therefore, when Paul wrote to the Roman Christians (probably about AD 57), the Roman Christian community was divided into two major factions. The Gentile Christians now comprised the majority group, and they were naturally less concerned about continuity with the OT or with the demands of the law of Moses than their Jewish brothers and sisters. They even looked down on the Jewish Christians (see 11:25). The minority Jewish Christians, for their part, reacted to the Gentile-Christian majority by insisting on adherence to certain aspects of the law of Moses. Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians to address this theological and social division, a schism that had at its heart the question of continuity and discontinuity between Jewish and Christian faith.

The Setting of Romans, about AD 57. Paul probably wrote Romans toward the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–19:41), perhaps from Corinth. Paul had the opportunity to visit the Romans, as he hoped (1:10-15)—his third missionary journey ended in Jerusalem, where he was imprisoned and eventually sent to Rome, where he arrived in AD 60 (Acts 28:11-15).
SUMMARY

In the introduction of the letter (1:1-17), Paul identifies himself and his readers (1:1-7), expresses thanks for the Roman Christians (1:8-15), and introduces the theme of the letter: the “Good News about Christ” (1:16-17).

Before elaborating on this Good News, Paul sets out the dark backdrop of universal human sinfulness that makes the Good News necessary. Both Gentiles (1:18-32) and Jews (2:1–3:8) have turned away from God’s revelation of himself. All are “under the power of sin” and cannot be made right with God by anything they do (3:9-20).

Into this hopeless situation comes the Good News, which reveals a new “way to be made right” with God. God provided this new way by sending Jesus as a sacrifice for sin, and all human beings can gain the benefits of that sacrifice by faith (3:21-26). Paul highlights the centrality of faith and its nature in 3:27–4:25. He shows that faith excludes boasting and that it enables both Jews and Gentiles to have equal access to God’s grace in Christ (3:27-31). He develops these same points through reference to Abraham (4:1-25).

In chs 5–8, Paul discusses the assurance or security of salvation. The assurance that believers will share God’s glory (5:1-11) is based on the way in which Jesus Christ more than reversed the terrible effects of Adam’s sin (5:12-21). Neither sin (6:1-23) nor the law (7:1-25) can prevent God from accomplishing his purposes for the believer. The Holy Spirit liberates believers from death (8:1-17) and assures them that the sufferings of this life will not keep them from the glory to which God has destined them (8:18-39).

The Good News can only truly be “good news” if the message of Christ stands in continuity with God’s promises in the OT. But the unbelief of so many Jews might show that God’s promises to Israel are not being fulfilled (9:1-5). So, in chs 9–11, Paul demonstrates that God is being faithful to his promises. God had never promised salvation to all Jews, but only to a remnant (9:6-29). The Jews themselves are responsible for their predicament because they refuse to recognize the fulfillment of God’s promises in Christ (9:30–10:21). Furthermore, God is faithfully preserving a remnant of Jewish believers (11:1-10), and God has still more to accomplish for his people Israel (11:11-36).

The Good News rescues people from the penalty of sin, and it also transforms a person’s life. In 12:1-15:13, Paul turns his attention to the transforming power of the Good News. In keeping with God’s mercies, this transformation demands a whole new way of thinking and living (12:1-2).
The transformed life will be fleshed out in community harmony (12:3-8), manifestations of love (12:9-21; cp. 13:8-10), and submission to the government (13:1-7). The transformed life derives its power from the work God has already done, as well as from the work he has yet to do (13:11-14).

In 14:1–15:13, Paul tackles a specific issue that was a problem in the church at Rome. Christians were criticizing each other over various practices related to the OT law. Paul exhorts them to accept each other and to look to Christ’s example of self-giving love as the model to emulate.

The letter format of Romans emerges again at the end, where Paul touches on his ministry and travel plans (15:14-33), greets and commends fellow workers and other Christians (16:1-16), and concludes with further references to fellow workers, a final warning, and a doxology (16:17-27).

DATE, PLACE, AND OCCASION OF WRITING
Paul probably wrote Romans during a three-month stay in Corinth near the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:2-3), around AD 57. The reference to Cenchrea in 16:1—a port city next to Corinth—identifies the geography more precisely. By this time, Paul had completed his missionary work in the eastern Mediterranean, and his visit to Jerusalem was imminent.

We can determine the general situation in which Romans was written by reviewing Paul’s references to his prior ministry and his future travel plans (15:14-33). Four geographical references provide the framework: (1) Looking back, Paul declared that he had “fully presented the Good News of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum” (15:19). Illyricum was a Roman province that occupied the same general area as modern-day Serbia and Croatia. Paul noted that he had planted churches in major cities from Jerusalem, through Asia Minor, and into Macedonia and Greece. This was the territory Paul and his companions covered on the three great missionary journeys recorded in Acts. (2) Paul’s intermediate destination was Jerusalem, where he planned to deliver a “gift to the believers” (15:25). This gift was money that Paul had been collecting from the Gentile churches he had founded to assist the church in Jerusalem (15:26; see also 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8–9). (3) After visiting Jerusalem to deliver the collection, Paul planned to go to Rome (15:24). (4) A long stay with the Roman Christians was not Paul’s final goal, as the language of 15:24 (“stop off”) makes clear. His ultimate goal was Spain, where he could pursue his calling to plant churches in places “where the name of Christ has never been heard” (15:20, 24). This information points to a date near the end of the third missionary journey.

PAUL’S PURPOSE IN WRITING
Romans combines three specific purposes: to summarize Paul’s theology, to solicit support for a future mission to Spain, and to bring unity to the church in Rome.

Paul saw himself standing at a critical juncture in his ministry (15:20). He had “fully presented” or fulfilled the Good News by taking it to a broad area of the eastern Mediterranean basin (15:19). He now stood ready to move to the far end of the Mediterranean to preach the
Good News in new territory. It is quite natural, then, that Paul took the occasion of his letter to the Romans to summarize his theology as he had hammered it out in the midst of controversy and trial for the previous twenty-five years.

In other words, Romans might be a summary of Paul’s theology. Even so, this is not the whole of Paul’s purpose in writing—it does not explain why Paul says so little in Romans about key theological ideas (e.g., the person of Christ, the church, the last days). Nor does it explain why Paul would have sent this summary of his theology to the church in Rome.

Another purpose emerges when we turn our attention to Paul’s ultimate destination, Spain: Paul wanted to gather support from the Roman Christians for his new mission in a distant land. Paul’s “sending church,” Antioch, was thousands of miles from Spain. As the apostle sought a new church to partner with him, his attention naturally turned to the church in Rome (15:24). Therefore, it is likely that Paul sent this dense theological treatise to Rome because he wanted to explain who he was and what he believed. Because Paul’s message had frequently been misunderstood, he became a controversial figure in the early church. He was undoubtedly aware that some Christians in Rome were suspicious of him and that he therefore must provide a careful and reasoned defense of his position on some of the most debated issues of the faith.

Finally, Paul wrote to a Christian community in Rome that was divided over the degree to which the OT law should continue to guide believers. Paul’s long and explicit treatment of this problem (14:1–15:13) reveals that one of his purposes in writing was to heal this rift in the community in Rome.

In Romans, Paul presented the Good News as he had come to understand it. The heart of that Good News is the offer of salvation in Christ for all who believe. Paul explores the problem of human sin, the solution provided in the cross of Christ, and the assurance of glory that a living relationship with Christ provides. The message of the cross of Christ stands both in continuity with the OT (because its promises are truly fulfilled in Christ) and in discontinuity with it (as God in Christ inaugurates a new covenant that transcends the OT law).

INTERPRETATION
Since the time of the Reformation, Romans has been read as a letter about the salvation of the individual. Following the lead of Martin Luther, whose own spiritual pilgrimage was closely tied to the theology of Romans, the Reformers (such as John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli) saw in this letter the classic biblical expression of the truth that human beings are put right with God by their faith in Christ and not by their own effort. The Reformers viewed Paul as fighting against a legalistic Judaism that insisted that people had to obey the law to be saved. Jewish preoccupation with the law had led many Jews to presume that faithfulness to the law was sufficient for salvation (e.g., 10:1-4).

Many contemporary interpreters insist that this Reformation view of Romans left out important elements in understanding both the letter itself and first-century Judaism. Jews in Paul’s day, it is argued, did not believe that they had to obey the law to be saved. They were already saved, through God’s choosing them to be his people. Obeying the
law was the way they maintained their status as God’s people. These interpreters say that Paul was not fighting against legalism but against exclusivism—against the Jewish claim that salvation was confined to Israel and was not to be shared with Gentiles. Accordingly, Paul shows how the Good News relates salvation through faith to the continuity of God’s people from the OT to the NT and to the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in his own day.

This new approach to understanding Romans has much to commend it. Christian interpreters have sometimes missed the notes of grace and faith that are part of Jewish teaching. And Romans does have a lot to say about including Gentiles in God’s people and the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church.

Ultimately, however, neither the Reformation view alone nor the contemporary view alone explains everything in Romans. They need to be combined if we are to appreciate the letter as a whole. At its most foundational level, Romans is about the Good News—and the Good News, first and foremost, is a message about how everyone can have a right relationship with God.

1.1-17 These verses contain the normal features of NT letter introductions: an identification of the writer (1:1-6) and readers (1:7; a thanksgiving (1:8-15); and the theme of the letter (1:16-17).

1:1 slave of Christ Jesus: The word slave is used of important OT leaders of God’s people, such as Moses (2 Kgs 18:12), Joshua (Josh 24:29), Elijah (2 Kgs 10:10), and David (2 Sam 7:8). The title underscores Paul’s complete subservience to Christ as Lord. * sent out (literally set apart): Paul may be alluding to being “set apart” by God for his mission before he was born, as the prophet Jeremiah was (Jer 1.5). He may also be referring to God’s call at the time of his Damascu Road conversion (Acts 9:15-16; cp. Acts 13:2), to preach the Good News to Jews and especially to Gentiles. The Good News, or “gospel,” is a recurrent topic in the opening of the letter (1:1, 9, 15, 16). Paul takes the word from the OT, where the Hebrew equivalent refers to the victory that God wins for his people (Isa 40:9; 41:27; 60:6; 61:1; Nah 1:15; see Joel 2:32).

1:3-4 In the Greek, these verses are in carefully structured parallel form; Paul might be quoting an early Christian creed or hymn about Jesus Christ as God’s Son in order to establish common ground with the Roman Christians, whom he had never visited. 1:3 In his earthly life (literally As regards the flesh): Paul often uses “flesh” (Greek sarx) to refer to bodily existence in this world (e.g., 4:1; 8:3). Paul refers to King David’s family line because God promised that a descendant of David would be the Messiah and would be given an eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7:13-16; see Isa 9:7; Jer 33:15). Jesus was born into David’s line (Matt 1:6; Luke 1:27, 32), so he was qualified to fulfill God’s promise. 1:4 and he was shown to be (or and was designated): Although he eternally existed as the Son of God (1:3), Jesus’ resurrection demonstrated him to be God’s Son, revealing him in all his power and glory. * by the power of the Holy Spirit: Or by the Spirit of holiness; or in the new realm of the Spirit. 1:5 given us . . . apostles: Here Paul might have been thinking both of himself and of the other apostles, or he might be using an editorial plural to refer only to himself. The privilege (or the grace): Privilege and authority could specify two separate things, but one might explain the other, as in the privilege of having apostolic authority. Paul always makes it clear that his distinctive authority is a gift from God (see also 15:15-16). * so that they will believe and obey him: This summary of Paul’s purpose in preaching to Gentiles brackets the book of Romans, as he repeats the same idea in slightly different language at the end of the letter (16:26). Paul wanted Gentiles to believe in Jesus Christ; he underscored that believing in Jesus Christ as the Lord entails a commitment to obey him. Faith and obedience are not identical, but one does not occur without the other. 1:7 To be holy means to be set apart for God. This expression is used throughout the OT to describe Israel, God’s chosen people (cp. Exod 19:6), whom God called from among all other nations to be his own. By calling the Gentile Christians his own holy people, Paul makes it clear that Gentiles are now fully included among God’s people.
Thanksgiving and Occasion: Paul and the Romans
8Let me say first that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith in him is being talked about all over the world. 9God knows how often I pray for you. Day and night I bring you and your needs in prayer to God, whom I serve with all my heart by spreading the Good News about his Son.

One of the things I always pray for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you. 11For I long to visit you so I can bring you some spiritual gift that will help you grow strong in the Lord. 12When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours. 13I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to visit you, but I was prevented until now. I want to work among you and see spiritual fruit, just as I have seen among other Gentiles. 14For I have a great sense of obligation to people in both the civilized world and the rest of the world, to the educated and uneducated alike. 15So I am eager to come to you in Rome, too, to preach the Good News.

The Theme of the Letter: God’s Good News
16For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, 17saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. 18This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”

All Persons Are Accountable to God for Sin (1:18–32)
18But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. 19They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. 20For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

1:9 When Paul uses the phrase with all my heart (or in my spirit), he might be describing the influence of God’s Holy Spirit on his own inner person. The word spirit also refers to the deepest part of a person, which the phrase all my heart expresses well.

1:11 some spiritual gift: Paul is probably referring to the spiritual benefit that he hopes his ministry will bring to the Roman Christians.

1:13 brothers and sisters (literally brothers): This Greek word (adelphoi) describes people who are in a familial relationship. Paul and other NT writers use this word to indicate that Christians are so intimately tied to one another in Christ that they are family. The word refers to both male and female Christians. 1:14 to people in both the civilized world and the rest of the world (literally to Greeks and barbarians): The Greeks prided themselves on being sophisticated and cultured, while regarding people from other cultures as inferior. They mocked other peoples’ poorly spoken Greek, claiming that they could only say “bar bar,” a nonsense phrase from which our word barbarian comes. Paul uses this cultural divide to emphasize his intention to preach the Good News to all kinds of people.

1:15 So I am eager to come to you in Rome, too, to preach the Good News.
21 Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. 22 Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. 23 And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies. 25 They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. 26 That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. 27 And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

28 Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. 29 Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. 30 They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. 31 They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. 32 They know God’s justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.

Jews are Accountable to God for Sin

2 You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. 2 And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. 3 Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God’s judgment when you do the same things? 4 Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can’t you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

5 But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up a terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 He will judge everyone according to what they have done.

1:21 To know God in Scripture usually means to have an intimate, saving relationship with him (see 2 Cor 5:16; Gal 4:9; Phil 3:8, 10). Here, however, they knew God means that people knew about God. All people have some understanding of God through creation, yet they do not do what is right based on that knowledge. Rather than learn more about God, they worship gods of their own making.

1:24 When human beings exchanged the living God for idols, God abandoned them, a point Paul makes twice more in this paragraph (1:26, 28). The word abandon includes a sense of “handing over,” suggesting that God actively consigns people to the consequences of their sin.

1:26 women turned against the natural way: In this context, natural way refers to the nature of the world as God made it. As in the OT, Paul singles out homosexuality as a key illustration of how people have fallen away from worship of the true God (see Gen 19:1-28; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Deut 23:17-18). God created human beings as male and female, and engaging in homosexual activity is a violation of God’s creative intention.

1:27 suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved: When people abandon the Creator’s intentions, they are judged for their actions. This judgment can take many different forms, but the ultimate consequence is spiritual death (see 1:32).

1:28 thought it foolish: Sin affects our actions and even our thoughts. One of the serious consequences of turning away from God is an unsound mind; people can no longer use their minds as God intended.

1:29-31 This list of sins follows a popular Hellenistic literary form called a diatribe, in which a writer tries to win over an audience to his views by portraying a debate between himself and a hypothetical opponent. * these very same things: Paul’s point is that Jews, like Gentiles, turn from God’s revelation to go their own way.

2:4 Can’t you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? Behind Paul’s question are Jewish passages (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 12–15; cp. Jer 7:1-5; Amos 5:18-27) that portray a prevalent Jewish complacency toward judgment. Many Jews thought that because they were God’s people, they did not need to worry about judgment, for their sins would not be punished as the sins of Gentiles would be. Paul emphasizes that God’s grace was intended to turn the Jews from their sin, not to condone a sinful lifestyle.

2:6-11 Paul uses a chiasm ("X" arrangement) to make his point:
A God judges everyone the same (2:6)
B Life is the reward for doing good (2:7)
C Wrath is the penalty for evil (2:8)
A' God shows no favoritism (2:11)

2:7 He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good: Paul makes it clear elsewhere that no one can receive eternal life except as God’s gift through faith (3:20; 8:1-8). Here, Paul is either referring to Christians whose good deeds (that result from faith) will be taken into account in God’s judgment, or he is reminding readers of the absolute standard that God’s own holiness establishes, since only by perfection can sinners hope to find acceptance before God. As the argument of the letter unfolds, Paul will show that no one is capable of meeting that standard.

2:8 Live for themselves translates a rare Greek word (ethiteia) that seems to convey the idea of selfish ambition or strife. Using this word, Aristotle scolded the politicians of his day for seeking public office for selfish gain rather than from a desire to serve the people (Aristotle, Politics 5.3; see also 2 Cor 12:20; Gal 5:20; Phil 1:17; 2:3; Jas 3:14, 16).

2:9 also for the Gentile: Literally also for the Greek, also in 2:10.

2:12 destroyed: This common NT word describes the fate of the wicked after death (see also 9:22; 14:15; 1 Cor 1:18; 15:18; 2 Cor 2:15; 4:3; Phil 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thes 2:10; 1 Tim 6:9). Condemned sinners do not cease to exist, but they suffer eternal punishment, which includes the everlasting destruction of all good in their identity and experience.

• the Jews, who do have God’s law: The Jews were given the law of Moses, while the Gentiles never had God’s written law. In the NT period, Jews emphasized their possession of the law as a mark of God’s favor and even as a guarantee of salvation.

2:13 obeying the law . . . makes us right in his sight: Regarding the promise of righteousness through obedience, see 2:7; see also Jas 1:22.

2:14-15 The Gentiles who know his law when they instinctively obey it may be Gentile Christians, especially since written in their hearts (2:15) alludes to the prophecy of the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34). Or they could be non-Christian Gentiles who know God’s general moral law through their consciences. In this case, Paul would be using the notion of natural law to show how all people could be held accountable for certain basic moral requirements.

2:16 secret life (literally the hidden things): Scripture frequently stresses that God will judge people according to their thoughts and intentions (see 1 Sam 16:7; Ps 139:1-2; Jer 17:10).

2:17-20 The boasting of the Jews reflects OT and Jewish teaching about the privileges and responsibilities God gave to Israel. God gave his law to Israel, entered into a special relationship with them, and commissioned them to be a light to the Gentiles (see Isa 42:6-7).
he wants; you know what is right because you have been taught his law. 19You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a light for people who are lost in darkness. 20You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. For you are certain that God's law gives you complete knowledge and truth.

Well then, if you teach others, why don’t you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal? 22You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you commit adultery? You condemn idolatry, but do you use idols? 23You tell others not to use items stolen from pagan temples; 24And if the Gentiles obey God's law, won’t God declare them to be his own people? 25In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God’s law will condemn you Jews who are circumcised and possess God’s law but don’t obey it.

For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. 26No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God’s Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.

God’s Faithfulness and the Judgment of Jews

Then what’s the advantage of being a Jew? Is there any value in the ceremony of circumcision? 27Yes, there are great benefits! First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God. 28True, some of them were unfaithful; but just because they were unfaithful, does that mean God will be unfaithful? Of course not! Even if everyone else is a liar, God is true. As the Scriptures say about him,

“You will be proved right in what you say, and you will win your case in court.”

But,” some might say, “our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn’t it unfair, Jews were not wrong to enjoy these blessings; their error was in failing to live up to their privileged position.

2:21-22 Paul again uses the diatribe style to expose the inconsistency of Jewish claims (see note on 2:1-5).

2:22 do you use items stolen from pagan temples? (literally do you steal from temples?): OT law prohibited Jews from having anything to do with pagan idols (see Deut 7:26), but first-century Jews did not strictly follow this law. Sometimes they stole idols and used or sold the precious metals.

2:24 Paul quotes Isa 52:5 (Greek version), where God’s name is blasphemed because Israel is oppressed by pagan nations. Here, Paul uses that passage to demonstrate the failure of the Jews to live up to their responsibilities.

2:25 God instituted the Jewish ceremony of circumcision as a sign of his covenant with Abraham; it was to be performed on every male Israelite child (Gen 17:9-13; see Rom 4:11). Circumcision therefore represents God’s covenant with his people Israel. The rite took on greater significance during the intertestamental period when the pagan king Antiochus IV Epiphanes tried to stamp out the Jewish faith by forbidding circumcision. The Jews resisted in the famous Maccabean Revolt (166–160 bc). After they restored the worship of the Lord in Israel, the Jews regarded circumcision as a highly prized mark of Jewish loyalty in the midst of a pagan culture.

2:26 won’t God declare them to be his own people? Paul might be speaking of Gentile Christians who are God’s people because they obey God’s law, or he could be speaking hypothetically about what would happen if a Gentile perfectly obeyed God’s law.

2:29 The letter of the law refers to the law of God written on tablets of stone (see 2 Cor 3:3), while God’s Spirit now writes his law on people’s hearts (Jer 31:33-34). Outward conformity is thus contrasted with obedience motivated by a change of heart. seeks praise: Or receives praise.

3:1 what’s the advantage of being a Jew? Paul moves his argument along by raising questions. After preaching the Good News for over twenty years, he knew what questions people would ask when they heard a particular teaching. His emphasis on the equality of Jews and Gentiles before God (ch 2) inevitably led people to ask whether he was eliminating all Jewish privileges. The question-and-answer style follows the pattern of the diatribe (see note on 2:1-5).

3:2 The advantage that Jews possessed was in having received God’s word. First of all: Paul never adds a second or a third point to the list he begins here. He might have forgotten to continue the list, or first of all might mean most importantly. However, 9:4-5 provides a good indication of what a list of Jewish privileges would have included.

• the whole revelation of God (literally the oracles of God): By using the word oracles (Greek logia), Paul highlights God’s personal communication with his people (see Deut 33:9; Ps 105:19) through which he gives them special privileges and responsibilities.

3:4 Of course not: The Greek me genoito is an emphatic negation, popular in the diatribe style that Paul uses here and in several other passages in Romans (see 3:6; 31: 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11).

• As the Scriptures say: Paul quotes Ps 51:4 (Greek version), where David confessed his sin in having an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba (see 2 Sam 11). God punished David, and David admitted that God was proved right and would win his case in court—his punishment was entirely just. God is faithful to what he has said in the past—his entire revelation—and his words warn of punishment for sin even as they promise reward for obedience.

3:5-7 how would he be qualified to judge the world? Abraham asked a similar question: “Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?” (Gen 18:25). God punishes all sin, and he retains absolute righteousness as he does so. Even when God makes use of human sin for his own ends, that sin still deserves to be, and will be, punished (see 9:10-24).
3:7  Rom 9:19  
3:8  Rom 6:1  
3:9  Rom 1:18-2:24
*Humanitas (0266)*  
*Rom 4:7*  
3:10-12  *Ps 14:1-3; 53:1-3*  
3:13  *Ps 5:9; 140:3*  
3:14  *Ps 10:7*  
3:15-17  *Isa 59:7-8*  
3:18  *Ps 36:1*  
3:19  Rom 2:12  
3:20  Ps 143:2  
Rom 4:15; 7:7  
Gal 2:16; 3:11  
3:21  Gen 15:6  
Rom 1:2; 17; 9:30
*dikaiosune* (1343)  
*Rom 4:3*  
3:22  Rom 4:11; 10:4, 12  
Gal 2:16  
Col 3:11  
*practae* (4100)  
*Rom 3:25*  

3:8 some people even slander us: Paul is referring to misrepresentations about his teaching on justification by faith. If a person is made right with God by faith alone, through God’s grace and apart from works, it could seem as if the good News allows believers to sin because their sin is forgiven when confessed (see 6:1). One of Paul’s purposes is to help the Roman Christians understand that such misunderstandings are without basis.

3:9 No, not at all: Paul’s emphatic answer does not contradict his claim in 3:1-2 that Jews have an advantage. But that advantage has not done them any good because they have disobeyed God’s word and incurred God’s punishment. Jews, like Gentiles, have sinned against the revelation of God and stand condemned. *or Gentiles: Literally or Greeks: *under the power of sin* (literally *under sin*): Being “under” something carries the sense of being under its power. The ultimate problem of human beings is not the fact of sin, but the more basic situation of being slaves to sin. The solution to this problem requires the liberation provided in Christ Jesus, who frees us from both the penalty and the power of sin.

3:10-18 The six quotations in these verses, drawn from various parts of the OT, all address human sinfulness. Paul follows the practice of rabbis who gathered together OT texts on similar themes in a practice called pearl-stringing.

3:10-12 This quotation from Ps 14:1-3; 53:1-3 (Greek version) directly supports the argument that all people are under the power of sin.

3:13-14 Paul here refers to sins of speech, mentioning a different organ of speech in each of the four lines (talk in 3:13 is literally *throat*).

3:15-17 In this quotation from Isa 59:7-8, Paul addresses sins against others.

3:18 This concluding quotation from Ps 36:1 neatly ties up the whole series (3:10-18) by referring to the same Greek words that introduced the first quotation (*ouk estin, “they have no” and “no one is”).

3:19 Paul speaks of the entire OT as the law (see also 1 Cor 9:8, 9; 14:21, 34; Gal 4:21). *Those to whom it was given* (literally *those in the law*) were the Jews, who were given the Scriptures. *How can Paul conclude that the entire world is guilty before God on the basis of evidence from the OT that Jews are sinful?* He argues “from the greater to the lesser”: If the law shows that the Jews, God’s own people, are guilty, then how much more are the Gentiles, who have not had the benefit of God’s instruction, also guilty.

3:20 By doing what the law commands refers to obeying the requirements of the law of Moses. While this phrase refers to Jews, the principle extends to all people. If Jews cannot be put in right relationship with God by obeying the law God gave them, certainly other people cannot establish such a relationship through good deeds.

3:21-4:25 Paul returns to the central theme of the righteousness of God that is revealed in Christ and is available to anyone who believes. The fundamental statement of this theology is in 3:21-26; Paul elaborates on it in 3:27-31, and illustrates it with the experience of Abraham in ch 4.

3:21-22 After a lengthy reminder of the power of sin (1:18-3:20), Paul returns to the theme presented in 1:17, the way to be made right with God (literally *the righteousness of God*). As in that verse, “the righteousness of God” is the way that God puts people in right relationship with himself. *without keeping the requirements of the law* (literally *apart from the law*): The old covenant looked forward to the climactic revelation of God’s righteousness in his Son. What God now accomplishes for us in Christ, he does apart from the covenant structure set up by the law of Moses (Heb 8:13).

*the writings of Moses: Literally the law.*
By Faith Alone: Initial Statement

23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. 24 Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he ‘freed us from the penalty for our sins. 25 For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they “believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, 26 for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

Justification “By Faith Alone” (3:27–4:25)

By Faith Alone: Initial Statement

27 Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. 28 So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

29 After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn’t he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. 30 There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. 31 Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law.

“By Faith Alone”: Abraham

Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? 2 If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God’s way. 3 For the Scriptures tell us, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.”

4 When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. 5 But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. 6 David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it:

7 “Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose ‘sins are put out of sight.”

3:24 undeserved kindness: God declares that we are righteous, not because he has to, but because he has freely chosen to give us his favor through Christ Jesus. Because we are helpless slaves of sin (3:9), our righteous status before God can never be earned (see 4:4–5).  • through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins (literally through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus): In Paul’s day, redemption referred to the price paid to free a slave. God paid our redemption price with the blood of his own Son to rescue us from our slavery to sin (see 3:9). This language was used in the OT to refer to the Exodus, the first redemption of God’s people from bondage (see 2 Sam 7:23). God promised that he would again redeem his people (Hos 13:14; Mic 4:10).

3:25 the sacrifice for sin (Greek hilastērion): This Greek word is used in the Greek OT to refer to the “atonement cover,” the cover that rested on the Ark of the Covenant in the inner sanctuary of the Tabernacle. The atonement cover was prominent in the Day of Atonement ritual (Lev 16) and came to stand for the atonement ceremony itself. Paul characterizes Jesus Christ as God’s provision of final atonement for his people. Jesus himself satisfies, or absorbs in himself, the anger of God against all sinful people (see 1:18).  • those who sinned in times past: Paul refers to righteous OT people who were not punished for their sins as strict justice would require. Hebrews reminds us, “it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4). How, then, could God forgive people in the OT? Paul answers that Jesus’ sacrifice works backward in history as well as forward—through Christ, God provided for the full satisfaction of his righteous anger against human sin.

3:29–30 Paul uses the foundational Jewish commitment to monotheism to argue for universal access to God’s forgiveness. If there is only one God, then he is equally the God of both Jews and Gentiles. All people must be able to come to God on the same terms, through faith.  • whether they are Jews or Gentiles: Literally whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised.

3:31 we truly fulfill the law: Paul knows that some people will object to his insistence on faith apart from the law because it seems to dismiss the demands of the law. However, faith actually enables people to fulfill the law. The Holy Spirit is given to those who have faith, and he makes it possible for people to do as they should.

4:1 Jews in Paul’s day revered Abraham as Israel’s founder. Some Jewish texts claim that Abraham never sinned (Prayer of Manasseh; Jubilees 23:10). Others emphasize his obedience to the law of Moses as the basis for his relationship with God (1 Maccabees 2:52; Sirach 44:19-20). However, Paul demonstrates that Abraham’s faith, not his obedience, established his status with God. Abraham’s position as the founder of God’s people demonstrates that justification by faith is central in God’s plan.

4:3 Paul quotes Gen 15:6. In response to God’s promise that he would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, Abraham believed God. It was faith that established Abraham’s relationship with God—not works (4:3–8), circumcision (4:9–12), the law (4:13–17), or the number of his descendants (4:18–21).

4:4–5 The logic of these verses is as follows: (1) The stated premise is that when people work, their pay is what they have earned, not a gift. (2) The unstated premise is that God is never indebted to his creatures (because they owe him everything), so anything he gives them is a gift (see also 9:14–16). (3) The conclusion is that therefore, people cannot be declared righteous before God because of their works.

4:7–8 This quotation from Ps 32:1–2 (Greek version) follows the Jewish custom of supporting a reference to the
God’s Unified Plan of Salvation (3:21-26)

The continuity of God’s unfolding plan of salvation is a central theme in Romans. In 3:21, Paul makes two important points about the new way of being “made right” with God that has been inaugurated in Jesus Christ. First, it does not depend on obeying the laws and regulations of the OT. Second, it was “promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets” (3:21). God has always planned to save the world through Jesus, and the entire OT was a preparation for that climactic moment in salvation history. In 1:2, Paul claims that “God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.” Paul keeps returning to this theme of continuity, especially in chs 9–11, where he shows how God’s dealings with Israel fit into that single, unfolding plan.

At the same time, Paul is also concerned to help us understand the discontinuity in God’s single plan of salvation. That plan unfolds in stages. Now that the final stage in Christ has arrived, the prior stage—during which the law of Moses ruled over God’s people—has been left behind. Paul repeatedly emphasizes that our new relationship with God stands separate from the law of Moses (see 6:14, 15; 7:4-6; 10:4). A similar point is made in John 1:17 and Heb 10:1. Paul’s recurring focus in Romans on the nature of God’s plan helps us to put the whole story of the Bible together in a way that honors both of its parts.

8 Yes, what \( \text{h} \)joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of sin.”

9 Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles? Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith. 10 But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised!

11 Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual “father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith. 12 And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised.

13 Clearly, God’s promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was based not on his obedience to God’s law, but on a right relationship with God that comes by faith. 14 If God’s promise is only for those who obey the law, then faith is not necessary and the promise is pointless. 15 For the law always brings punishment on those who try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!)

16 So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain
to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham’s. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. 17 That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, “I have made you the father of many nations.” This happened because Abraham believed in the God who 1 brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.

18 Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, “That’s how many descendants you will have!” 19 And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah’s womb.

20 Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. 21 He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. 22 And because of Abraham’s faith, God counted him as righteous. 23 And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn’t just for Abraham’s benefit. It was recorded for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 24 He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God.


The Hope of Glory (5:1-21)

From Justification to Salvation

Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. 2 Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory.

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. 4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. 5 And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

5:6 When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. 7 Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. 9 And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation.

5:3-4 See also Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-7. The similarities in these passages indicate early Christian teaching common to all three of these writers.

5:5 this hope will not lead to disappointment (literally will not put to shame): In the OT, shame sometimes refers to a negative verdict from God’s judgment (e.g., Isa 28:16, quoted in Rom 9:33). * he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love: See Jer 31:33-34; Acts 2:17-21.

5:6 At just the right time might mean that God sent Christ at the time appointed in history, or that our condition as utterly helpless was the right time for God to demonstrate his love by sending his Son on our behalf.

5:9 The blood of Christ refers to Jesus’ sacrificial death (3:25). In the Scriptures, blood is shorthand for a violent death (Lev 17:11), especially when that death atones for sins. * he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation: Paul frequently speaks of salvation as the final deliverance of believers from God’s wrath and the tribulations of this life (see 13:11).
God’s Grace (5:15-17, 20-21)

The grace of God is theological bedrock for Paul. He never tries to prove that God is gracious, but he assumes it as a fact when presenting the Good News to the Romans (see 3:24; 4:4-5, 16; 5:2, 15-21; 6:14-15; 11:5-6). Paul rules out any idea that we merit our salvation, because God acts by his grace (4:4-5). Our good works do not give us right standing with God—if they did, God would be obliged to reward us for our efforts, just as a worker earns a wage. Instead, he gives salvation as a gift to those he has chosen (11:5-6). Grace is so important to the Christian experience that Paul can refer simply to our “standing in” grace (cf. 5:2) and to our living under the power of grace (6:14-15). Grace now rules over us in the new age of redemption (5:20-21).

The apostle John makes the same point: “The law was given through Moses, but God’s unfailing love [grace] and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Neither John nor Paul meant that God’s grace was not active in the OT, because God has always dealt graciously with his people. But the overwhelming power of God’s grace is displayed for us in and through Jesus Christ.

saved through the life of his Son:
Believers already share in the new life that Christ provided through his resurrection (6:11). Through this vital connection with Christ, believers will also be spared from God’s wrath in the last day (see also Col 3:4).

Adam is both the name of the original man, Adam, and a Hebrew word that means “man.” Paul emphasizes the solidarity of Adam with the human race. sin entered the world: The significance that Paul ascribes to this act, and the parallel that he draws between Adam’s sin and Christ’s act of obedience on the cross, makes clear that Paul views Adam and his sin in the Garden of Eden as historical fact. everyone sinned: Death is universal because sin is universal. It is not clear when or how everyone sinned, but Paul later attributes the condemnation of all people to the sin of Adam, their representative (5:18). Jewish tradition is divided on the relationship between Adam’s sin and the sin and death of human beings generally. Some texts emphasize a solidarity between Adam and all other people, as in “when Adam sinned a death was decreed against those who were to be born” (2 Baruch 23:4). Other texts insist that people die because of their own sin: “Adam is, therefore, not the cause, except only for himself, but each of us had become our own Adam” (2 Baruch 54:19).

Paul continues his explanation of “everyone sinned” (5:12) by stating that people who died between the times of Adam and Moses were not subject to specific commandments from God. Therefore, their condemnation was not only because of their own sin. It was because of their union with Adam, who sinned by violating an explicit commandment of God.

5:15 Paul uses the word many in contrast with one. Many does not always mean all, but it can include all people if the context suggests it. Clearly, the many who suffer death because of Adam includes everyone (see 5:12), but Paul makes it clear elsewhere that the many who receive the gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, sadly, does not include everyone (see 11:1-5).

Both Adam and Jesus Christ committed a single act whose influence extends to all the people that they represent. Adam represents all people. People must receive the gift of righteousness to be represented by Christ.

Christ’s one act of righteousness refers to his death on the cross, a righteous act because Christ chose to die in obedience to the Father’s will (see John 10:18). new life for everyone: Paul is not teaching that all people will experience the new life that Christ won through his death on the cross. New life is available to everyone through Christ, but not everyone receives it.

For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.

The Reign of Grace and Life

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break. Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come.
with God and new life for everyone. 19 Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.

20 God’s law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God’s wonderful grace became more abundant. 21 So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God’s wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Freedom from Bondage to Sin (6:1-23) “Dead to Sin” through Union with Christ

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? 2Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? 3 Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ in baptism, we joined him in his death? 4 For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

5 Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. 6 We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. 7 For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin.

8 And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. 9 We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. 10 When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. 11 So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. 13 Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were set free from the power of sin. 14 Sin is no longer our master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.

Freed from Sin’s Power to Serve Righteousness

15 Well then, since God’s grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! 16 Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever at the time of his coming in glory (2 Cor 4:14; Phil 3:21; 1 Thes 4:17; 2 Tim 2:11).

6:10 he died once to break the power of sin: Because we died with Jesus (6:4-5), we have also died to sin (6:2). Jesus was never under sin’s power in the way that we are, because he had no sin nature from Adam and he never succumbed to temptation (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15). However, when he became human, he entered the arena where sin holds sway, and he was truly vulnerable to sin.

6:12 Do not let sin control the way you live: Or Do not let sin reign in your body, which is subject to death.

6:14 you no longer live under the requirements of the law: With the Messiah’s coming, the era governed by the law of Moses came to an end (see Gal 3:19-25). * you live under the freedom of God’s grace: God’s dealings with his people have always been characterized by grace, but grace dominates the new era in which Christians live in Christ. Cp. John 1:17.

6:15 set us free from the law: The law of Moses was the governing power of the old covenant era. Believers now live under the governing power of Christ himself.
you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose
to obey God, which leads to righteous living. 17 Thank God! Once you were slaves of
sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. 18 Now you are
free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.

Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery
to help you understand all this. Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and
lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves
to righteous living so that you will become holy.

When you were ‘slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. 21 And
what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end
in eternal doom. 22 But now you are free from the power of sin and have become
slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.
23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ
Jesus our Lord.

### The Old Realm and the New (5:12–8:39)

Jews in Paul's day perceived a contrast between the “present evil age” and a “glorious age
to come.” Throughout Romans 5–8, Paul uses these contrasting realms to conceptualize our
experience of salvation. The old realm is ruled by death (5:12–21), sin (ch 6), and sinful
nature (8:1–11). The new realm is characterized by life (ch 7), righteous living (ch 6),
grace (ch 6), and the Holy Spirit (ch 8). People’s destinies are controlled by the realm to which they belong.

Each realm is headed by a man who represents its constituents. The old realm of
sin and death is headed by Adam, the first man, while the new realm of forgiveness and life is
headed by Christ. By nature, all human beings are in the old realm of sin and death and are
represented by Adam, the first man—whose sin and death control the destiny of all people
(5:12, 18–19). Those who put their faith in God through Christ are transferred by faith into
the new realm of life. God appointed Jesus Christ as a “second Adam” (see 5:14). By obeying
God and fulfilling God’s will, Jesus won a decisive victory over the realm of sin that Adam
had inaugurated (5:18–19). By receiving God’s gift of grace (5:17), people accept Jesus as their
head and look forward to eternal life.

Those who are in the new realm are identified with Christ and enjoy the benefits of union
with him. They have “died with Christ,” they have been “buried with Christ,” and their present
new life with Christ is an anticipation of the day when they will “live with him” forever (6:3–10).

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### 6:16 righteous living (Greek dikaiōsisane, “righteousness”)
In the first part of Romans, Paul uses this Greek word in a judicial sense, referring (1) to
the activity of God to set people in a right relationship with himself or (2) to the
righteous standing that believers enjoy as a result of Christ’s work (see, e.g.,
1:17; 3:21–22; 4:3, 5). Here, Paul uses the same word as it is often used in the
OT, meaning the right behavior that God demands from his people.

### 6:19 Paul uses the Greek word sarx (human nature, or flesh) to refer to the
frailty and proneness to sin that characterizes humans. Paul uses the illustration
of slavery to show the relationship of the human nature to sin.

### 6:20 free from the obligation to do right (literally free from righteousness): Paul
means either that unbelievers feel no obligation to obey God or that they are unable to do so. But the freedom
that they boast of actually makes them slaves to sin.

### 6:21 eternal doom (literally death): Throughout chs 5–8, Paul uses death to
describe the eternal consequences of sin (5:12, 14, 15, 17, 21; 6:16, 23; 7:5,
9:10, 13, 24; 8:2, 6, 13). The language goes back to God’s warning to Adam
and Eve (Gen 2:17). This death is not primarily physical death; it denotes
separation from the fellowship of God that, if not reversed through faith in
Christ, will last forever.

### 7:1 brothers and sisters: Literally brothers; also in 7:4. See note on 1:13. * Both
Jewish Christians and many of the Gentile Christians were familiar with the
law. Jews were taught the law of Moses from birth. Many of the Gentiles in the
church at Rome had been God-fearers, Gentiles who were interested in Judaism
and attended the synagogue regularly.

* the law applies only while a person is living: Paul may be paraphrasing a rabbinic saying: “If a person is dead, he is free from the Torah and the fulfilling of the commandments” (Babylonian Shabbat 30a; baraita Shabbat 151).

7:2-3 These verses are not an allegory, in which every element of the story has
a theological counterpart. Paul simply cites an illustration to make two basic
points: Death can release a person from obligation to the law, and freedom
from one relationship can allow a person to establish a new one. Paul applies the
illustration in 7:4.
law and does not commit adultery when she remarries.

4 So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. 5 When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. 6 But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.

The History and Experience of Jews under the Law

7 Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is sinful? Of course not! In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, “You must not covet.” 8 But sin used this command to arouse all kinds of covetous desires within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power. 9 At one time I lived without understanding the law. But when I learned the command not to covet, for instance, the power of sin came to life, 10 and I died. So I discovered that the law’s commands, which were supposed to bring life, brought spiritual death instead. 11 Sin took advantage of those commands and deceived me; it used the commands to kill me. 12 But still, the law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good.

13 But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God’s good commands for its own evil purposes.

14 So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. 15 I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate. 16 But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. 17 So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

18 And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. 19 I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. 20 But if I...
do what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.  
21I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. 22I love God’s law with all my heart. 23But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. 24Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? 25Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

Assurance of Eternal Life in the Spirit (8:1-30)

The Spirirt of Life

8 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. 2And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. 3The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his

The Limitations of Law (7:1-25)

The law was central to God’s old covenant with the people of Israel, and many Jews in Paul’s day still saw it as critical to how God’s people lived. Therefore, in Romans, Paul frequently deals with questions about the law. The pinnacle of his treatment comes in Rom 7, where Paul powerfully argues that the law of Moses, rather than having a positive effect on people’s lives, stimulated sin and brought death (7:5).

Paul wants us to realize that the law is not at fault. God’s law is good and holy (7:12), but it is powerless to change the human heart. Whether we conclude that Paul (in 7:14-25) is describing the experience of an unbeliever, a mature believer, or an immature believer, the point remains that human sin cannot be overcome by the law. God’s law is given to people who, because of their connection with Adam, are already locked under sin’s power. They may want to do what God tells them, but they find that they cannot (7:15-20). Deliverance can come only through a new and radical experience of God’s power and grace in Jesus Christ (7:25). Through God’s Spirit, Jesus rescues us “from the power of sin that leads to death” (8:2).

If God’s good and holy law cannot rescue us from our predicament and save us, how much less helpful are all human laws that people rely on for religious or spiritual well-being. Whether those laws come from a religious figure, a tradition we have inherited, or a church we attend, none of them can change the human soul. They can tell us what to do, but they cannot empower us to do it. God’s law can provide guidelines in the new life God has given us by grace, but it can never substitute for the power of God’s grace, made available through the work of Christ.

7:21 principle of life (literally law): Paul is referring to a regular occurrence, such as when we speak of the “law of gravity.” The struggle between wanting to do what is right and instead doing what is wrong reveals a regular pattern operating in the human sphere.

7:22 with all my heart (literally in my inner person): The Greeks used this phrase to denote the spiritual or immortal side of human beings (cp. 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 3:16).

7:23 another power . . . This power (literally another law . . . This law): Paul plays on the word law in these verses. Opposed to God’s law (7:22) is another law, a ruling power that prevents Paul from submitting to God’s law even though he fully agrees with it.

7:24 this life that is dominated by sin and death (literally this body of death): Sin is so invasive that it affects the whole person, particularly our interactions in the physical world.

8:1 So now there is no condemnation: Paul concludes from the argument of chs 5–7 that neither sin (ch 6) nor the law (ch 7) can keep believers from having eternal life (ch 5). Paul can triumphantly proclaim that those who belong to Christ Jesus need not fear that they will be condemned for their sins.

8:2 you belong . . . freed you: Some manuscripts read I belong . . . freed me. A scribe might have changed an original you into I/me at some point.

8:3 our sinful nature: Literally our flesh; similarly in 8:4-9, 12. See note on 6:19. * in a body like the bodies we sinners have: Jesus identified with sinful people so that he could be their representative and redeem them. Paul also implies that Jesus’ incarnate nature was not exactly like ours; born of a virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus did not inherit a sinful nature from Adam. * a sacrifice for our sins: In the Greek OT, this phrase frequently describes a sin offering, and three of the eight NT occurrences also have this meaning (Heb 10:6, 8; 13:11). Christ was the sin offering that brought forgiveness and turned away God’s wrath. God condemned sin in Christ, our substitute, so that we could escape condemnation.
own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God’s laws, and it never will. That’s why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature cannot please God.

But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God.

The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.

The Spirit of Adoption

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

The Spirit of Glory

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.
8:19-21 All creation includes animals, plants, and the earth itself. Paul follows OT precedent (see especially Ps 65:12-13; Isa 24:4; Jer 4:28; 12:4) by personifying the created world. *waiting eagerly... looks forward: Just as the entire world was harmed by Adam’s fall into sin, it will share in the blessings that God has promised his people.

8:19 his children: Literally his sons.

8:22 The pains of childbirth is a metaphor for the longing of creation (see also Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8; John 16:20-22).

8:23 we believers also groan: “Groaning” expresses a frustrated longing for God’s deliverance from the difficulties and oppression of this life (see Exod 3:7; Lam 1:22; Ezek 24:17; 2 Cor 5:2).

* we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory (literally we have the first harvest of the Spirit): In the OT, the phrase first harvest or firstfruits often describes the offering of the first and best part of a harvest to God (see Exod 23:19; Lev 2:12; 23:10; cp. 1 Cor 15:20, 23). The Holy Spirit is God’s pledge that he will see his work in us through to its conclusion (see Eph 1:14). * wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children: Literally wait anxiously for sonship. Although we have already been adopted by God as his children, the full rights of that adoption—our inheritance (see 8:17)—are not yet ours. In this life, Christians live in tension between the “already” of redemption and the “not yet” of the glory to be revealed.

8:24 we don’t need to hope for it: Some manuscripts read we don’t need to wait for it.

8:26 groanings that cannot be expressed in words: This might refer to speech that does not take the form of human language, such as when believers, uncertain of what to say, utter meaningless sounds in prayer. The groanings in question are the Spirit’s, not ours. When we do not know how to pray, the Spirit is interceding for us before God.

8:27 for us believers: Literally for God’s holy people.

8:28 And we know that God causes everything to work together: Some manuscripts read And we know that everything works together.

8:29 would be the firstborn: Or would be supreme.

8:30 gave them his glory: Elsewhere in this passage, the glory Christians will experience is consistently in the future (8:18, 21, 23). The past tense here refers to God’s past decision to glorify us in the future. We have not yet entered into our inheritance, but the Father has irrevocably determined to give us his glory.

8:31 such wonderful things: Paul is referring to everything he has taught in chs 5–8 about the blessings and sense of assurance that believers receive from their relationship with God.

8:32 did not spare even his own Son: Behind this language is the story about Abraham’s willingness to offer his only son, Isaac (Gen 22:12, 16). Isaac, however, was not actually sacrificed. God’s not sparing his only Son went the full course: He handed him over to the shameful and painful death of crucifixion.

8:36 This quotation is from Ps 44:22.
38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. 39 No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.


Introduction: The Tension between God’s Promises and Israel’s Plight (9:1-5)

With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it. 2 My heart is filled with the privilege of worshiping him and receiving the glorious promises. 3 Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.

Defining the Promise (Part 1): God’s Sovereign Election (9:6-29)

The Israel within Israel

6 Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel? No, for not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God’s people! 7 Being descendants of Abraham doesn’t make them truly Abraham’s children. For the Scriptures say, “Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted,” though Abraham had other children, too. 8 This means that Abraham’s physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. Only the children of the promise are considered to be Abraham’s children. 9 For God had promised, “I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

10 This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins. 11 But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message shows that God chooses people according to his own will.)
God Is in Charge (9:5-24)

We human beings always want to think that we are in charge. We think that we are the "captains of our souls" and that by our decisions and actions we can determine what will happen. However, Scripture confronts us with quite a different scenario. Although human decisions and actions are significant, the will of God is vastly more important.

In Rom 9, Paul shows that God determines the course of salvation. Paul constantly explains the unexpected development of salvation history by appealing to what God has said and done. Human decisions alone cannot explain the situation, and God has said that he will show mercy to anyone he chooses (9:15). While theologians will continue to debate the role of God's action and the role of human decision in salvation, God's sovereignty stands out clearly.

The contemporary world has set God to the side and ignores the divine influence on the course of human affairs. But God's decisions really do direct the world as well as the personal histories of those who trust him. We can confidently affirm that "God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (8:28).

1 "Invictus" by W. E. Henley (1849–1903).
"Those who were not my people,
I will now call my people.
And I will love those
whom I did not love before."

26 And,
"Then, at the place where they were told,
‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called
children of the living God.'"

27 And concerning Israel, Isaiah the prophet cried out,
"Though the people of Israel are as numerous as the sand of the seashore,
only a remnant will be saved.

28 For the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth quickly and with finality."

29 And Isaiah said the same thing in another place:
"If the Lord of Heaven's Armies
had not spared a few of our children,
we would have been wiped out like Sodom,
destroyed like Gomorrah."

Understanding Israel's Plight: Christ as the Climax of Salvation History (9:30–10:21)
Israel, the Gentiles, and the Righteousness of God

30 What does all this mean? Even though the Gentiles were not trying to follow God's standards, they were made right with God. And it was by faith that this took place.

31 But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded.

32 Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him. They stumbled over the great rock in their path.

33 God warned them of this in the Scriptures when he said,
"I am placing a stone in Jerusalem that makes people stumble, a rock that makes them fall.
But anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced."

10 Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is for the people of Israel to be saved. 2 I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. 3 For they don't understand God's way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God's way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law.

4 For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God.

5 For Moses writes that the law's way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all of its commands. 6 But faith's righteousness through the law:

9:32-33 by keeping the law: Literally by works. *The great rock in their path* is Christ. People either build on him by putting their faith in him, or they stumble over his message that faith, and not human works, is the key to getting right with God.

9:33 This quotation is from Isa 8:14; 28:16 (Greek version). These two texts, along with Ps 118:22, are also quoted together in 1 Pet 2:6-8. The early church likely had a collection of messianic “stone” quotations from the OT that they used to illuminate the significance of Christ (see also Matt 21:42).

* Jerusalem: Greek Zion.


10:2 Zeal denotes a passionate and commendable commitment to God and his purposes (see Num 25:6-13). But in Paul's day Jewish zeal was misdirected because it failed to understand that Jesus Christ is the pinnacle of God's plan. (For Paul's own misdirected zeal before his conversion to Christ, see Acts 9:1-2; Gal 1:13-14.)

10:3 God's way of making people right with himself: See 1:17; 3:21-26. Paul uses this phrase to explain Israel's failure in terms basic to the gospel. God manifested his righteousness through the ministry of Christ, but most Jews did not understand it partly because they were so focused on the law as a way of securing their own righteousness.

10:4 For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given (or for Christ is the end of the law, or For Christ is the culmination of the law): The function of the law was to point forward and prepare the way for the Messiah; Jesus' coming does not destroy the law but fulfills all of its requirements, so that the primary requirement for God's people is to believe in him (see 3:31; Matt 5:17-18).

10:5 requires obedience to all of its commands: See Lev 18:5, where these words encouraged the Israelites to obey the law in order to enjoy long life and prosperity in the land that God was giving them.

10:6 stands for Jesus Christ: See also Matt 20:28-29. Paul identifies Jesus Christ as the culmination of all that the law had promised. (For Paul's own conversion to Christ, see Acts 9:3-17; Gal 1:13-16.)
way of getting right with God says, “Don’t say in your heart, ‘Who will go up to heaven?’ (to bring Christ down to earth).” And don’t say, “Who will go down to the place of the dead?” (to bring Christ back to life again).” In fact, it says, “The message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart.”

And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Israel’s Accountability

But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!”

But not everyone welcomes the Good News, for Isaiah the prophet said, “Lord, who has believed our message?” So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ. But I ask, have the people of Israel actually heard the message? Yes, they have:

“The message has gone throughout the earth, and the words to all the world.”

But I ask, did the people of Israel really understand? Yes, they did, for even in the time of Moses, God said, “I will rouse your jealousy through people who are not even a nation. I will provoke your anger through the foolish Gentiles.”

And later Isaiah spoke boldly for God, saying, “I was found by people who were not looking for me. I showed myself to those who were not asking for me.”

But regarding Israel, God said, “All day long I opened my arms to them, but they were disobedient and rebellious.”

Summary: Israel, the “Elect,” and the “Hardened” (11:1-10)

I ask, then, has God rejected his own people, the nation of Israel? Of course not! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. No, God has not rejected his own people, whom he ‘chose from the very beginning.
Do you realize what the Scriptures say about this? Elijah the prophet complained to God about the people of Israel and said, 3"Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

4And do you remember God’s reply? He said, “No, I have 7,000 others who have never bowed down to Baal!”

5It is the same today, for a few of the people of Israel have remained faithful because of God’s grace—his undeserved kindness in choosing them. 6And since it is through God’s kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God’s grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved.

7So this is the situation: Most of the people of Israel have not found the favor of God they are looking for so earnestly. A few have—the ones God has chosen—but the hearts of the rest were hardened. 8As the Scriptures say,

“God has put them into a deep sleep.
To this day he has shut their eyes so they do not see,
and closed their ears so they do not hear.”

9Likewise, David said,

“Let their bountiful table become a snare,
a trap that makes them think all is well.”

10Let their blessings cause them to stumble,
and let them get what they deserve.
11Let their eyes go blind so they cannot see,
and let their backs be bent forever.”

Defining the Promise (Part 2): The Future of Israel (11:11-32)

God’s Purpose in Israel’s Rejection

11Did God’s people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! They were disobedient, so God made salvation available to the Gentiles. But he wanted his own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves. 12Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the people of Israel turned down God’s offer of salvation, think how much greater a blessing the world will share when they finally accept it.

13I am saying all this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I stress this, 14for I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them. 15For since their rejection meant that God offered salvation to the rest of the world, their acceptance will be even more wonderful. It will be life for those who were dead!

The Interrelationship of Jews and Gentiles: Warning to Gentiles

16And since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, their descendants will also on his grace alone. • Elijah the prophet:

In 1 Kgs 19:1-18, the apostate King Ahab had slaughtered many of the Lord’s prophets, and Ahab’s wife Jezebel threatened Elijah with the same fate. Elijah fled to the wilderness, where he bemoaned his fate. God responded with the assurance that many faithful people remained. Paul found the present situation to be somewhat parallel. While many Jews did not believe, and some were even hostile, God was (and is) still working to preserve a believing remnant.

11:3 This quotation is from 1 Kgs 19:10, 14.
11:4 This quotation is from 1 Kgs 19:18.
11:5 for a few of the people of Israel (literally for a remnant): Paul returns to the OT concept of the remnant that he used in 9:27-29. This solid core of godly Israelites represents God’s pledge of his continuing faithfulness to his promises and to his people.
11:7-8 the hearts of the rest were hardened: This is God’s own work; God has put them into a deep sleep and shut their eyes. See Acts 13:46-48; 18:6.
11:8 This quotation is from Isa 29:10; Deut 29:4.
11:9-10 This quotation is from Ps 69:22-23 (Greek version).
11:11 so God made salvation available to the Gentiles: The offer of salvation to the Gentiles is the purpose, not just the result, of Israel’s disobedience. Paul emphasizes that God had the salvation of Gentiles in view all along, and, ultimately, the salvation of many Jews as well. • he wanted his own people to become jealous: The theme of jealousy comes from Deut 32:21, which Paul quoted in 10:19. The sight of Gentiles enjoying the blessings of salvation that God had promised to Israel would spur Jews to desire salvation so they could participate in those blessings as well.
11:13-14 you Gentiles: Paul addresses the Gentile Christians in Rome with the practical goal of rebuking them for thinking too highly of themselves (11:20), especially in relation to their Jewish brothers and sisters. He shows that their enjoyment of salvation depends entirely on God’s kindness [11:22], and that God’s final goal is to stimulate repentance among the Jews [11:23]. • I stress this: Paul devoted himself to the conversion of Gentiles because he knew that their salvation would ultimately lead to salvation for Jews as well.
11:15 The context emphasizes God’s role in hardening many Jews (11:7-10), so the phrase their rejection likely means God’s rejection of the unbelieving Jews. • their acceptance then refers to God’s acceptance of Jews into his Kingdom (see also 14:3 and 15:7). • While the phrase life for those who were dead could refer to the new spiritual life that comes to the Jews as a result of their conversion to Christ (see 6:13), the language more naturally suggests the physical resurrection from the dead that occurs when Christ returns in glory (see, e.g., 1 Thes 4:13-18).

11:16 the entire batch of dough is holy because the portion given as an offering is holy: This imagery comes from Num 15:17-21, where God commanded the Israelites to take part of their first batch of dough and set it aside as a gift. God’s
12:13
Cor 12:13

In Paul’s extended metaphor, you are just a branch, not the root. By the time Paul wrote to the church in Rome, it was composed of Gentiles, a common situation in the early Christian communities. This dominant role led many Gentile Christians to brag about their status, while treating Jews and their religious heritage with disdain. Paul reminds the Gentile believers that they enjoy God’s blessings only because they have been included in the one people of God, who are rooted in God’s promises to Israel.

11:17:24 In Paul’s extended metaphor, God’s special olive tree refers to the people of God. The image is a natural one, because the olive tree is the most widely cultivated fruit tree in the Mediterranean basin, and it was already used as a symbol of Israel in the OT (Jer 11:16; Hos 14:5-6). Paul refers to the Gentile believers as branches from a wild olive tree because they were not originally included among the people of God.

11:18 You are just a branch, not the root: By the time Paul wrote to the church in Rome, it was composed mainly of Gentiles, a common situation in the early Christian communities. This dominant role led many Gentile Christians to brag about their status, while treating Jews and their religious heritage with disdain. Paul reminds the Gentile believers that they enjoy God’s blessings only because they have been included in the one people of God, who are rooted in God’s promises to Israel.

11:20 fear what could happen: In Scripture, fear often means a reverential awe of God that includes the recognition that we must one day stand before him in judgment (see 2 Cor 5:11; 7:1, 11, 15; Phil 2:12; Col 3:22).

11:21 he won’t: Some manuscripts read perhaps he won’t.

11:22 if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off: Scripture consistently emphasizes that only believers who persevere to the end will be saved. However, Paul’s warning leads to debate over the theological implications of his statement. Some think that it implies that genuine believers can stop believing and therefore not be saved in the end. Others argue that we should not press the metaphor so far and that Paul is referring to people who appear to be believers but whose lack of real faith ultimately reveals itself.

11:24 by nature . . . contrary to nature: The usual method of enhancing the yield of olive trees involved grafting a shoot from a cultivated tree onto a wild olive tree to benefit from the wild tree’s
The Salvation of “All Israel”

I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud about yourselves. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ. And so all Israel will be saved. As the Scriptures say, “The one who rescues will come from Jerusalem, and he will turn Israel away from ungodliness. And this is my covenant with them, that I will take away their sins.”

Many of the people of Israel are now enemies of the Good News, and this benefits you Gentiles. Yet they are still the people he loves because he chose their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For God’s gifts and his call can never be withdrawn. Once, you Gentiles were rebels against God, but when the people of Israel rebelled against him, God was merciful to you instead. Now they are the rebels, and God’s mercy has come to you so that they, too, will share in God’s mercy. For God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so he could have mercy on everyone.

Conclusion: Praise to God in Light of His Awesome Plan (11:33-36)

Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!

For who can know the Lord’s thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice?

And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back?

For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.


The Heart of the Matter: Total Transformation (12:1–2)

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly
the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Humility and Mutual Service (12:3-8) Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Love and Its Manifestations (12:9-21) Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!
17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. 18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. 19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

"I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.

20 Instead,

"If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads."

21 Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

The Christian and Secular Rulers (13:1-7)

13 Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. 2 So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. 3 For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. 4 The authorities are God’s servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God’s servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. 5 So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience.

6 Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid. They are serving God in what they do. 7 Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes: The word "overtax" (HCSB) refers to the idea of "to pay more than what one owes." (RWW) This is the sense intended here. 8 Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the

Love and the Law (13:8-10)

8 Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the
13:9 “You must not commit adultery. . . . You must not covet”: This quotation is from Exodus 20:13-15, 17. • “Love your neighbor as yourself”: This quotation is from Lev 19:18.

13:11 The NT often speaks of salvation as the final victory over sin and death that believers will experience when Jesus returns in glory (see 5:9-10).

13:12-13 the day of salvation: The word day reflects two sources. First, the OT repeatedly predicts the day of the Lord when God’s plan culminates (see Isaiah 13:4-13; Jeremiah 30:8-9; Joel 2:32; 3:18; Obadiah 1:15-18). Second, the tradition of moral instruction in the ancient world associated light/daytime with good and darkness/nighttime with evil. The Greeks, Romans, and ancient Jews all used this contrast. Because believers belong to the day they should be living out its values, avoiding the dark deeds that are typical of nighttime.

14:1-15:7 Paul moves to a specific issue that was causing conflict in the church at Rome. The church in Rome was embroiled in a dispute between people who were weak in faith and people who were strong (see 15:1) regarding certain practices. Throughout this section, Paul instructs believers to be tolerant toward others and their practices; he is convinced that people on both sides of the issue are genuine believers, and he does not think the issues they are fighting over are essential to the faith. Paul on the other hand, is doing this to warn believers about the danger of being too zealous in their faith. 

14:1 Being weak in faith means having scruples against doing certain things that Christian liberty would allow. In Rome, most of the weak in faith were Jewish Christians whose consciences did not give them liberty from certain requirements of Jewish law.

14:2 The weak in faith apparently believed that they should eat only vegetables. Their conviction probably stemmed from a concern to maintain Jewish ritual purity in the midst of a pagan culture. These Jewish Christians were following the lead of Daniel and his friends, who refused to eat the rich food and wine that the king of Babylon offered them (Daniel 1:3-16). Other Jewish sources reveal that pious Jews often restricted their diets in pagan cultures because they could never be sure that meat had been slaughtered according to Jewish requirements.

14:3-4 look down on . . . condemn: The “strong,” those who prided themselves on their enlightened freedom in Christ, looked with disdain on those they considered to be “weak.” The weak, in turn—certain that they were following the true route to piety—condemned the strong for their laxness. These attitudes, over different issues, are mirrored throughout the history of the Christian church. • God has accepted them: Both the weak and the strong are genuine believers, welcomed by God into his family. Therefore, they have no right to treat each other as if they do not belong (14:4; see also 15:7).

14:5 some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike: The reference is probably to Jewish festival days and to the Sabbath; cp. Col 2:16. While Christ’s provision of salvation, observance of the Sabbath in its original form is not required of Christians.

14:7 As the Lord’s servants (14:4), Christians are to look to God for guidance and seek to honor him in all things (14:8).

14:9 Paul refers to standard early Christian teaching on the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection (e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:15). • of the living and of the dead: (literally of the dead and of the living): The original word order matches the sequence of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the redemptive events that make Jesus our Lord.
10 So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For the Scriptures say, 12 “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God.”

13 Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.

Do Not Cause Your Brother or Sister to Stumble!

14 So let’s stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.

15 I know and am convinced on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong. 16 And if another believer is distressed by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you eat it. Don’t let your eating ruin someone for whom Christ died. 17 Then you will not be criticized for doing something you believe is good. 18 For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 19 If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too. 20 So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.

21 Don’t tear apart the work of God over what you eat. Remember, all foods are acceptable, but it is wrong to eat something if it makes another person stumble. 22 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another believer to stumble. 23 You may believe there’s nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God. Blessed are those who don’t feel guilty for doing something they have decided is right. 24 But if you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it. For you are not following your convictions. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.

Put Other People First!

15 We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about

14:10 another believer: Literally your brother; also in 14:10b, 13, 15, 21. See note on 1:13. • we will all stand before the judgment seat of God: Paul reminds the Roman Christians that it is God, not other Christians, who will ultimately judge all of us (cp. 2 Cor 5:10).

14:11 This quotation is from Isa 49:18; 45:23 (Greek version). In its original context, Isa 45:23 is surrounded by assertions of God’s sovereignty (Isa 45:22, 24). Only the sovereign God has the right to stand in judgment (14:10, 12). • confess and give praise to God: Or confess allegiance to God.

14:13 This verse acts as a bridge. Let’s stop condemning each other summarizes 14:1-12, while the concern about causing another believer to stumble and fall becomes the major emphasis of 14:14-23. • stumble and fall: This phrase originally applied to obstacles that could trip people as they walked, or to traps into which a person might fall. It is used metaphorically throughout the NT for behavior that might bring spiritual harm to another person (see 1 Cor 8:9, 13; 1 Jn 2:10; cp. Matt 21:42-44; Luke 20:17-18; Rom 9:32-33; 1 Pet 2:8).

14:14 no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat (literally nothing is common in itself): The word common signals that the root concern that Paul was addressing was Jewish purity regulations. Jews described food as common if it was not clean (i.e., not kosher), thereby causing a Jew to become ritually impure (see Lev 11; cp. Mark 7:2, 5; Acts 10:14). Paul again follows the teaching of Jesus that “every kind of food is acceptable in God’s eyes” (Mark 7:19). • for that person it is wrong: The truth that no food is wrong to eat was not easy for pious Jews to accept because they had been raised to honor God by avoiding certain foods. Paul urges those who are strong in faith not to force others to violate their consciences (cp. 1 Cor 8:1-13).

14:15 The word translated ruin (Greek apollumi, “destroy”) is often applied to eternal damnation (see 2:12; Matt 10:28; 18:14; Luke 9:24; 13:2-5; John 3:16; 10:10, 28; 1 Cor 1:18-19; Jas 4:12; 2 Pet 3:9). By insisting on their freedom to eat whatever they want, the strong might cause sensitive Jewish Christians for whom Christ died to turn away from the faith.

14:20 The work of God refers both to the spiritual life of other Christians (14:15) and to the Christian community itself (14:19). The strong, with their dogged insistence on doing whatever they want, create division and disrupt God’s intention to build a healthy and united community of believers.

14:21 or drink wine: Jews sometimes abstained from wine to avoid the appearance of ritual contamination, since wine was used in pagan religious celebrations (see Dan 1:3-16).

14:22 keep it between yourself and God: Paul did not contest the freedom of the strong believers, but he instructed them to limit the expression of their freedom out of love for fellow believers so that the whole Christian community could be built up. • Blessed are those who don’t feel guilty: Guilt could come from harming the faith of the weak believers. Christian freedom is only worthwhile when it can be lived out without bringing such guilt.

14:23 If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning: God’s word defines sin for us, yet it also involves violating our conscience. The weak Christians in Rome did not yet believe in their own hearts that they could eat meat, drink wine, or ignore Jewish holy days; their consciences were still weak. They should not violate their consciences on these matters. Nor should the strong, by the power of their example or by their scorn, force weak Christians to do so.

15:1-4 We who are strong: Paul aligns himself with those he identifies as strong in faith, and he reveals that the division in the Roman church was not simply between Jews and Gentiles. Like Paul, some Jews had enlightened consciences and so were counted...
things like this. We must not just please ourselves. \(^2\) We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. \(^3\) For even Christ didn't live to please himself. As the Scriptures say, “The insults of those who insult you, O God, have fallen on me.” \(^4\) Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.

\(^5\) May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. \(^6\) Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Receive One Another!**

\(^7\) Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory. \(^8\) Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. \(^9\) He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote:

“For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to your name.”

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**Tolerance and Its Limits (14:1–15:13)**

Paul pleads for tolerance between those who are weak in faith and those who are strong in faith, and he teaches that believers need to accept each other (14:1; 15:7). They should stop condemning and belittling each other. Rather, they should learn to worship God with a united voice and spirit (15:6).

Paul is addressing the specific issue of whether believers need to practice certain requirements of the OT law and of Jewish worship. Theologians have used the word *adiaphora* ("non-essentials") to describe beliefs or practices that are neither required nor prohibited by Scripture. On such issues, Christians must accommodate a variety of opinions.

Paul takes a very different approach when the Good News itself is at stake. In Galatians, for example, Paul confronts false teaching about the Good News by severely castigating the false teachers (Gal 1:6-9) and by warning readers that adopting false teaching will alienate them from Christ (Gal 5:4).

In our day, we need to be careful about what we tolerate and accommodate, and we need to be equally careful about what we decide is worthy of confrontation. Believers need to consider carefully the different issues they confront in their associations with other believers. If the basic truth of the Good News is not violated, we should not quarrel or be divided over such issues. Other issues, however, strike at the heart of the message of Good News. In these cases, Christians need to take a stand and be faithful to the Good News and to Christ. The way Paul himself dealt with a variety of issues in his own time can serve as a guide for dealing with conflicts and controversies in our time.

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Rom 12:9-21
Ps 133:1-3
2 Cor 6:14–7:1
Col 3:12-15
2 Tim 2:23-26

15:2 *1 Cor 9:19; 10:24
Gal 6:2
15:3 *Ps 69:9
15:4 2 Tim 3:16
\(\text{\'paraklēsis (3874)}\)
1 Cor 14:31
15:5 1 Cor 1:10
2 Cor 1:3
15:6 Rev 1:6
15:8 Matt 15:24
Acts 3:25-26
2 Cor 1:20
15:9 2 Sam 22:50
*Ps 18:49
And in another place it is written, “Rejoice with his people, you Gentiles.”

And yet again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles. Praise him, all you people of the earth.”

And in another place Isaiah said, “The heir to David’s throne will come, and he will rule over the Gentiles. They will place their hope on him.”

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s Ministry and Travel Plans

I am fully convinced, my dear brothers and sisters, that you are full of goodness. You know these things so well you can teach them to each other all about them. Even so, I have been bold enough to write about some of these points, knowing that all you need is this reminder. For by God’s grace, I am a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles. I bring you the Good News so that I might present you as an acceptable offering to God, made holy by the Holy Spirit.

So I have reason to be enthusiastic about all Christ Jesus has done through me in my service to God. Yet I dare not boast about anything except what Christ has done through me, bringing the Gentiles to God by my message and by the way I worked among them. They were convinced by the power of miraculous signs and wonders and by the power of God’s Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum.

My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else. I have been following the plan spoken of in the Scriptures, where it says, “Those who have never been told about him will see, and those who have never heard of him will understand.”

In fact, my visit to you has been delayed so long because I have been preaching in these places.

But now I have finished my work in these regions, and after all these long years of waiting, I am eager to visit you. I am planning to go to Spain, and when I do, I will stop off in Rome. And after I have enjoyed your fellowship for a little while, you can provide for my journey.

Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum: Illyricum was a region northeast of Italy, a Roman province that occupied most of the coastline along the Adriatic Sea, from modern-day Albania to Croatia. An arc drawn from Jerusalem to Illyricum would include the areas where Paul had planted churches (southern Galatia, Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece).

15:10 This quotation is from Deut 32:43.
15:11 This quotation is from Ps 117:1.
15:12 This quotation is from Isa 11:10 (Greek version). *The heir to David’s throne: Literally The root of Jesse. David was the son of Jesse.
15:14–16:27 This final section contains elements so common at the end of NT letters: a discussion of travel plans (15:14-29), requests for prayer (15:30-33), references to ministry associates (16:1-2, 21-23), greetings (16:3-16), and a doxology (16:25-27). Only the warning about false teachers (16:17-19) is a non-standard feature in this conclusion.
15:14 dear brothers and sisters: Literally brothers; also in 15:30. See note on 1:13. *You know these things so well: Paul praises the Roman Christians, as he had in the opening of the letter (see 1:8-12), demonstrating a gracious manner toward a church he had neither founded nor visited.
15:15-16 by God’s grace: Paul emphasized that his role as apostle and teacher was because God had chosen him to lead in the formation of the Christian church (see also 1:5; 12:3; 1 Cor 3:10; Gal 2:9; Eph 3:2, 7, 8).
15:16 special messenger: The Greek word (leitourgos, “servant” or “minister”) could refer to almost any kind of servant, but Jews often applied the word to priests. Paul probably chose this word to emphasize the priestly nature of his ministry. *to you Gentiles: Paul stresses the Gentile flavor of the church in Rome (see also 1:6-7). This does not mean that there were no Jews in the church (see 16:3-16), but Gentiles had become the majority. *present you as an acceptable offering to God: Paul was fulfilling Isa 66:19-20.
15:19 God’s Spirit: Other manuscripts read the Spirit; still others read the Holy Spirit. *I have fully presented the Good News of Christ: Paul was not claiming that the work of evangelism had been completed in these regions. His point was that churches had been planted in enough major population centers so that those churches could carry on the work of evangelism themselves. Paul’s own distinctive ministry of planting foundational and strategic churches had been fulfilled. *from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum: Illyricum was a region northeast of Italy, a Roman province that occupied most of the coastline along the Adriatic Sea, from modern-day Albania to Croatia. An arc drawn from Jerusalem to Illyricum would include the areas where Paul had planted churches (southern Galatia, Asia Minor, Macedon-
15:25-28 I must go to Jerusalem to take a gift to the believers there: During his third missionary journey, Paul collected donations from the Gentile churches to help the believers in Jerusalem and to draw the two wings of the first-century church closer together (see also 1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8-9).

15:25 the believers: Literally God's holy people; also in 15:26, 31.

15:26 Macedonia and Achaia were the northern and southern regions of Greece. Paul founded churches in several prominent cities in Macedonia, including Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. In Achaia, Paul had preached in Athens and founded the church in Corinth (see Acts 16-18). • the poor among the believers in Jerusalem: Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were suffering from famines that had hit the area (see Acts 11:27-30), and also because their faith in Christ caused them to be ostracized from Jewish society.

15:27 they owe a real debt: Gentile Christians owe their spiritual existence to God's work among the Israelites (see 11:17-24).

15:31 Pray that I will be rescued from those in Judea who refuse to obey God. See Acts 21-22. God preserved Paul's life and used the circumstances of his arrest in Jerusalem to take him precisely where he planned to go—Rome. • the donation: Literally the ministry; other manuscripts read the gift.

15:33 Some manuscripts do not include Amen. One very early manuscript places the doxology (16:25-27) here. This has led some scholars to conclude that the original letter to the Romans consisted of only 1:1–15:33, but few now follow this theory. The best early manuscripts place the doxology at the end of ch 16, and the whole of ch 16 was most likely part of Paul's original letter to the Romans. See also note on 16:1-6.

16:1-16 Paul here commended and greeted twenty-seven Roman Christians, ten of whom were women. Women played important roles in the early church. • Paul had never been to Rome, which has led to some speculation as to how he knew so many people there. One theory is that ch 16 was actually part of another letter that Paul sent to Ephesus. However, we have no good manuscript evidence for a separate letter (cp. note on 15:33). Perhaps the answer is that Paul was able to greet so many people in Rome because he had encountered them during their travels away from Rome (see Romans Introduction, “Setting,” p. 1888).

16:1 A deacon (Greek diakonos, “servant”) refers both to a Christian who is recognized as a servant of Christ and specifically to someone who holds the office of deacon in a particular church (see Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-12; cp. Acts 6:1-6). • Cenchrea was located eight miles from Corinth and functioned as its port. Paul might have been writing this letter to the Romans from Corinth on a winter-long stop there near the end of his third missionary journey (see Acts 20:2-3).

16:2 she has been helpful to many: This phrase indicates the ancient role of the patron, a wealthy person who used influence and money to help people and causes (see “Work and Patronage” at 2 Thes 3:6-10, p. 2045). Phoebe was apparently a woman of wealth and influence who used her resources to help missionaries such as Paul.

16:3-16 Although Paul had never visited the Christian community in Rome, he established rapport with these believers by personally greeting many of the church’s members. The names reveal that the Roman Christian community was very diverse—Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women all formed a new society in the church (see Gal 3:26-29).

16:3 Priscilla and Aquila were Paul’s good friends (see “Priscilla and Aquila” at Acts 18:1-3, p. 1865). After leaving Rome around AD 49, they became his co-workers for an extended time in Corinth and Ephesus (see Acts 18-19). They had apparently returned to Rome by the time Paul wrote Romans (about AD 57).

16:5 the church that meets in their home: Early Christians did not have large buildings for their meetings—they met in private homes. The church in Rome was composed of a number of house churches where small groups of believers gathered for worship and instruction.
and Junia, my fellow Jews, who were in prison with me. They are highly respected among the apostles and became followers of Christ before I did. 8Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. 9Greet Ursula, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.

10Greet Apelles, a good man whom Christ approves. And give my greetings to the believers from the household of Aristobulus. 11Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew. Greet the Lord's people from the household of Narcissus. 12Give my greetings to Tryphaena and Tryphosa, the Lord's workers, and to dear Persis, who has worked so hard for the Lord. 13Greet Rufus, whom the Lord picked out to be his very own; and also his dear mother, who has been a mother to me.

14Give my greetings to Asuncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who meet with them. 15Give my greetings to Philologus, Julita, Nerestus and his sister, and to Olympas and all the believers who meet with them. 16Greet each other in Christian love. All the churches of Christ send you their greetings.

Closing Remarks and Doxology
17And now I make one more appeal, my dear brothers and sisters. Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people's faith by teaching things contrary to what you have been taught. Stay away from them. 18Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests. By smooth talk and glowing words they deceive innocent people. 19But everyone knows that you are obedient to the Lord. This makes me very happy. I want you to be wise in doing right and to stay innocent of any wrong. 20The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

21Timothy, my fellow worker, sends you his greetings, as do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my fellow Jews.

22I, Tertius, the one writing this letter for Paul, send my greetings, too, as one of the Lord's followers.

23Gaius says hello to you. He is my host and also serves as host to the whole church. Erastus, the city treasurer, sends you his greetings, and so does our brother Quartus.

25Now all glory to God, who is able to make

16:7 In Greek, the name Junia could refer to a man named Junias or to a woman named Junia. Most interpreters understand Junia as a feminine name. Some late manuscripts accent the word so it reads Junias, a masculine name; still others read Julia (feminine). This section pairs masculine and feminine names to refer to husband-and-wife teams, so Junia was probably a woman.

16:13 This Rufus might be the individual mentioned as the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried Christ's cross (see Mark 15:21).

16:14 brothers and sisters: Literally brothers; also in 16:17. See note on 1:13.

16:15 all the believers: Literally all of God's holy people.

16:16 in Christian love (literally with a sacred kiss): The kiss was a common way to greet another person in the ancient world and particularly among the Jews. It is mentioned frequently in the New Testament as a greeting (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thes 5:26; see 1 Pet 5:14); the kiss of peace became a standard feature of the Christian liturgy by the second century.

16:17 people who cause divisions: Paul had trouble with divisive false teachers elsewhere (see Galatians, Colossians, 1 Timothy), so he warned the Roman church about this danger.

16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet: Paul alludes to the curse that God pronounced upon the serpent after he had deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:15). Christ, the offspring of Eve, will soon crush Satan under the feet of the church (cp. Matt 16:18-19). Lord Jesus: Some manuscripts read Lord Jesus Christ.

16:21 Timothy was one of Paul's closest ministry associates (see "Timothy" at Acts 16:1-3, p. 1860). Timothy accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:2-3) and was with Paul in Corinth while Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church (see Acts 20:2-4).

16:22 Tertius was the scribe (or amanuensis) who wrote the letter as Paul dictated. Most ancient letter writers employed such a scribe.

16:23 Some manuscripts add v 24, May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Still others add this sentence after v 27. This Erastus was probably the individual Paul sent from Ephesus to Macedonia during his third missionary journey (Acts 19:21-22; see 2 Tim 4:20). An inscription in Corinth mentions an Erastus who was a city magistrate, possibly the same Erastus mentioned here.

16:25-27 This doxology makes a very appropriate conclusion to Paul's letter and its argument, reprising many of the themes found at the very beginning (1:1-15). The doxology is missing in two late manuscripts and is in different places in other manuscripts (after 14:23 and after 15:33). Therefore, these verses might have been added to Paul's letter at a later time. However, the majority of manuscripts do include the doxology at the end of the letter, and it uses vocabulary and themes common in the rest of the letter. Paul most likely wrote it himself as a conclusion to the letter.
you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him. All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen.

16:25 plan (literally mystery): For Paul, the mystery is the truth about God and his plan that was not clearly known in the OT era but which has been revealed in the NT era. While the OT predicted the conversion of Gentiles, it did not make clear that Gentiles would become equal members of the people of God without becoming proselytes of Judaism.

16:26 the prophets: Literally the prophetic writings. * so that they too might believe and obey him: Paul uses the same language about the mission to the Gentiles that he used in 1:5, creating a beautiful frame around the letter as a whole.