

Lives and Times of The Bible

or

“Biblical Synchronicity”

An Approach to the Faith of our Fathers

Book I

A Study of Scripture in Greater Depth

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2021

Disclaimer

The bible was, of necessity, written in compressed form. Its' authors, arguably aware of causes vs. effects and problems vs. solutions, chose not to include in their written efforts. Therefore, the research required to produce this book were efforts intended only to uncover some of that information.

No attempt was made to use only information supporting the doctrinal or theological position of any denomination. There was effort made to use sources considered reliable and that were not known to be intentionally controversial. Therefore, any information found contrary to any standard doctrinal thought is simply a report of what was found.

The author's only intention has been to discover what supposed objectively oriented authors had to say about a specific topic.

Quoting a theological friend, *place the plow to the ground and let's see what turns up.*

Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge the help of friends and family in researching and writing the material in this book. Son, David and wife Jodi for their considerable help and advice in page set up, locating and researching sources of information; for help in vetting both significant information and significant authors.

Grandson, Joshua, for his invaluable help repairing (at a distance) an aging and cantankerous computer; for help in positioning page-graphics.

Wife, Adrien (now deceased), who patiently endured many hours alone while I labored over such concerns as the phrasing of split infinitives, participles, concept structure, point-of-view, etc.

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Forward

Traditional Sanctuary Services:

The appearance and practice of corporate worship in the early 21st Century is decidedly different from what it was in the past. In many churches, Midweek Prayer services no longer exist. For others, Sunday evening services are intermittent and may soon disappear as well.

Too, the physical appearance and conduct of sanctuary worship is in the process of changing. Choirs wear street clothing, and for many, the long-revered pulpit desk (the *Sacred Desk*) is gone replaced with a plastic lectern. The minister's three-piece suit has for many given way to jeans or wash pants and a pull-over shirt.

Padded pews, for some, have been replaced with folding chairs, and the standard organ and piano have been replaced with guitars, tambourines and trap-drums providing accompaniment to praise songs. Left behind have been traditional hymns burgeoning with multiple rhetorical images replaced with a paucity of repetitive imagery in praise songs.

Sunday School:

Sunday School, long a staple of church instruction and growth, appears slowly to be dying, its' original purpose long forgotten or diverted to more pressing temporal needs.

Robert Raikes, a British printer of the mid 1700s saw children working all week in factories only to carouse in the streets on Sunday, their day off.

Their hours were long and hard, but they were free on Sundays. Seeing them fighting in the streets and knowing they had no schooling, their parents either dead or in prison, Raikes himself a deeply religious man started classes for the children teaching them bible, how to count money and to read and write. The *schools* were held on Sundays.

Within a few years the number of children in Raikes' classes numbered in the thousands. Thus, Sunday School in England, had begun with the emphasis on *school—on learning*.

In early America, education was increasingly at a premium the farther west one went. Among other concerns, Sunday class topics were related to both academic and spiritual understanding. Various itinerant lecturers from the eastern portion of the country often were the instructors.

Eventually, in the 1870's, compulsory education began, forcing children to attend school where they learned the basics: reading, writing and arithmetic. Textbook content often exposed the children to issues of faith and morality. As well, they were expected to attend Sunday School where biblical instruction separate from secular instruction was supposed to occur. So, in early America, secular and biblical instruction, likely influenced by Robert Raikes' efforts in Britain, overlapped as part of education.

As decades and generations passed, Sunday School instruction became graded in content difficulty correlating with that of public schools. Instruction, relegated to volunteers, themselves often uninformed of both church history and doctrine, morphed into wandering class

discussions regarding theological abstractions or whatever the instructor's or attendee's opinion happened to be. Lessons for adults provided by the individual denomination too often were written at the Junior High School level of reading and understanding.

The result of these and other issues has left many educated adult Sunday School attendees with a need for deeper biblical knowledge.

The lessons that follow here are intended to raise the academic level of biblical instruction for the adult learner.

The bible was written in compressed form. Its' authors knew much more than they chose to place in written form. Had they written all they knew, our bible would be so large, no one would read it. Hence, the title of the present work is *Lives and Times of the Bible: Biblical Synchronicity, or A Study of Scripture in Greater Depth*.

Synchronicity: *The coincidental occurrence of events and especially psychic events . . . that seem related but are not explained by conventional mechanisms of causality.* (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary)

Progressive Revelation

Or

Cottage Cheese vs. Blackberry Jam

In circa 1914 and in the verdant mountains of Appalachia, a certain farmer loaded his wagon with garden produce, hitched his horse to the wagon, and proceeded to hawk his wares up and down the streets of two or three nearby villages.

On this Saturday, he included a vat of white cottage cheese and another vat filled with sweet blackberry jam. He sold it by the ladle-full into the purchaser's container. But he had only one ladle. No matter how carefully he cleaned the ladle between sales, by the end of his run, one could barely tell the difference between the cottage cheese and the blackberry jam.

This analogy, while proving nothing, may help explain what follows.

In 1446 B.C. and after 400 years of imprisonment, the children of Israel were led out of Egypt and into the Sinai Desert where they would remain for 40 years.

The Israelites had multiple memories of wives and daughters being raped by their masters; of husbands and sons being beaten or killed by their masters.

But they knew nothing of codified law needed to structure and govern their new culture. They knew nothing of how to structure their faith.

The Israelites had a problem, but they **did not** know it. God had a problem, and **did** know it. He invited Moses up on Mt Sinai for a conference. There, he gave Moses only four principles of faith:

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt make of me no graven images.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Thou shalt not use the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

Moses was given six principles that would serve as the foundation structure for culture, i.e. how people should treat each other.

Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work.

Honor thy father and thy mother.

Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not covet. (Ex. 20, KJV)

From these rudimentary instructions, God, expecting His instructions to be expanded and refined over time by Moses and the Israelites, continued leading them to organize both their faith and socio/political culture.

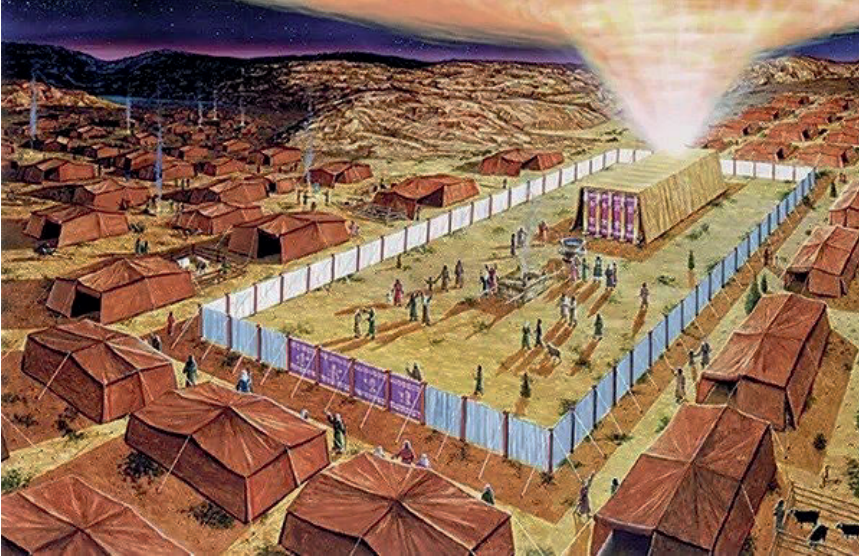
(Ex. 25-26 KJV) God gave Moses instructions for how to build both the Arc of the Covenant and a Wilderness Tabernacle. The specifics of each can be a subject for another lesson. But God directed that there be

Priests to serve inside the Tabernacle. All Priests would be Levites, but not all Levites would be priests.

These priests were separated from the citizenry for spiritual service inside the Wilderness Tabernacle. God knew the citizenry (“people will be people!”) would break one or more of the ten commandments plus any refinements to the laws ever added to the ten commandments over time. Some means was needed to confront and rectify their anticipated wrong-doing.

The duty, among others, of the priests was to contend with the breaches of both civil and spiritual law God knew would occur among the citizenry.

Those on the inside of the Tabernacle complex were to guard carefully against any tendency to become involved inappropriately with those outside the complex. (In other words, don’t mix the cottage cheese with the blackberry jam. The reader can decide which is which.)



WILDERNESS TABERNACLE

(Stan Stein - The Tabernacle)

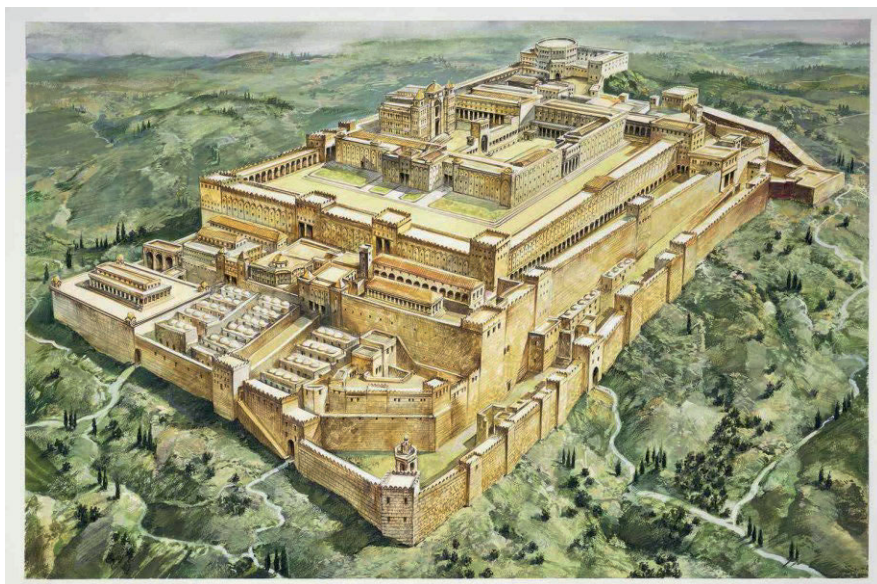
The system of having a priesthood separated for spiritual service contending with the sins of the people worked for hundreds of years. Even through most of Solomon's period, from 970-931 B.C., the system worked.

God honored the work of the Priests' separation for spiritual service as did the people being served. But the two "vats" – the outside vs. the inside – became more and more mixed as time went on.

Solomon Mixed the two "Vats":

Solomon, not of the tribe of Levi, built his own palace inside the temple complex. Moreover, he built accommodations for Pharos's Daughter either in a wing of his own palace or across the complex from his own palace with a road connecting the two.

Too, likely as a feature of settlements in increasing international trade, he was given concubines, or “wives” (a distinction without a difference); all of whom were housed in a wing of his own palace. Still further, many



SOLOMON'S TEMPLE MOUNT

(Getty Images)

of these wives and concubines brought with them from neighboring city-states their own worship protocols favoring other gods.

The “outside” was becoming increasingly confused with the “inside”, those separated for spiritual service. But this was not a deal-breaker with God.

Enter Someone Who Sensed the Problem:

So, confused were these two that Jehoiachim, a later successor to Solomon was entreated by a local preacher to return both church and

government to their proper place. There is some thought that his social skills may have been lacking. For his efforts, he was barred from the complex. The man was Jeremiah. Jeremiah, as told by God, wrote a scroll, specifically asking Jehoiachim and his priests to return the nation to its' spiritual roots and away from their wicked ways. (Jer. 36:2-3)

Since Jeremiah could not present the scroll himself, having been barred from temple grounds, he sent Baruch, his scribe-secretary to present his message.

Jehoiachim grabbed the scroll-trimming knife from Baruch, cut each passage as Baruch read it, and threw it into the fire. Jeremiah, then, rewrote it in its' entirety. We have its' complete version as the book of Jeremiah. No wonder he was a weeping prophet; read *Lamentations*.

That Was a Deal-Breaker:

Seventy years in Babylonian captivity was the result. It would seem that God's Progressive Revelation to the Jews was not taking root.

Back from Babylonian captivity, the leader was Zerubbabel. Around 521 B.C., he began rebuilding the temple complex of Solomon. His temple, though intended adequately to replace that of Solomon, fell short of its' intent. There were many issues.

First, the Arc of the Covenant that had served the Israelites for hundreds of years was gone. It either had been stolen or hidden when the Babylonian diaspora began. If it had been hidden, it could not be found because those who hid it likely had died in the 70-year interim.

Now, on *Yom Kippur* the High Priest could not offer sacrifice for the people. Remember that Ezekiel, in Babylon recorded his vision of the cherubim coming to life on the Mercy Seat, the gold lid of the Arc of the Covenant, and leaving the temple coming to rest on the Mt of Olives.

The spiritual fallout of this meant there was no way for those having been separated for spiritual service inside the temple complex to ritually provide remedy for the sins of people who were outside the complex. The cloud reminiscent of the Cloud by Day



ZERUBBABEL'S TEMPLE MOUNT

Getty Images

in Sinai, and the Fire of God on the altar, reminiscent of the Pillar of Fire by Night in the Sinai were gone. **God was NOT there!**

It Gets Worse:

Another issue was that priests had for hundreds of years used the Urim and Thummim to determine God's Will regarding significant events. These were either stone, ceramic amulets or sticks likely with inscriptions of some sort on them. Throwing these into a closed area (like one's lap) was called Casting Lots. Casting Lots was eventually discarded as a means of determining God's will; although, the disciples used the system to find a replacement for Judas. The prominence of prophets was on the rise in Israel, although it is clear their advice was not often taken.

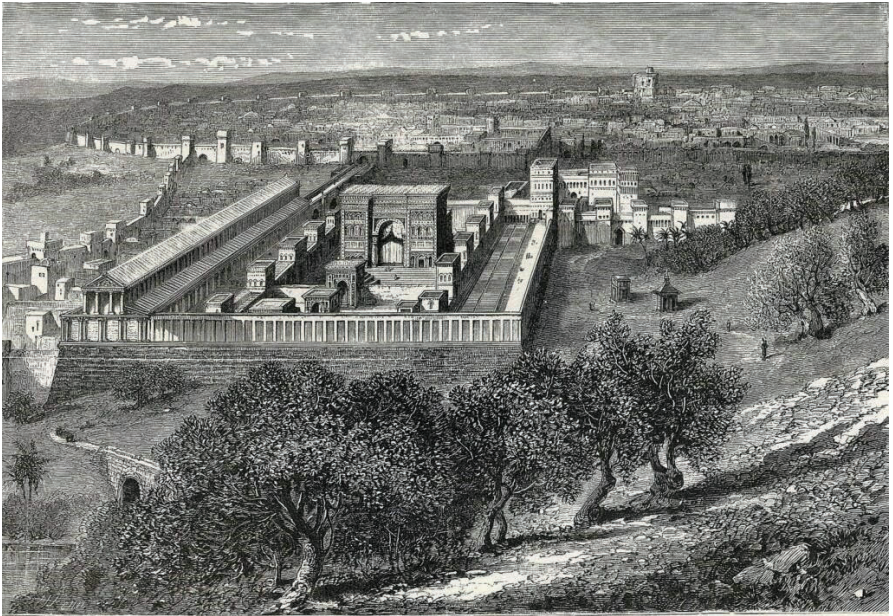
Zerubbabel's temple lasted for centuries, but eventually Alexander the Great in 167 BC, conquered the area. Shortly thereafter, the temple was looted; religious observances were banned; Judaism was effectively outlawed. Antiochus Epiphanes ordered an altar of Zeus be erected in the temple and that pigs be sacrificed on its' altar.

The *coupe de gras* for the intended separation of some for spiritual service happened during worship protocols in Herod's Temple. The year was circa 32 AD.

The population had increased significantly since the return from Babylon. Herod permitted sacrificial worship although the Arc of the Covenant still was absent as were the Urim and Thummim.

So Look at the Church, 32 AD:

The church, realizing that a significant number of animals was now required for sacrifice, went into business raising animals for just that purpose. Likely the shepherd boys *watching their flock by night* as recorded by Luke, were working for the church. God, in typical understatement, hung out a single extra star that night on honor of Jesus' birth, our Savior. During the ministry of Jesus, at celebration of Passover, he was walking around inside the temple complex. An estimated 250,000 extra people were in Jerusalem for the Passover that year expecting to participate in sacrificial worship.



Herod's Temple Mount

Jones, C.H.; Hamilton, T.H.; Williams, J.David. 1873.

View of the Temple of Herod, from Olivet

An untold number of sheep, cattle and doves, *et.al.*, in cages had been herded into the compound for sale to the individual worshiper.

In preparation, the priests set up a line of priests (how many is uncertain) to sacrifice animals, drain their blood, etc. Receptacles were built into the floor of the compound to catch the blood and drain it to the outside where a line of individuals with containers would catch the blood and carry it to the edge of the city. The scene was a bloody mess.

Most individuals from other city-states wanted to worship but had no animal for sacrifice. So, animals could be purchased, from the church, on the spot. But the priests would not accept anything but Jewish coins. Conversations likely went like this:

I'm from Pergamum, and I could not bring an animal with me for sacrifice.

No problem. Just pick out a suitable animal and pay for it.

I see a lamb. Looks perfect to me. How much is it?

100 Shekels. Just step over to the table and pay for it.

*Here are 296 Denarius.**

Oh, but we don't take Roman Denarius. We only take Jewish Shekels. Just step to the next table and exchange your Denarius for Jewish Shekels and come back.

*(100 Shekels was worth 296 Denarius)

They likely gave him fewer Shekels for his 296 Denarius, a fraction of the value offered in foreign currency. If so, he was being “ripped off” by the church.

To Jesus, **that was a deal-breaker! Too much mixing of the two “vats.”**

Jesus, walking about watching and listening to this cacophony of animals and people (Matt 21:12), fashioned a whip of cords. He went after the money changers tipping over the ‘money-changers’ tables and driving the sheep and cattle from the courts crying; (Matt 21:13)

“My house shall be called a house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”



Roman Scourging Whip

(Bing Images)

The priests seem to have heard only “*My house*.” This and other events brought about his trial, execution, resurrection, and ascension.

But his work was done. With his death and resurrection, there was no longer a difference between believers outside and those inside the compound separated for spiritual service. All believers were given the assignment of individual responsibility before God. It was the initiation of the concept of **The Priesthood of the Believer**. Direct access to God, the Father!

Jesus, in his high-priestly prayer, would ask his father to sanctify (separate for spiritual service) his disciples. The walls of the old Wilderness Tabernacle were no longer a separation between the outside and the inside. He asked his father not to take them (both disciples and we, today's believers) out of the world, but to keep them and us from the evil that is in the world.

(KJV Jn. 17) I have given them thy word and the world hath hated them because they are not of the world even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. . .

The believer's body itself became the temple of the Holy Spirit. The wall of separation was gone; the individual became his own priest with Jesus as his High Priest. Paul would eventually write, *When the body of **this** tabernacle is dissolved, I have another, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

Shekinah Glory of God

Definition: Shekinah Glory of God is any physical manifestation of the presence of God, i.e., the ability to see, taste, touch, smell, or hear something you identify as God's presence.

It was 1446 B.C. when the Israelites were finally released from Egyptian bondage. Finding themselves alone in the Sinai Desert, they were ready to revolt when God came to their rescue.

Actually, in an attempt to be close to his own people, God guided them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It was the earliest account of the physically manifest presence of God – to be near his people.



Shekinah Glory of God

(Bibleinfo.com)

God's desire to be near his people did not diminish over time. In the desert encampment, Moses was directed by God to set up a Tent of Meeting at some distance outside the encampment of the people. (Ex 33:7-11) Anyone wishing to meet with God could go to that Tent of Meeting. If Moses went there to meet there with God, the people would stand at

attention at the entrance to their own tents as he walked past. The little cloud would descend to be just above Moses and follow him to the door of the Tent of Meeting, remaining there so long as Moses spoke with God *"as a man speaks with a friend."* (v. 11)

The Wilderness Tabernacle included a Court of the People, a Holy Place for the priests, and a Holy of Holies (the "House of God"?) where only the High Priest could enter and that only on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) to make sacrificial atonement for the sins of the people.

In this Holy of Holies was the Arc of the Covenant standing 2.5' high X 2.5' wide X 4' long with a gold lid, the Mercy Seat. The curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was, according to Josephus, 4" thick by 15' tall by 15' wide.

Most importantly, on the day of atonement, when the High Priest entered, he found that same small cloud hovering inside. If God accepted the sacrifice, a pillar of fire would strike the sacrifice. The shekinah of God was still with his children.

This relationship between the people and God continued for hundreds of years. In the days of Solomon and his magnificent temple, the shekinah of God's presence was so strong that the cloud seeped out of the Holy of Holies around and under its' veil to a point where it filled the court of the Priests and even the Court of the People.



Arc of the Covenant

Getty Images

It was so prevalent the people could barely see across the expanse of the area. (I Kings 8:10-11) *And it came to pass when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.*

God's attempts to be near his people continued in this manner through successive kings until confronted with problems of the last king after Solomon. Jeremiah prepared a scroll detailing both the kings' and the priests' wicked behavior. Jeremiah, having been barred from the temple

area sent his secretary-scribe, Baruch, who took the message to the king. The king threw the scroll into the fire.

Jeremiah rewrote the scroll, but their human behavior had logical consequences both for Israel and their shekinah-relationship with God. Exile in Babylon was the result.

In Babylonian captivity, Ezekiel had a vision in which the shekinah with the cherubim (carved into either end of the Arc of the Covenant) came to life, departed the Holy of Holies, and the temple itself. (Ezek 10:18) *Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house...*



Mt of Olives

(Getty Images)

(v. 19) *when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and everyone stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house . . .* (the East Gate refers to the Mt. of Olives). They came to rest on The Mount of Olives. **(Remember the Mount of Olives!)**

This means that God was not in the Holy of Holies from 597 BC, the beginning date of the diaspora in Babylon, until the coming of Jesus, the Christ. **God wasn't there!**

Historians write that, without the Holy of Holies and the Arc of the Covenant, Jews instituted Synagogue Worship; that there was growing reliance on the advice of prophets

Emanuel:

But God still wanted to be near his people, not housed in the Holy of Holies, there controlled by the priesthood. In the fulness of time, Jesus, the Christ Child, was born, and they called him ***Emanuel, God with us.*** God was physically present. They could see, hear, and touch him. **The shekinah was back!**

For thirty-three years, officials tried to get him for one cause or another. Eventually, they charged him with blasphemy, i.e., calling himself God.

Many others through Jewish history had arisen to attention calling themselves the Messiah. In each case they had been found to be frauds; their “miracles” had been slight-of-hand tricks. Jesus was to them just one more imposter.

Got Him, or So They Thought!

Hanging him on the cross, they assumed their task was complete. It was not. The Holy of Holies was in place with its' famous curtain, but God was not there. He was on a cross! They dusted off their hands and went

out to the Passover Dinner. Little could be heard on Golgotha but the moans of the dying thieves mixed with the sobs of Jesus' mother, his brother and others.

No one noticed when, about noon a small white cloud floated into the area and stood. By one o'clock, other clouds had joined the first one and their color was turning grey. By two o'clock, still more clouds had gathered and the atmosphere was like the dusk of evening. By three o'clock, the sky was as dark as midnight, and Jesus must have pushed off against the nail through his feet sufficient to release his sagging body and allow him one last breath of air. We are told He cried out with a loud voice, but in colloquial English, He screamed, ***It is finished!***

Wow!

When He did, the clouds began to boil; the very earth shook so that rocks broke in two; graves were opened. God was saying to the world, *Since 597 B.C., **that** is a sacrifice I'll take!*

In a modern room we hear only the words spoken on the phone by someone nearby. We don't hear what that person hears. One might imagine that as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, God, the Father, may have said, *Thank you, son, you've done your job.* And, being the good son he was, Jesus got up and walked away.

But It's Not Over!

Forty days later, Jesus gathered his disciples with him on the Mt. of Olives, the very place the Shekinah had come to rest as reported in Ezekiel's vision shortly after the beginning of the diaspora.

There, he instructed his disciples to gather in the Upper Room to wait for the Holy Spirit to come. They did as they had been instructed, and when that happened what seemed to be a mighty rushing wind came through the room and what appeared to be small pillars of fire stood above their heads.

From that moment, all believers have been considered **living sacrifices** to God. They and we are to live our lives as directed by God, but the Shekinah, the physical manifestation of the presence of God, has taken residence, ever alive, in the spiritual heart of every believer.

The Good Shepherd

God's Approach to Leadership

(John 10:1-21)

Sometime in the 1960s, Douglas McGregor of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management, coined a new theory-phrase related to human motivation. Related to psychology and management in the business world, it is: *Theory X* and *Theory Y*.

Theory X assumes an employee's motivation necessitates a leader's authoritarian style of management. Such leaders, assuming a specific employee requiring Theory X of management, must remain near that employee's task making helpful remarks to and about the employee's efforts.

Theory Y assumes the employee's skill, honor, and motivation can be trusted. Thus, they are empowered and given time and space in which to complete the assignment.

Illustration:

The student entered the professor's office requesting the teacher pray for him to find God's will for his life. The student wanted to make the correct choice of a college major.

The professor agreed to pray for him but directed him to proceed to the Dean of Students' Office and take the Kuder Preference test. The student

could not understand such a suggestion when all he had requested was prayer.

The professor instructed the student that his potential talents, inclinations, preferences had been placed there by God. The Kuder Preference Test, continued the professor, was designed simply to identify the preferences already placed in him by God. Following those skills, preferences, inclinations will help to direct the individual into God's Will.

John 10:1-21 presents a parable of the Good Shepherd.

There are three classes of shepherds:

Class I: The Master Shepherd, owner of the flock. The sheep know his voice. They follow him. It makes a difference to the Master Shepherd whether the sheep live or die. He counts the sheep released to the pasture, and he will count them again as they return from the pasture. He wants as many or more in return as he released to the pasture.

Class II: The Heirling Shepherd is in service for the financial reward. The sheep may or may not know his voice. They may or may not follow him. It makes little difference to him whether or not they live or die. Thus, the heirling will, in times of danger, act to save himself rather than saving the sheep.

Class III: The Good Shepherd; cares for the flock. He knows their preferences, personalities, skills, idiosyncrasies. He manages their activities rather than dictate where they go or what they do.

He recognizes those who require Theory X management as opposed to those who can be trusted as Theory Y.

Sheep are sheep; they are docile in self-defense, vulnerable to disease, and inattentive to their immediate environment.

The Good Shepherd knows his sheep are on loan from the Master Shepherd, so he'll provide the support he believes the Master Shepherd desires of him.

John, in this parable, sees Christians as the sheep and Christ as the Good Shepherd (a biblical model of Christian Leadership). We are in our field of service, applying the skills, inclinations, etc. given us. But, like sheep, people will be people! We, too, are sometimes docile in self-defense; vulnerable to attack from the venal intent of others; not always attentive to our immediate environment.

There are times when the Christian, busy with life, forgets, becomes distracted, and misses the mark of God's Will. The still-small-voice inside will remind that person of their purpose and lead them back to the proper field of service.

Illustration:

The professor went to his office, arriving at 6:45 preparing for 2-3 classes to be taught before returning to his office again. Six students having personal difficulties were there seeking his counsel. By the time he had discussed each of their issues, he literally ran to his first class. Opening his brief case and looking up to the class, he discovered he was in the wrong room.

Embarrassedly, he ran to the correct room only to discover he had brought along the wrong teaching materials.

He, himself, was attending serious personal issues and was about to make a desperately wrong decision when he stopped abruptly to take inventory.

Like in the parable, he was the sheep that had wandered out away from the pasture, attending legitimate issues, and finding himself in great danger.

It was as though God said to him, *don't move! Stand still. I've been here before. Here, take my hand and I will lead you back to your field of service.*

Having led the professor back to his field of service, God must have gone off looking for someone else (another sheep) who had simply wandered off.

Looking for Home:

But the time will come when its' time to go home. Your work in the field has come to an end. While your work may be done, that of the Good Shepherd's is not finished.

The Good Shepherd does not want to go home without all of his sheep. So, the sheep will not go home alone. The Good Shepherd will go with his sheep. Arriving at the sheep fold, he knows the Master Shepherd will place a symbolic rod atop the only entrance to the fold and count the sheep as they pass under the rod.

(NIV Ezekiel 34 et. passim) I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel.

Remember you, the believer, are one of his sheep. He doesn't want to go home without you.

Looking for Home

(II Cor 4; I Pet 2:9-12; II Pet 1:3-4)

Playing with Angels:

Most of us have observed with amusement a baby lying on its' back on the living room floor looking at nothing in particular. Suddenly it appears to see something. It begins to kick its' little fat legs, flail its' arms, and it squeals in sheer delight. It appears to see something the adult does not see.

It's a stretch, and nearly impossible to prove, but some think the baby is playing with angels. Its' little body was made on earth following protocols designed by god for procreation, but its' soul was given by God. And some day the baby-man will grow old and die. The body will remain where it was made, but the soul will go back to the God who gave it.

Principle:

A spark of the divine has been placed in every person at birth. Said Diogenetus, circa 130 A.D., The soul is imprisoned in the body.

Confines of Humanity:

Humanity is limited in multiple ways. We each have five receptors, two of which (sight and hearing) are distance oriented; three of which (touch, taste, smell) are immediate receptors.

Consider only two of these. Our hearing acuity begins at about 15 cycles-per-second at the low end and terminates at about 18,000 cycles-per-second (the squeal of an old-fashioned TV picture tube). There is a range of sounds both below and above 15-18,000 cps that we cannot detect. Further, our minds switch from ear-to-ear as we listen. The switching slows as the content heard is new or difficult causing the listener to miss available data.

Consider sight. Visual acuity alters moment by moment throughout the day. Our mind causes our eyes to alternate eye-to-eye at an average of 20 times per second. The speed of change is a function of both familiarity and subject-complexity. The mind processes each 1/20-per-second visual bit of data. When the data is too difficult or is unfamiliar, the mind slows the switching speed and information is lost.

These and other confining features of our five senses are even more complex telling us things are happening around us about which we know little or nothing.

Modern scientists of quantum physics go so far as to say that the little data our senses give us is only enough to form a hologram of reality. True reality is somewhere else.

Thomas Hood, British mathematician, physician and author said, *I remember the fir trees dark and high. I used to think their slender spires were close against the sky. It was a childish ignorance, but now 'tis no joy, to know I'm farther from heaven now than when I was a boy.*

Wordsworth, of Ambleside, England, wrote that a child comes from heaven; that through time the years slowly take this memory away. Said Wordsworth, *Trailing clouds of glory do we come, but shades of the prison house begin to close about the growing boy; soon the boy-man is totally earthbound and heaven is all but forgotten.*

Dual Identity:

Humans have an earthly body with a divine spark; heavenly creatures having an earthly experience.

Paul, in II Cor 4 *et. passim* through 5, says that we struggle with this earthly domination of our humanity. We have help with the earnest (motivation) of the spirit in preparation for things to come. That makes us uncomfortable at times with where we are now.

Paul, sensing this unease slipped in and out of the eternal-temporal as he wrote. . .

(2 Cor 4: *et passim*) *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side . . . We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that this life may be revealed in our mortal body. So, then death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

. . . *So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporal, but what is unseen is eternal.*

(2 Pet 1:3-4) Peter provides for a resolution of the human dilemma.

Peter said we are partakers of the divine nature (the divine spark?) *Theias Koinonoi Physeos* (Christ, all divine, united in the incarnation with human nature).

Elements of the Divine:

It seems appropriate to identify the elements of this divine nature with which we are partakers. Here are some:

SPIRITUALITY: It's a facet of existence that does not depend on a physical body. We have it in communion with God's son. It's a self-defined existence.

INFINITY: A facet of existence without limits. No bounds with unlimited access to wisdom, power, goodness beyond measure. It's no wonder we are spiritually uncomfortable at times!

ETERNITY: It's a facet of existence that has neither beginning nor ending; an existence without temporal restrictions. God said: *I am that I am*; (Rev. 1:8) *that which is, and which is to come, the almighty*.

IMMUTABILITY: Once created it cannot change through all eternity. God doesn't change – we do. His moral governance is always in harmony with his own holy nature.

We are partakers with God in these divine characteristics; tied inextricably to something much larger than ourselves.

I Pet 2:9-11 *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God . . . v. 11, Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from . . .* (and he then named the things that would entice us toward the things of this world).

John Wesley wrote of our living in a strange house (our bodies); and being pilgrims in a strange land (this world).

Barclay's Commentary: *We are exiles of eternity.*

The exiled Jew still constructs his synagogue so that when he enters, he is facing Jerusalem (home). The Greek for sojourner is *Paroikos* from which we derive the word *parish* or *parishioner*. That's you, the sojourner.

We live here, analogous to the Jew in exile, but with eternal loyalties. The teacher isn't just teaching grammar; he's showing a class of students how to "get along" on their way home – hoping the student makes proper choices on the way. Believers all are *living sacrifices*, i.e., truck drivers, cooks, roofers, concrete finishers, etc., being reminded daily that we are only here temporarily. We're on our way home.

We should, in fact, have a spiritual curiosity about who we are and the specifics of where we are going. Such persons are *renewed in their spirit (spirituality, infinity, eternity, immutability) of their mind after the image of God.*

It's the **searching**, a curiosity for knowledge of God (hungering and thirsting after righteousness) that renews our minds.

There is a passage from a 12-13-page Epistle to Diogenetus that is of value here. It was supposedly written by some disciple of his. (Incidentally, the Greek for *disciple* is *mathetes* which means "intentional learner" – not just "follower.")

Christians are not marked out from the rest of mankind by their country or their speech or their customs . . . They dwell in cities both Greek and barbarian, each as his lot is cast, following the customs of the region in clothing and in food and in the outward things of life generally; yet they manifest the wonderful and openly paradoxical character of their own state. They inhabit the lands of their birth, but as temporary residents thereof; they take their share of all responsibilities as citizens, and endure all disabilities as aliens. Every foreign land is their native land and every native land a foreign land . . . They pass their days upon earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.

Remember, you'll always feel a "tug" on your heart strings telling you something's not quite right. It isn't – quite right.

Some saints, not all, nearing the end of their life seem to disengage from this life; like not reading the paper or watching news on TV. They seem to stand as it were with one foot in time and the other in eternity.

It might be an aged person's corollary-behavior reminiscent of the little babe excitedly kicking and flailing its' arms. A southern gospel song title aims at this: They're just *Trying to Get a Glimpse of what's over on the Other Side*.

Jezebel, a Royal Pain!

Or

Drain the Swamp!

I Kings 16 – 19 *et. passim*; II Kings 9

For many years, Jezebel dominated both society and politics in the Kingdom of Israel (Northern Kingdom). But she was not born and raised there.

Jezebel's Birth Home:

Jezebel was born a princess to King Ethball, King of Sidon. Sidon was a loosely connected group of city-states called Phoenicia. Narrow, in places, it was only 5 miles or so wide but 200 miles tall along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea extending from Carmel in the south to Arvad in the north.

The area derived its' wealth from both dye-producing snails on the sea coast and a sizable labor force of skilled craftsmen. David, at about 1000 BC, hired craftsmen from Phoenicia to help build his palace and Temple. He also purchased cedars from the northern portion of the area, modern day Lebanon, for them to use creating state-of-the-art paneling in his Temple and Palace.

The Gross National Product of Sidon was enormous, unlike that of Ahab in Israel, the Northern Kingdom.

Ahab's Nation was Poor:

Eventually, Jezebel married Ahab, King of Israel. At home, Jezebel was a princess. But as the wife of Ahab, she was a queen.

Jezebel had married “up” socially while Ahab married wealth. Jezebel knew and understood the protocols of high society and could fit in with the culture of a queen to Ahab. But it was not a marriage made in heaven.

Together, it is assumed, they had a daughter, Athaliah, who grew up to become Queen Consort to Jehoram, King of Judah (the Southern Kingdom). Together, they had a son, Aziah. It appears that Ahab had a son, Joram, from an earlier marriage.

Ahab was weak-willed, and Jezebel was strong-willed. As one might expect, Jezebel, from the beginning, controlled husband Ahab in both national policy and religion.

Jezebel in Both Religion and Politics: (I kings 16:31-33)

Jezebel quickly did two things of concern to worshippers of the true and living God: first, she introduced Baal as an officially sanctioned religious practice.

This decision was a slap in the face to traditional Israeli worship. Ahab, having been converted to the worship of Baal, built an outside altar and grove in which to practice Baal worship.

A second consequence of Jezebel's influence was that she had established Baal-Government as superior to religion. She was likely behind the government's decision that declared it illegal to prophesy in the name of the true and living God. At least that was the ruling's effect (I Kings 18:4).

A further effect of the ruling was that any prophet whose prophesy did not come true could be executed. References indicate many prophets met their fate at the ruling of this evil woman.

Enter Obadiah, Servant of the Lord, Counselor to the House of Ahab / Jezebel:

Having learned of Jezebel's ruling on potentially executing prophets, Obadiah hid 100 prophets in two caves, 50 in each.

Meanwhile, Jezebel was bringing prophets of Baal into the palace supposedly to spend the night with her. Into this debauched environment, God sent Elijah who immediately created two problems for himself:

- 1) He prophesied a three-year draught – and it happened (I Kings 17:1-5).
- 2) He demanded to confront Baal's prophets at Mt. Carmel, evidently a Baal altar-shrine.

Ahab, reacting to Elijah's draught, and concerned for the animals under his care, asked Obadiah to go out searching for food. Obadiah did and

ran into Elijah who asked Obadiah to do him a favor and take a message to the palace. Obadiah's response is classic (I Kings 18:9-15):

What have I done wrong that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death? As surely as the Lord your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you. But now you tell me to go to my master and say, "Elijah is here" (sarcastically). I don't know where the Spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, HE-WILL-KILL-ME (caps added). Yet, I your servant have worshiped the Lord since my youth. Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the Lord? I hid a hundred of the Lord's prophets in two caves, fifty in each and supplied them with food and water. And now you tell me to go to my master and say, "Elijah is here" (more sarcasm) HE-WILL-KILL-ME (emphasis added).

Elijah would have nothing of Obadiah's argument and insisted on having the meeting that very day. It was an *either put up or shut up* moment for Jezebel and Ahab.

Remember, the law said a prophesy that did not happen was a capital offense for the prophet. The event occurred at Mt. Carmel. The prophesy of Baal's prophets failed to occur. Elijah's did. So, Jezebel was under law to execute her own prophets.

Jezebel didn't. So, Elijah did! He had all of her prophets executed. Surprise, surprise, this angered Jezebel. So, Elijah ran for his life (I King 19:1-5).

Naboth and his Vineyard:

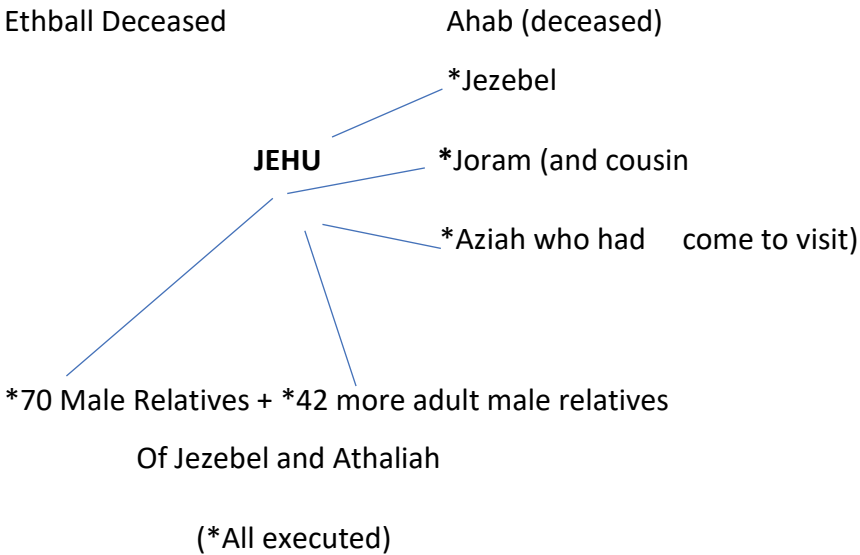
Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard, but Naboth wouldn't sell it. So, Jezebel framed Naboth accusing him of a crime he had not committed and had him executed. For this crime, Elijah prophesied a violent death for both Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab died violently less than 36 months later in battle with the Syrians. This left Jezebel solely in charge of both religion and government.

Enter Elisha:

Elisha was farming when Elijah approached having been told of God that he was soon to die. Elisha accepted the "promotion". His first assignment: to overthrow the house of Ahab.

Elisha appointed Jehu the new ruler of the Kingdom of Israel, effectively bypassing Jezebel. Jehu's first assignment, Elijah-through-Elisha, was to overthrow the house of Ahab i.e., **Drain the Swamp! Jehu did it in spades!**

How Jehu Did It



Athaliah and Jehoram remained in the southern kingdom.

The Fall of the House of Ahab / Jezebel:

Jezebel, apparently knowing Jehu was coming, prepared for an official visit to the palace. She dressed in her finest, carefully applied appropriate make-up, and stood at an upstairs window observing Jehu’s approach. Jehu marched into the palace, went straight upstairs to her quarters where he immediately commanded her court officials to throw her out the window. They did. As Elijah had prophesied, she, too, died a violent death. Dogs came to devour her remains (II Kings 9:30-35). But Jehu was not finished.

The Denouement:

Aziah, son of Athaliah and King Jehoram, had come up from Judah to visit Joram, son of Ahab and step-son of Jezebel. Jehu, discovering the visit, killed Joram. Aziah had seen Joram die at the hands of Jehu, and turned to flee. Jehu went after him, chasing him toward the Fortress, Gur. Aziah didn't make it. He was shot through with arrows (obviously in the back) and died that evening in Megiddo.

Not yet finished, Jehu sought out 70 male relatives of Jezebel and Athaliah plus 42 more adult male relatives, put them in a pit, making it a "shooting gallery" and killed them all. Any one of them could have claimed the throne of Jezebel.

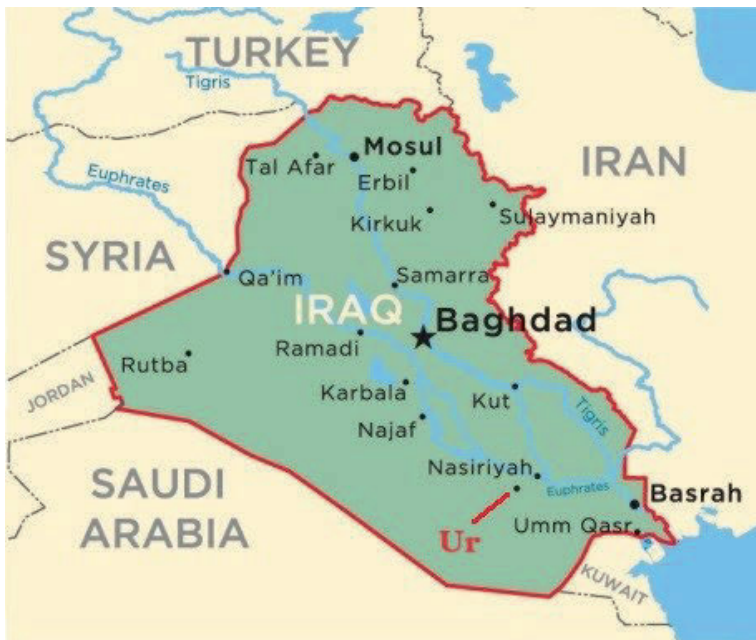
Athaliah survived all of this and served for a while as reigning queen in Judah. But one day, as she stood in the horse gate of her palace, she too was murdered.

The swamp had been drained!

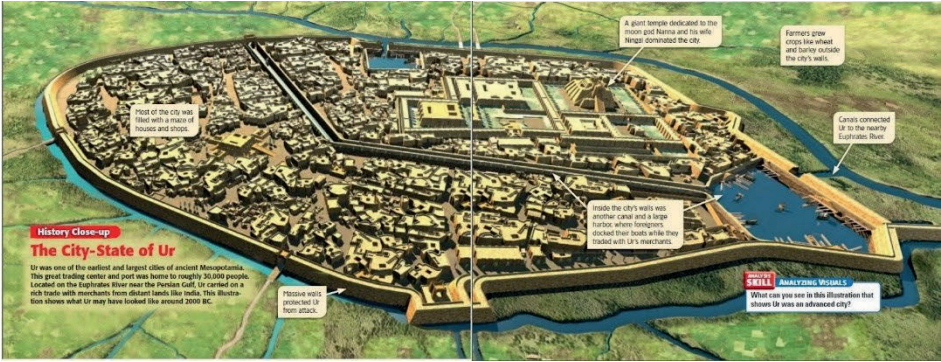
Abraham: Is There a God?

The year was circa 2500-3000 B.C. Today the land is called Iraq, but then it was called Mesopotamia and it was watered by two rivers: the Tigris River on the eastern half and the Euphrates River serving the western half.

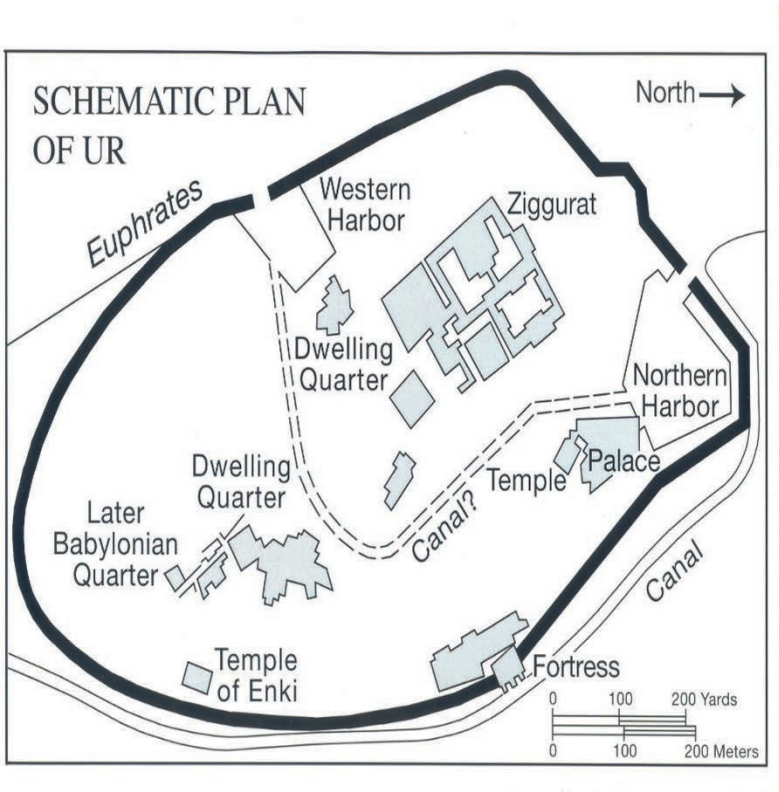
The rivers today meet a few miles above the Persian Gulf and flow together into the gulf. Then, the Persian Gulf is thought to have had a shore line far north. There was a city situated on the Euphrates river close to the shore line of the gulf. Ur was a city of some size having



Location to the City of Ur



The City – State of Ur



City Plan of Ur

numerous priests, astronomers and mathematicians. As can be seen in the city map p. 64, there was a canal that meandered through the center of the city terminating at a local harbor, probably to accommodate international trade brought to the city due to its' location on the Persian Gulf coast.

The priests had their own building, a ziggurat located in the northwestern quadrant of the city. It was there to house the numerous gods worshipped by the Ur-ites.

Priests and "Gods":

At one count, there were thirty or more sun-gods, an equal number of fire-gods plus gods for rain, animals and more. The supreme god (male or female?) of the area lived in a "penthouse" a-top the ziggurat where the god of the opposite sex supposedly would visit periodically. The Chaldeans mostly worshipped gods of light, sun and fire. The city's name itself, Ur, meant "fire."

Terra and Son, Abram, -Abraham:

According to Josephus, 1st century Jewish historian, Abram approached his father, Terra, having noticed the numerous gods Terra had been worshipping. Asked why he worshipped so many gods, some carved of wood, others of stone or other material, Terra replied that he wanted to be certain not to have offended any god, just in case he was worshipping the wrong one.

According to Josephus, Abram informed his father of irregular phenomena visible on land or sea caused by the sun and moon as well as other heavenly bodies. Said, Abram, worshipping the various gods did not seem to affect any of these natural phenomena. So perhaps something was amiss. Perhaps the behavior of heavenly bodies conformed instead to the will of another more powerful God – the *God of the Universe* -- if you will.

According to Josephus, Abram reasoned further (no one can know the exact conversation, but here is Josephus' general thinking about it):

Admitted, the fire- god is powerful. It can cook your food and heat your house, but if you get too close it will kill you.

What's more, the rain- god produces water in which you can swim, float, craft or bath, but if you are not careful, it too will kill you. Besides, did you ever notice that when the rain god comes out, the fire god goes away? So, is the rain god more powerful than the fire god?

Consider the sun god. It will help your garden grow. It will bring you a pleasant experience. But when the sun god comes out the rain god goes away. So perhaps the sun- god is more powerful than the rain- god which in turn is more powerful than the fire- god.

I theorize that there is a God over all other gods and that perhaps we should worship only that God.

Abram and his personal family left Ur and traveled north to Haran. No one knows what became of Terra's worship commitment. An eventual famine sent Abram/Abraham to Egypt.

Josephus says Abraham went to Egypt to observe their priests and prophets, to debate their theories. Abraham was brilliant in his debating techniques.

Supposedly in a challenge to the Egyptian theologians and philosophers, he would follow their gods if they won a debate. But they would follow his God if he won. He won! It does not appear the Egyptian theologians kept their word.

Distribution of New Concepts in a Culture:

As an aside, consider the discovery of iron/steel. The world has had this product for nearly four thousand years. Yet, when the Titanic sank in the north Atlantic, people could not understand why because of its' careful construction.

When it was finally discovered at the bottom of the Atlantic and a piece of its' steel was brought to the surface, one of the first things done was to test the quality of the steel. It was reported that they found the steel quite strong – until it was submitted to very cold temperatures. Though uncertain, they questioned whether or not it became brittle in freezing temperatures thereby becoming a possible contributing cause of the disaster. This, after nearly four thousand years of use.

Moses after 400 Years:

The ideas of Abraham had been floating about in the culture for a long time when, under the guidance of God, Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt.

Wandering around in the Sinai Desert, Moses was invited by God to a conference on Mt. Sinai. He went – of course.

In the conference, Moses was given ten starting principles to be used in constructing a new religion, and a new culture. Israelites knew a great deal about slavery but little about structured faith or culture. The first four principles related to faith.

The Very First of God's Ten Principles:

The very first matter of concern to God was to say, *Thou shalt have no other gods before me!* That settled the matter.

Yet, even in the 21st century, the world continues to serve a variety of gods.

God must be saying to Himself, *Well, I guess it's' just a process.*

Ephesus: Sin City

and the

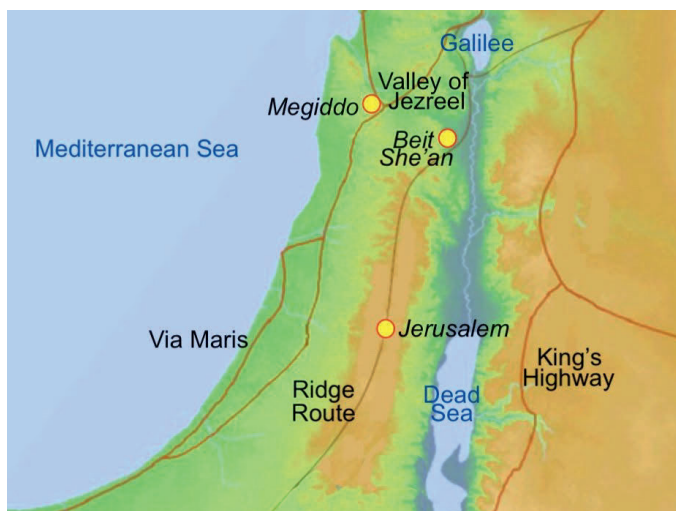
Little Church of The Way

The Little Church of The Way held services in Ephesus, a self-governing, Roman-oriented, cultured, wealthy – and troubled city.

Located as a coastal city on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, Ephesus commanded an envied position on the much-traveled road from Egypt and from what is currently Saudi Arabia to Rome and back.

One “thoroughfare” originating in Egypt was named the Via Maris Highway and generally followed the Mediterranean coast line up through Judea and Israel stopping at predetermined places along the way where travelers paid taxes.

A second road originating in Arabia was called the Kings Highway. It was inland of the Via Maris and east of the Jordan. The two roads connected at or near Damascus just north of Capernaum. From there, some went toward Rome. Others went east, likely to India.



Via Maris Highway on left --- King's Highway on Right

(Getty Images)

These highways, actually little more than worn paths, accommodated camel and donkey caravans of up to three thousand each. Each camel in the caravan had its' own handler, a male who sometimes had some or all of his family traveling with him. There might be 3 or more males along for each camel – a figure that will become significant a bit later. Too, while a camel or donkey caravan of up to three thousand might be traveling up the Via Maris, the same could be happening a bit east on the King's Highway.

While this was happening on the routes toward Rome, for example, there were other caravans returning from Rome and/or India.

The traffic along these two routes was a vital source of income, trade, and unfortunately of attendance at the “church” known in Ephesus as the Temple of Artemis, AKA Temple of Diana.



Camel/Donkey Caravan

(Getty Images)

Culture in Ephesus:

Ephesus, itself was a center of culture. Just east of town was an amphitheater that would seat 24,000 people. That would easily accommodate up to one/half the population of the city. Its' stage was approximately 100 feet wide. Plays were staged during the day, there being no artificial lights to facilitate night plays.

In Ephesus as in other major Roman-oriented cities, plays were celebrated. Actors were greeted at the waterfront, escorted into town,

and in general treated as celebrities. Merchants would close their stores during the plays in support of patrons who wanted to attend the plays.



Amphitheatre in Ephesus

(Getty Images)

Here as in other cities, merchants are thought to have brought any rotten eggs, apples, fruit, etc. they had to the play, set up stands where they would sell the produce to the attendees. Then, if an attendee did not appreciate the actors' performance or the play's content, that person might throw the rotten eggs or fruit at the stage.

There is no doubt that members of the little Church of the Way attended the plays.

Arcadian Way, Ephesus, Turkey



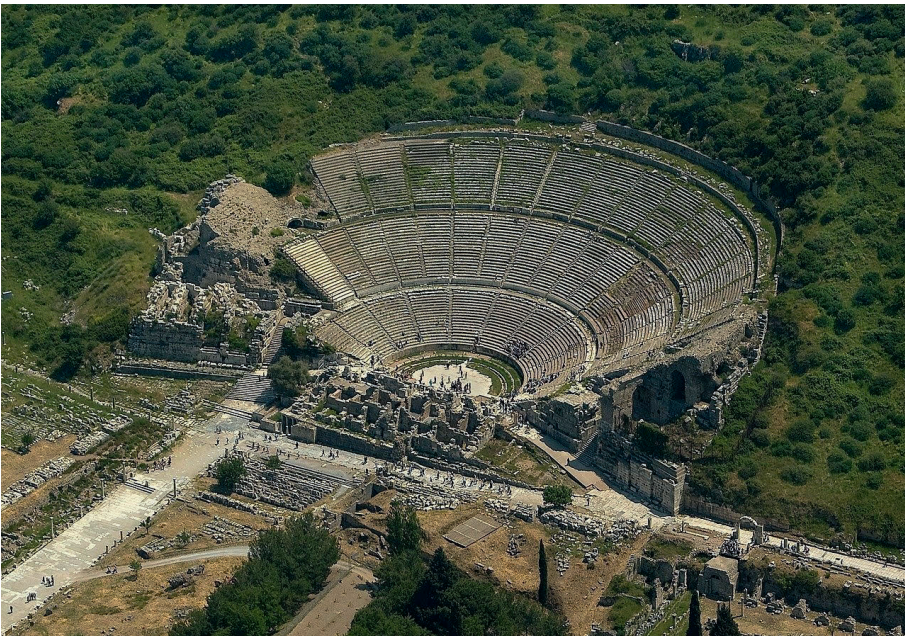
Arcadian Way, Ephesus, Turkey

The town of Ephesus in Turkey was the site of an ancient Greek city situated on the west coast of Asia Minor. Arcadian Way, shown here, is a marble street constructed during the reign of Emperor Arcadius (395-408). The street runs from middle harbor gate to the theater, also shown. This Greco-Roman theater was built during the Hellenistic period. Later rulers changed the structure of the building, and the ruins left today appear to be completely Roman.

AMPHITHEATER: EPHESUS WITH MARBLE

John the Revelator knew and understood Greek-Roman dramatic theater because one can identify the format of a Greek play structure in his Book of Revelations starting with the Inciting Force, Rising Action, Climax (in its' geometric center); Falling Action; and Denouement at the end.

Notice, in the picture above of the Arcadian Way with the amphitheater, that there is a roadway leading from the sea coast, bisecting Ephesus,



leading straight to the theater. That road was paved with marble. It was on that road that residents would escort visiting actors and lead them to their venue.

Temple of Artemis AKA Temple of Diana:

One of the Seven Wonders of the World, this temple, a “church” for Ephesus, was 425’ long by 225’ wide supported by no fewer than 120 columns. Each column was 60’ tall, and 36 of them were gilded with gold leaf. A 60’ statue of Diana was inside, gilded with gold leaf and constructed with 64 breasts (goddess of love) and in squat-style.

The temple employed an estimated 1000-to-1500 temple prostitutes (“priestesses”). A similar but smaller temple stood in Corinth, and it had 1000 slave-prostitutes working there. Ephesus’ temple was larger.

Celebratory banquets held in Ephesus’ temple frequently turned into sexual orgies.

Considering the 3000 – 5000 men accompanying each of two camel caravans going toward Rome and points east, with even more returning from these places, it is clear that the women employed in the temple were accommodating as many as 5000-10,000 men each day.

The women in town and the men in town thought nothing more of visiting this temple than modern folk think of attending local church. It is likely that women and men, members of the little Church of The Way in Ephesus participated in the “business” of the temple. The apostle Paul had to deal with this as only one of his major concerns.

Enter the Nicolaitans:

In Rev 2:1-7 John recorded God’s complaints about Ephesus including the

Nicolaitans. In Acts 6:5, there is a list of deacons appointed to help do the work of the church.



Temple of Artemis

(Getty Images)

Nicholas was one of the seven, but he had diverted from his original task and had begun to follow a profligate life style including adultery, promoting it to and for others. In general, he promoted a version of hedonism, meaning: *If it feels good, do it!*

He said it was the duty of mankind to fight against flesh and to abuse it. *Man can freely partake in sin because the law of God (being spiritual) is not binding (on the flesh).*

Paul and the Sorcerers:

Paul had cast out evil spirits among the citizenry of Ephesus. Some sources say he even preached in the Temple of Artemis – a matter of significant boldness considering all that was going on there. Many of the sorcerers and magicians had become believers. Their scrolls and books were housed in the library at Ephesus. That library housed a total of 19,000 volumes, a massive collection at that time, approximately 14 hundred years before the printing press would be invented.

According to Acts 19:18-19, they came to the library (see below), checked out their scrolls and books, piled them up in the plaza in front of the library and set fire to them.



Library and Plaza at Ephesus

(Getty Images)

Demetrius, the business man who made models of Artemis (Acts 19:23-27) and sold them to the camel-drivers passing through town lost much of his business. Understandably, he was upset. He called the “Good-Ole-Boys” of Ephesus together, started a riot and hauled Paul, Gaius and Aristarchus out to the amphitheater just at the edge of town where they held a “drum-head” trial (see p. 76 above). Paul was cautioned against willingly appearing before the crowd.

The people shouted “Great is Artemis” for two hours before quieting down to allow the trial to proceed. The city clerk addressed the crowd for a time and then dismissed them, Paul and his companions.

The Little Church of The Way:

Said God, through John, Rev 2:2-7 *et. passim* I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false . . .yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen . . .you have this in your favor: you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans which I also hate. . .

Quite obviously, the Church of The Way in Ephesus had its’ hands full dealing with the constant flow of camel-drivers coming through town, the debauched activities going on in the Temple of Artemis, and the mind-set of some church fathers, all contrary to the true and living God.

Clearly, members of the church had been visiting Artemis. Likely, housewives and daughters were doing the same. To them, it meant little more than going to church or to work earning a little spending money.

The church needed to and had applied tests of faith among their parishioners, but something got lost in the process. They lost their first love in enforcing orthodoxy.

Belief Systems in Conflict:

Paul's major problem was that he was destroying much of the local church-folk's belief system. That destruction created a vacuum which he had to fill.

An analogous-comparison is needed to understand Paul's dilemma.

Each human's brain is a repository of beliefs; not one, two, or even a dozen beliefs. There are thousands of them ranging from beliefs we don't know we have until someone tells us -- to beliefs so massive they are an aggregate of belief-bundles pointing in the same direction.

Example #1: You close your eyes; you believe the people you were looking at are still there. Open them and see the people. That belief is in the "who cares" category.

Example #2: "Jesus Loves Me." Tied to that massive belief is Bundle #1 involving sub-beliefs regarding virgin birth; Bundle #2 involving an intelligence that confounded trained priests (plural); Bundle #3 involving temptations in the desert where the very validity of the Plan of Salvation was at stake; Bundle # 4 involving a traitorous disciple; Bundle # 5

involving a trial where the “fix” was “in”; Bundle # 6 involving a resurrection; Bundle # 7 involving an ascension to heaven; Bundle # 8 involving the resurrected Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father making intercession for believers; hence, **Jesus Loves Me**.

There’s more, but that establishes the issue. Assume someone could come along with undeniable proof (don’t worry, it’ll never happen) that “they found the body!” The spiritual belief system of believers would collapse like a house of cards.

That’s what Paul and his companions had done to the spiritual belief systems of the folk in Ephesus!

Ephesus had Two Unusual Members:

John, the Revelator had pastored the church for some time, and his aunt, now retired, attended services there.

She had been married at an early age, a marriage arranged for her to marry an older man. She was pregnant when she met her husband-to-be, and he was unhappy about what he saw. It was settled, though, and they were traveling southward when she went into labor. Her baby, a boy, was likely self-delivered. But as the birth was happening, God hung out an extra star in the night sky, and sent an angel to announce to shepherds watching their flock by night that a savior had been born. She named him **Yeshua, Jesus!**

John, now nearly 100 years old, was growing feeble. The loving youth of his old pastorate would carry him on a cot to the house of worship. They,

then, would be seated likely on the floor near him asking questions like *What was Jesus like? What do you remember of Him? How did all of this religion start?*

Imagine watching that venerable old man, once one of the two “Sons of Thunder” so named by Jesus, his own cousin. But, John, now a Gentle Giant – was the last disciple alive who had known Jesus.

Imagine him raising himself up on an elbow, waving a bony finger toward the youth, and saying, *Ah, children, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ..”* and another John, the scribe, wrote it down.

Corinth

or

Ephesus on Steroids

Morals of the 1st Century:

Family life in the middle of the 1st Century (biblical Corinth, in this lesson was about 50-55 A.D.) centered around the man. Women were thought of by many as little more than chattel, valuable for producing children and seeing to the comfort of men. This bold comment will be clearer later in this study.

Men had few restrictions on their behavior. In fact, a man's visit to a temple prostitute was little more significant than going shopping. Wives were supposed to understand. But in the new Christian assemblies? That could –and did prove to be an issue.

Corinth's Location:

Corinth was situated on an isthmus near the Aegean Sea with the Port of Cenchrea on the east and the Port of Lechaenum on the west. The distance from east to west was 4-6 miles (depending on the source of the information).

Small-to-mid-size ships would dock at one or other of these ports and off-load their cargo of goods and people. The ship would then be lifted out of the water, placed on rollers, and (on the Diolkos Road, built especially for this purpose) push-pull the ship to the opposite port. It would then

be placed back in the water. The cargo, itself transported across the isthmus, would be placed back onboard the ship. Then, once the passengers and crew had boarded, it would prepare for departure.

The alternative to this procedure required a 200-mile trip around the south of the area. Such a trip was both time consuming and dangerous. What's more, there were pleasures awaiting the crew and passengers in Corinth.

In fact, seafaring men had a colloquial name given to any of them having visited Corinth; they had been **Corinthianized**, i.e., they had been to the city; had visited the Temple of Aphrodite, Apollo, et al., and had participated in their much lauded "activities." Sailors were advised to save their money if they



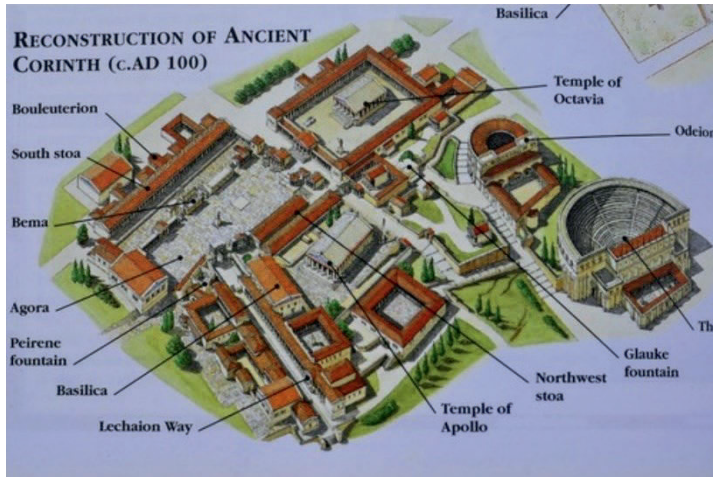
Corinthian Isthmus

(nasa earth observatory)

planned a visit to Corinth because most every pleasure they might imagine was available there.

Corinth's Geography:

In 400 B.C., Corinth had a population estimated at 90,000. Now, in mid-1st Century, its' population was estimated by one source as being in the hundreds of thousands. If accurate, its' population would rival that of many modern-day cities.



Corinth Map of Downtown

(Faith Bible Ministries Images)

Just at the edge of town, the Acrocorinth Mountain rose to a height of 1800 feet. At its' peak stood a temple, to the goddess, Aphrodite. Inside the temple were 1000 temple prostitutes. The individuals were reported all to have been slaves.



Walled Gates of Acrocorinth
(Bing Images)



Entrance Castle to Acrocorinth
Temple of Aphrodite with 1000 Prostitutes
(Bing Images)

That means they were taken into slavery from conquered lands. Some undoubtedly had been married at the time. Sadly, common sense dictates that likely some had been believers.

One male winner of a sport contest bought and donated a number of women to the Temple of Aphrodite and was highly praised for his generosity!



Acrocorinth Mountain in the Background - 1800 Ft High

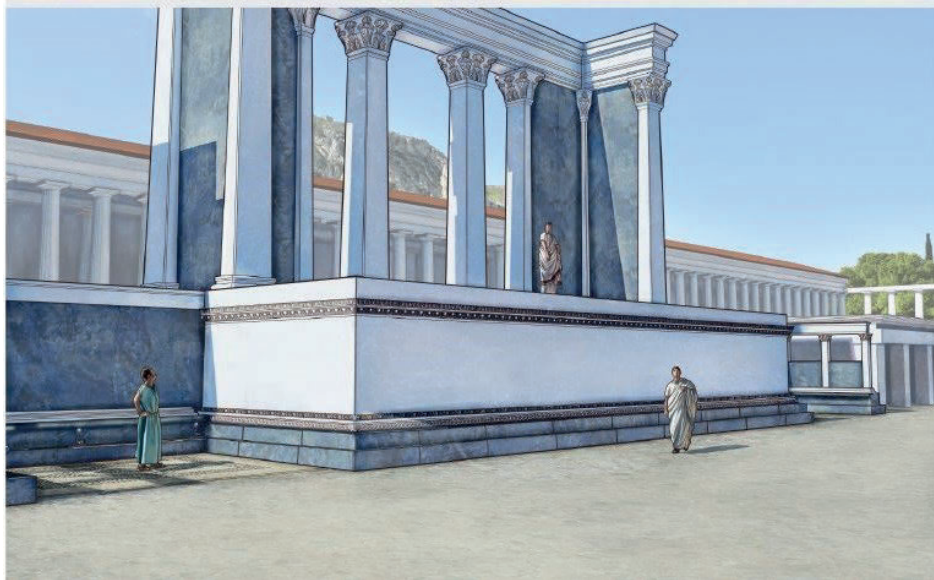
Bema Judgment Seat in Foreground

Located in Agora (Shopping Center) Downtown

(Luther Seminary Images)



Courtesy of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports



How it would have appeared in Mid – 1st Century

(Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports)

There were other Temples open down town. Added to this, some women worked the various wharfs east and west.

It is equally likely that none of the slaves wanted to be there.

Question: How guilty is an individual who performs an illegal or immoral act against their will?

Oh yes, with all of this “worshipping” happening in the local temples, there were two known churches; a synagogue, and one little “Church of The Way” with an estimated attendance each of 50-60 on any given Sabbath or Sunday. The Church of The Way was likely the only Christian church in the area that served the true and living God.

Corinth's Population Mix:

In the BC period, Greeks controlled Corinth. In time the city was destroyed but was rebuilt by Caesar, a Roman.

Not surprisingly in the A.D. period of Paul's interest, there was a population of both Greek and Roman descent. Too, a number of Jews had migrated there from Israel/Judea. The Jews had their own church, a synagogue; the Greek/Roman population had their various temples; and a few believers from all cultures had their own little Church of The Way.

Paul found a mix of all three sub-cultures in the Church of The Way, which served as the basis of his concern and advice to the church, including dress codes and hair styles (times haven't changed much since then).

Enter the Influence of Paul:

Paul wrote **three** letters to Corinth, but we have only two of them.

Letter # 1 has been lost. I Corinthians 5:9-11 refers to it (KJV) as *the previous Letter*. We know little of its' content.

Letter # 2 (Our First Corinthians) was written while Paul was still in Ephesus in about 55 A.D. It is thought that Paul, while writing Letter # 2, heard back from Corinth regarding the (now lost) 1st Letter. Our 1st Cor:5-6 seems to include Paul's reference to the Corinthian reaction to his first letter.

1st Cor 7-15 is probably a response by Paul to specific questions asked of him by Chloe, then in Corinth.

Letter # 3 is our II Corinthians and is alluded to by many as the *Letter of Tears* (II Cor 2:3-4).

II Cor 6:14-7:1 differs in style and content from what precedes it in 1st Corinthians. That is, it contains categorical imperatives, rhetorical questions and an angry tenor, all more characteristic of what one might imagine preceded it in 1st Corinthians.

Paul's Strange Entrance into Corinth:

A husband and wife, Aquila, husband, and Priscila, wife, both tent makers and leather workers like Paul, had been expelled from Rome by Claudius. Their crime? They were Jewish and worse yet, they both were believers, Christians.

Arriving in Corinth, they settled in the Jewish synagogue, likely out on the Lechaion Road, a thoroughfare leading out of town.

Entering Corinth Paul went to church with Aquila and Priscila – in the Synagogue. They introduced Paul as an itinerant evangelist whereupon, Paul was invited to speak, sort of like, *Stand and give us a word of testimony!* (Acts 18:4)

Apparently, Paul preached there numerous times because, Crispus, Ruler of the Synagogue, became a believer and was likely replaced by Sosthenes in the Synagogue.

Being Ruler of the Synagogue was a position of strategic importance because that person determined who (in that synagogue) did what -- to whom -- and when they would do it.

Remember Jairus, back in Capernaum, whose daughter Jesus had raised from the dead? Synagogue Ruler had been Jairus' job, too.

After a while, the nice synagogue folk didn't take well to Paul evangelizing Christianity in their Jewish synagogue (Acts 18:6)! They opposed Paul who simply shook his clothes (a Jewish custom) and went next door to the house church. This one, as it turns out, owned by Justus, appears to have shared a wall in common with the synagogue (Acts 18:7). It *joined hard to the synagogue*. (KJV) It isn't clear whether it is the same church as the one with which Chloe identified.

When Paul moved next door, Crispus appears to have gone with him.

Corinth's Little Church of The Way:

This is where the story of Paul in Corinth becomes interesting -- really interesting!

There were the same three cultural sub-groups in the church as were in the city, i.e., descendants of Greek, Roman, and Israeli/Judean cultures. The church was a spiritual/social/cultural bomb ready to explode. All it needed was someone to light the fuse.

Issue # 1, Spiritual Identity:

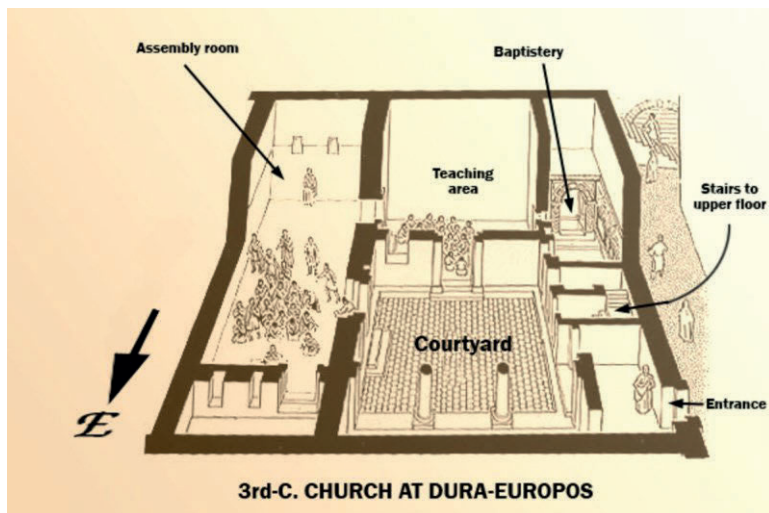
As well, there were four spiritual sub-groups in the church.

Pauline Group: probably stressed personal liberty in spiritual matters. But, it was stressed to them, that claiming spiritual identity with Paul was to bypass God who works in us all. (1st Cor 3:17) As it was explained, God will destroy anyone who destroys God's temple – implying that Christ, not Paul, was the foundation.

Petrine Group: probably followed Peter's earlier identification with Judaizers, i.e., that Christians should follow the Jewish Law of Moses.

Apollos Group: probably followed an understanding of a fellow believer in the area skilled in both oratory and in reasoning his faith.

Christian Group: This group seemed to have understood and enjoyed the essence of divine influence in the Christian life.



Typical House Church 1st Century

Likely owned by a wealthy patron

(Bing Images)

Paul's preaching was intended to tear down the social/spiritual walls that separated these groups. Paul knew that the idea of a "crucified Christ" made no sense to a Jew or to a Greek. Instead, Paul's preaching required a new way of looking at one's spiritual life – at God.

Note: How does one persuade another to change such a central belief in that person's own system of beliefs?

Issue # 2, Languages:

Understandably they spoke a variety of languages. And they were quite proud of their linguistic knowledge. One can only image a typical service where three or four languages might be spoken simultaneously among

the congregants, each and all proud to display their own linguistic prowess.

Issue # 3, Spiritual Gifts:

Gifted in spiritual matters, they were quite proud (I Cor 1:1-9) and likely reminded each other of their individual skills.

Paul (1st Cor 1:26-31) reminded them that God had not chosen them on the basis of their societal status or knowledge. All were of equal status to God. That argument would not “set well” with Corinthians!

Said Paul, faith is not based on oratory (including Paul’s) but on gifts of the spirit (1st Cor 2:4). Human reasoning alone is not a proper basis of faith.

Paul decried their self-glorifying exuberant life-styles.

Issue # 4, Social Grouping:

The folk of the church were cliquish separating the haves from the have-nots. For example, at the Lord’s Supper, a complete meal of cheap food would be prepared for the slaves and other poor folk, but the wealthier among them would arrive at the dinner early, eat better-prepared gourmet food leaving the poorer and slaves among them to eat alone (1st Cor 11:17-22). Humility was not among the most prevalent of Corinthian spiritual gifts.

Issue # 5, Litigation:

There's more. They were prone to litigate against each other (1st Cor 6:1-11). Small infractions among them (perhaps events occurring in a service) were grist for the legal mills. Paul reminded them that some infractions should be quietly suffered; that greed and immorality are not a part of the kingdom of God. The church's main task is not to control the actions of evil persons (1st Cor 5:12-13). Back off, deal with one's soul's need, and let God deal with some other issues.

Issue # 6, Food Offered to Idols:

Most meat available in the Agora (Shopping Center) had been offered to idols before going on the market. Folk from the church were eating such meat. Banquets held in the local temples for various trade guilds also served meat that had been offered to idols. The skilled among the church folk were members of trade guilds.

Differences among the people had arisen based on what meat they were eating.

Paul declared to them that God does not reward us on the basis of what we know or what we eat. Bravado from the strong among them at the expense of the weak was a dangerous way to live the Christian life.

Someone has said that *The accumulation of power AT THE EXPENSE OF the weak is a moral evil*. At least, it is food for thought.

Issue # 7, Order of the Service:

Their meetings were lively (who would have thought it?). Paul wanted to change HOW they did it, not WHAT they did.

Worshipping in the Little Church of The Way “hard by the Synagogue”, and having noisy services, the Jews next door were unhappy – and for cause.

Some men in the Christian services had visited the temple of Aphrodite. It is equally likely that some of the women-slaves “working” in that temple had been believers before having been enslaved. If so, it is likely that, on occasion, one or two of them attended services in Paul’s little church.

One can imagine the response of wives seeing a woman from the Temple of Aphrodite attending, the wife knowing her own husband had visited that temple. Loud arguments ensued in the church.

One man had married, then had a son who by this time was a young adult living at home. The wife died. The father remarried and then died himself. The son and step-mother appear to have been living at home as “husband-wife”.

Some in the church appear to have argued that it was immoral and should stop. Others, remembering the cultural norms, argued that it was the young man’s prerogative, and that the woman should accept it.

Issue # 8, Women's Clothing and Hair (1st Cor. 11:1-7):

Women identifying by their older Roman descent tended to wear a stola, i.e., a sleeveless robe over a tunic. It had marital significance. The stola seems to have been at issue. Some felt a married woman without a stola was “advertising” herself as being single, i.e., identifying herself with prostitutes who wore togas.

It was perfectly acceptable for 1st Century Roman women in Corinth to be both bare-headed and stola-less if they wished – hence, the problem.

Women mostly used some sort of head covering with a veil if they were married. The use of a stola vs. a veil was yet another point of contention among them.



Corinthian Married Woman's Hair Style

Evidence that she was married

(Bing Images)

A woman who chose not to wear a stola or veil was expected to wear an ornate hair style (long hair) done in a way that would show all men she was married (and not a prostitute). It had little or nothing to do with faith.

Some Roman-oriented Christians seemed to long for “old time religion”, i.e., clothing reflecting older Roman times.

Some women would attend church and lift the veil to participate in service thus avoiding speaking through their veil which had resulted in their words being slurred when they spoke. Paul felt that lifting the veil appeared as a “come-on” to local men (Paul had to be kidding!).

Paul finally concluded (1st Cor 11:2-16) that Christian women should simply adapt to local customs and be comfortable.

Issue # 8, Resurrection of the Dead:

Most of them seemed to accept only the resurrection of Christ, but that others would not be resurrected. Or, the soul might resurrect, but not the body.

Issue # 9, Collection for the Needy in Judea:

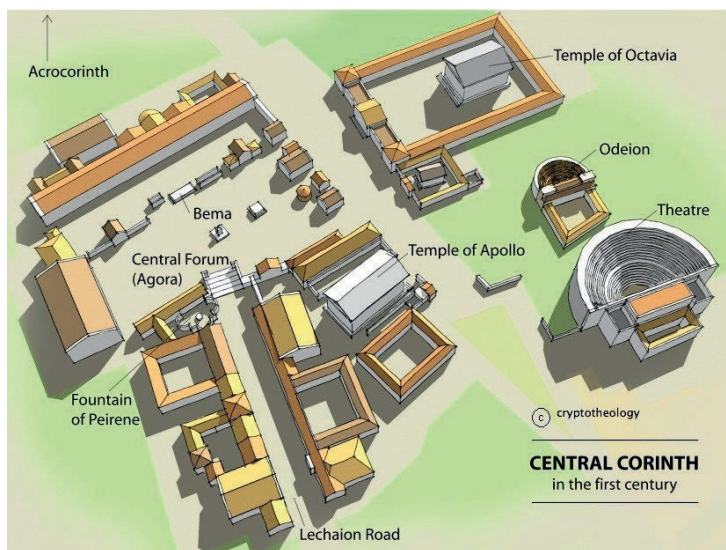
Famine in Judea had impoverished its' Christians (1st Cor 16:1-4). Paul wanted to accept a Corinthian offering and take it with him back to Judea.

Paul, Jews and the Bema:

The Synagogue folk had opposed Paul, the opposition that caused Paul to move next door to the house church. There, Paul busied himself addressing the church's multiple problems (ref. Issues 1-9 above).

But the services at the house church were boisterous and distasteful to the synagogue folk. In addition, the Jews did not like the way Paul preached. Paul was hauled downtown to the Bema, a raised platform on the edge of the Agora (shopping Center).

The Bema, a Judgment Seat, was constructed of blue/white polished marble and was both the scene of local philosophers wanting to address a crowd, and a place where anyone who wished could harangue against the government. It was also the locale of some public trials for all to see. That's where the Jews took Paul. They wanted to make a public spectacle of Paul.



Downtown Corinth

Notice the Bema is Centrally located in the Agora (Shopping Center)

(Bing Images)

Their accusation? *This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.* In other words, he was preaching God wrong (Acts 18:13-14 KJV)!

The newly appointed Proconsul (think local judge), a man named Gallio made short shrift of the proceedings.



The Bema of Paul's Trial

With view of Acrocorinth Mountain

(Bing Images)

Paul had started to speak when Gallio interrupted him. Scripture does not say it, but it is likely Gallio winked at Paul, knowing Paul was Roman as was Gallio himself. Likely holding up his hand to Paul, he probably said, "I've got this. . ."

In a brief statement, he said to the Jews (NIV V 14-15), *If it is a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, I would bear with you. But if it is a question*

of words and names and of your law, you look to it for I will be no judge of such matters.

Gallio had thrown their charges out of court! Well, that cut it for the Jews! They had humiliated themselves, and Paul had nothing to do with it! They wanted Paul to be flogged and placed in stocks.

They wanted to hit somebody – but who? They could not attack Paul because he was a Roman, and that would make them guilty of assault. They – not Paul – would be flogged and placed in stocks.

So, they turned and attacked Sosthenes, the new Ruler of their own Synagogue and beat the stuffing out of him. Gallio and Paul watched doing nothing about it! What a moment that must have been for Paul!

So, Paul remained in Corinth for 1 ½ years. When Paul left, he took Aquila and Priscilla to Jerusalem with him (who can blame them!) – stopping back at Ephesus on the way.

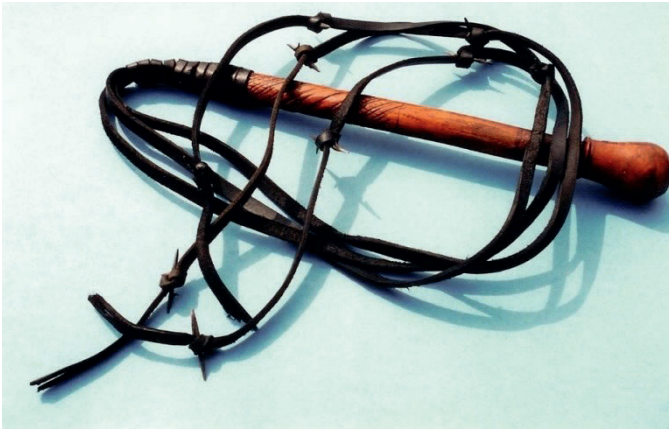
Flogging, Caning and Stoning

Preface: Flogging was a well-thought-out monstrous procedure used extensively in punishment by both Roman and Hebrew 1st century cultures. There is some thought that current (21st century) Chinese *Caning* is a carry-over from a similar procedure employed by Romans.

Survival in either form was preferred but not essential. In other words, they wanted to inflict severe pain sufficient that they could observe the expected effects on the individual but were not distraught should the victim expire.

Strong, stout, muscular executioner-type men were chosen to inflict this horrible punishment. Once chosen, the individual who was to administer this punishment would practice studiously exactly how to administer the procedure both to cause maximum pain and to avoid killing the victim. These men were *killing machines!*

The Equipment: Various instruments were used between the two cultures. Romans had a choice of leather straps each 18" – 24" in length, each strap with metal balls, broken shards of metal or ceramics woven into the straps. Or they could use two or three canes of unknown length tied together.



Roman Whip

(similar to the one used on Christ)

(visitstillwaters.com)

The Cane option may have been adopted by modern China for punishment. It is said that the Chinese, in the 21st century will cause the victim to face a wall with hands tied above sufficiently high that the victim cannot fall or sag. The flogger-caner is taught to twist his wrists at the exact moment the canes strike the back of the victim thus causing the canes to break the skin. The break in the skin would obviously be lengthy. There might be 10 or more such strokes that the victim must endure.

Such victims invariably are taken to a hospital once the caning punishment is ended.

Hebrew Flogging instruments consisted of two types: The first, a braided leather handle with straps of 18" – 24" in length each with metals balls, broken shards of metal or pottery imbedded in the straps. This device might have one, or three straps attached so that one strap 39 times, or

thirteen strokes with a 3-strap whip would equal the 39 maximum lashes permitted by Jewish law, i.e., 40 save one.

A second type instrument was similar to the first except that it would have 13 thongs attached. With this one, the flogger needed strike the victim only 3 times to meet the 39-stroke maximum.

For Stoning, the process was simple; the victim was placed in an open area inside a circle of people (supposed enemies) each person having his or her own cache of rocks. At a given signal, the circle of people would start throwing stones at the victim. This would continue until the individual was dead.

In scripture, (John 8:7) A woman had been brought before Jesus having been caught in adultery. The Law of Moses demanded she, not the man, be stoned. Jesus, arguing that anyone having sinned themselves has no right to pass such judgment on anyone they believe has sinned, said: *Let him that is without sin cast the first stone*. No one threw a single stone.

In time, the stoning procedure was changed to one in which the victim was placed in a “fox-hole” type position buried up to the chest, arms at the side. That permitted the stones to be “more accurately” aimed at the head.

The Flogging Victim’s Positions: In the case of Hebrew flogging, the victim would be forced to strip naked to below the buttocks exposing the upper legs. He might then be placed in one of three positions.

The first one might be a kneeling position bent over a low bench (Germans did this to the Jews in the Dachau Prison Camp WWII).

The second choice involved tying the victim to a post so that he could not escape and hopefully not sag or kneel.

The third choice was to force the victim to lie face down on the ground with both arms and legs spread apart and held in that position either by stakes and ropes or by individuals helping with the process.

The Flogging Victim's Reaction: The victim now exposed to just above the knees would be struck repeatedly on the exposed areas. The sharp bone, metal, or pottery shards would bite into the flesh. The flogger might then jerk the thongs tearing the flesh still further.

The victim eventually would enter a state of uncontrolled quivering and trembling. Beyond this stage, assuming the flogging continued, the victim would enter hypovolemic shock where the heart would begin to beat faster trying in vain to replace the blood loss. But there would be less blood available for replacement.

Blood pressure would drop dangerously low. Kidneys would shut down. The victim would become thirsty from loss of body fluid, and ask for water.

At this point, the victim would enter a coma with faint and erratic heart-beat. Death would follow.



One Such Victim

(holymillcross images)

The flogger was trained to observe these physical responses to the flogging and would stop the procedure just before the victim became comatose.

Body organs and/or portions of the spinal column were sometimes exposed causing unbelievable pain to the victim.

Consider Paul (and Silas):

In Philippi: (Acts 16:22-24) *The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in stocks.*

Such jailers often in placing men in stocks would separate the feet and legs as far apart as possible so as to cause even more pain and keep the body from resting comfortably.

(v 33) The jailer took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds. If the flogging was as described above, Paul and Silas were barely able to walk if at all. The flogging would have left their backs, buttocks and upper legs in shreds requiring much more than mere washing.

Paul to the Corinthians: (2 Cor 11:24-25) *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned.*

Five floggings from the Jews, would have caused massive scars intersecting more massive scars intersecting still more massive scars.

Three incidents of having been beaten with rods would have left still more massive scars (not welts) on his back, buttocks and legs.

From a purely human point of view from stoning alone, Paul would have suffered broken and disfiguring bones in his face. He would have had breaks in his arms and/or legs.

Stoning: (Acts 14: 19) *Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.*

Either the stoning referenced in Acts 14 was not so severe as described; the bible abbreviated the description of the scene; or an unreported miracle took place that day for Paul.

The result of Paul's many potentially disfiguring beatings and the stoning would have caused him to have had kidney issues, severe back pain, a disfigured face poorly healed broken skull bones and ribs along with poorly healed breaks in his arms and legs. Paul would not have walked straight. He would have lost the full and free movement of his arms and legs.

In recognition of the likelihood that the atrocities described here truly happened to Paul, read again Paul's defense of his own ministry (2 Cor 11:16- 12:10).

Said Paul: *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

INDEED!

A Modest Proposal

In Defense of Faith

Knowing vs Believing: There is a difference between knowing something and believing something. One can only know something by having experienced it through one or more of the five senses requiring some proximity by human sensory or other investigative protocols.

Knowing:

is a complex concept often requiring both time and effort in research. Beyond our five senses, sometimes statistical research provides information that has a likelihood of being true.

Too, the use of instrumentation is often employed to extend our senses. Microscopes allow us to see things our eyes alone will not reveal. With an Analytic Spectrometer a house-fire investigator can determine whether accelerants were or were not used to start the blaze.

So, knowing is sometimes a probability and not always an absolute.

Believing:

on the other hand, is by nature a secondary function relying on one's own probability of knowing, or the knowing experience of another human being. As a secondary human function, believing is easily suspect from having based conclusions on the knowing or beliefs of others. So, beliefs, too often, are expressed as "knowing" experiences without recognizing

the error in thinking. To say, *I know – that I know- that I know.* . . is both meaningless and a means to stop another's inquiry.

For example, we believe Jesus lived. Such belief is premised on knowing statements of numerous individuals who had one or more human contacts with him via their five senses, i.e., they saw him, heard him or touched him. Further, both Roman and Hebrew records confirm his life as fact. We believe those sources.

We believe Jesus was crucified and arose from the dead; a belief premised on the knowing statements of people who saw, touched and heard him.

It is actually impossible for individuals today personally to know the fact of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. BUT WE BELIEVE IT!

Note: A series of events occurring in church history affected what we believe vs. what we know.

Event # 1: Hierapolis, Laodicea, Colossae, and Ephesus in 1st Century Middle East, were within +/- 100 miles of each other. Laodicea and Colossae were 10-12 miles from Hierapolis. Two significant dates relate to these four cities:

- a) 41 A.D., approximately 4 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Antioch followers of The Way were given the name, **Christians**.

- b) Some events occurred in Hierapolis circa 52-54 A.D., only 15 or so years after Christ's resurrection, and only 11 years after the name Christian was given to followers of The Way.

Hierapolis was located at the intersection of two major earthquake faults, both open and emitting carbon dioxide gas, lethal to both animals and humans. Birds flying over the crevasses would die in mid-air falling into the chasm.

The priests of Hierapolis built the Temple of Apollo either at the crevasses or partly over them. They carved steps down into a cave they found deep in a crevasse.

Priests for a time would step down into the cave while holding their breath, remain for a few seconds, and return to the surface as others watched. Arriving at the surface, they would exclaim that they, like Jesus, had descended into hell and was resurrected.

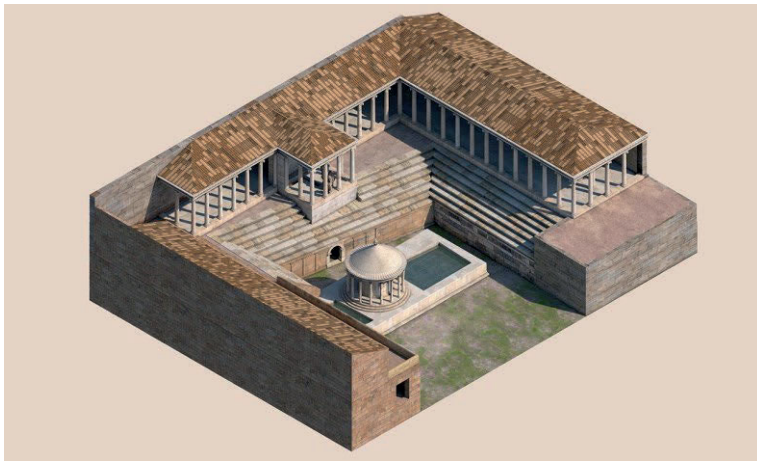
In time, they found an air pocket inside the cave where they could remain for a period of time and then return to the surface to prophesy to selected folk -- who had paid a fee.

A concrete entrance was erected at the cave's entrance with a sign, **THE GATES OF HELL.**

Archaeologists uncover ancient 'gate to hell' in Turkey



(NBC news)



(Science.org)

The folk from these near-by cities did not **know** of Jesus' resurrection. The priests did not **know** of Jesus' resurrection. It is assumed none had seen, heard or touched Jesus. They were all equal to each other in having to form **beliefs** about the resurrection based on what others had told them. Some of those persons telling them the truth included Paul and his associates.



What was believed to be beyond the gate

(Bing Images)

This made folk vulnerable to the priests' "resurrection scam." The context was ripe for heresy to flourish – and it did. The disciples et al. were dying away. Both Paul and Peter would be put to death in Rome in 67 AD.

Soon, the last person known to have actually seen, heard and touched Jesus would be John, The Revelator, and John was in Ephesus about 100 miles away.

So, the persons who could give testimony to having had a *knowing* experience were dying, and those of us who were/are forced to a *believing* experience were growing rapidly.

Event # 2: The Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.), held 70 +/- years after the scams of Hierapolis had festered during that time. The Council was actually a debate about, you guessed it . . . *Was Jesus Human or Divine?*

Arius, a North African Priest, had been loudly declaring Jesus as human, implying a denial of his divinity. He was so outspoken, authors say he would proudly traverse local streets making his declarations for all to hear. He was mostly boisterous giving little or no evidence and having minimal knowledge of debate techniques (requiring rational thought). He was assigned, by Emperor Constantine of Rome, the negative in the debate. He was to argue that Jesus indeed was NOT divine.

Assigned to the Affirmative were Alexander, a bishop/priest from North Africa along with Alexander's trusted secretary, Athanasius. Both men were time-tested professional models of debating technique and rational thought.

Emperor Constantine had tired of Arius' ranting. So, he set the debate for Nicaea, in the general area of Hierapolis, Laodicea, Ephesus and Colossae.

None of the principals of the debate had first-hand knowledge of Jesus' divinity. The Emperor had "stacked the deck" in favor of his preferred outcome. This, for a truth foretold by prophets for 1000 years, affirmed by Jesus' disciples and hundreds of others (including his mother, Mary). (It is assumed that Jesus was *Christ* even before his resurrection).

So, they were debating a moot question in addition to the fact that "the fix" was in. All of Christianity since that debate, point to it as having concluded definitively that Jesus, The Christ, was divine.

Interim: Athanasius' value to Rome grew exponentially following that debate. He wrote 45 Festal Letters to the Pope after the debate, one per year, all at Epiphany (Easter).

In letter # 39 (367 A.D.) he wrote a letter giving his thoughts regarding how they might celebrate Easter that year and included a list of books/scrolls he considered worthy to form a testament for Christians – a “New” Testament (noting that the Jews already had their own “Old” Testament).

While he was at it, Athanasius indicated his desire that his list of books/scrolls be canonized; that, making them spiritually equal to the Jewish Old Testament in value. We accept the fact that while Paul probably never met the Christ face to face, he had met others who **did have knowing** information about the Christ. We believe them all.

In 382 A.D., Pope Damasus, after extended conferences with bishops, declared the list to be both official and the content holy. (After all, he was Pope. He could do that!).

Note: The issues: *The Divinity of Christ* and *The Canonized New Testament* continued for over 1100 years until when in the 1500's, Luther and Calvin began to question, not these issues, but Catholic doctrine and Catholic Rules of Operation.

Event # 3: *The Council of Trent (1545-1563 A.D.):* Mostly, it was a Catholic attempt at a counter-reformation against the growing Protestant popularity. It took approximately 18 years to complete because the attending bishops became so irate, obstinate, dictatorial, threatening (a

few were sent home because they would not stop fighting and threatening each other). They did make some decisions:

Conclusions:

- a. Protestants were condemned: Luther and Calvin in specific.
- b. *Justification by Faith*, a protestant doctrinal position, was declared heresy.
- c. The Apocrypha was to be added to Athanasius' list of books proposed for the New Testament. Further, they declared damned anyone who disagreed!
- d. They affirmed the doctrine of *Transubstantiation*, a belief that in the Eucharist, the wine becomes the actual blood of Christ and the bread becomes the actual flesh of Christ.
- e. There WAS a purgatory where sins unforgiven in life could be properly dealt with – assuming a proper financial addendum to the church (or the priest).
- f. Indulgences, purchased of course, was an approved protocol for dealing with the effects of purgatory. Other uses were added later.
- g. Priests were to be celibate.
- h. Adopt the Gregorian Calendar.
- i. There are TWO sources of divine special revelation: **#1. Inspiration: Canon Scripture (which THEY had voted into effect); and #2. Church Tradition, i.e., "It's right because we've always done it this way!"**

This writer's Own Conclusions:

- 1) I **believe** there is a God, though I have not physically seen, heard, touched, tasted or smelled anything that was identified as Him.
- 2) I accept by faith (what other choice is there?) the record of Jesus', The Christ's, death and resurrection and, by extension, Christ's divinity.
- 3) We might better understand why some decide for themselves what is or is not inspired as did the Catholic bishops of Trent. Their inspiration decision was the result of a vote (which implies some probably voted "no"!).
- 4) I accept the writing of New Testament authors, writing as citizens of their own culture, some from their own **knowing** and some based thoughts on their own **beliefs**. I trust and believe them.
- 5) I believe the original Word of God does not exist for inspection; that Moses' writing was premised on what had been revealed to him.
- 6) I believe one should be somewhat cautious drawing spiritual conclusions on exegetical declarations themselves based on Greek or Hebrew languages used in the re-re-re-re-translated New Testament.
- 7) Finally, I believe the original WORK of God still exists in the form of the earth and all of its' inhabitants. Scientists continue (ignorantly in some cases) to investigate it, some not aware they are discovering the very nature of God.

A Layman's Look at Scripture

Sin Definitions Do Not All Agree

Denominations Describe Sin in many different ways

One defines it as: *a behavior that is unacceptable to a deity or supernatural being and subject to punishment by him.*

Another defines sin as: *a Willful transgression of the known law of God.*

Another... *any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.*

Another... *if it leads to a separation of that person from God.*

Another... *the conscious persistent stubborn unyielding refusal . . . of someone who was at one time a believer.*

Scripture's Own Fifteen Sin-Terms

Chatta'ah': to miss the way; go wrong; incur guilt; willfully go against what one knows is right.

Pesha: to break an established rule as in breaking a relationship.

Avon: to be perverted or depraved as in iniquity or continue in a depraved way.

Hattat: a missing of a mark, standard or goal.

Segagah: an error or mistake.

Resa: godlessness, injustice, wickedness.

Amal: mischief or oppression.

Hamartia: most common; offenses against God, people, laws.

Parapgtoma: lapses

Adikia: unjust deeds.

Parabasis: trespass of laws.

Asebeia: godlessness, impiety.

Anomia: lawlessness.

Paradigm Shifts in Scripture

The concept of Progressive Revelation in the bible suggests that god gradually revealed truths as the Hebrews and Christians needed the information and at a rate that the people were capable of absorbing. This produced a number of paradigm shifts in peoples' beliefs and actions in which old structures were replaced with new ones. Some are described here.

Shift # 1: *Satan and Evil* - both a shift and an evolution.

- a) Both Numbers 22:22; and 1st Chron 21:1 present Satan as an adversary, a bad evil influence.
- b) He was advanced to the level of Prosecuting Attorney against God in Job 1 & 2; again, in Zechariah 3:1-7.
- c) He became an all-evil supernatural being at the same time Yahweh was presented as a wholly good deity. This leveled the "playing field" for good and evil in the minds of the Jews.
- d) Satan, then, became the cause of mental illness as indicated in Matt 4:1-3; Luke 4:2; Matt 12:24; Jn 8:44.

- e) Satan evolved further then as a massive force for evil recorded in the New Testament by Paul and Timothy 2 Cor 11:12-14; 2 Cor 12:7; 1st Thess 2:17-18; 1st Timothy 1:19-20. This massive force must be dealt with, and it was -- in Revelations.
- f) In Revelations, Satan is presented in the ultimate battle with God at the end of the world, Armageddon Rev 12:9; Rev. 20:2-3; Rev 20:7-8.

**Ritual Killing of Animals.* This system appears to be an attempt to come to terms with the concept of Satan and evil in the world.

- a) It was used to alleviate sin and impurity Lev 23:2.
- b) It was used to heal a person with running sores (supposedly caused by Satan) Lev 15:14-15.
- c) It was used to forgive a ruler having committed an inadvertent sin Lev 4:23-25.
- d) This sacrificial system was overthrown as recorded by Isa 1:11.

**Religious Observances and Seasonal Days of Celebration.* A possible maturational process.

Shift # 2: Are, were, people to be punished for the sins of their parents?

Two answers:

- a) Answer # 1: Yes, they are/were. The Pentateuch (1st Five Books of the Old Testament) list numerous such instances.
 - (1) Gen. 1: The Transmission of Original Sin known as the *Fall of Mankind*.

- (2) Gen. 6: The Great Flood of Noah. God was displeased with all of mankind and attempted the most egregious genocide in history. Adults, youths, children, infants and newborns (along with animals) were to be destroyed.
- (3) Ex. 20: In one of the three versions of the Ten Commandments in Ex 20:5 has God saying he will punish children, grandchildren, greatgrandchildren, and maybe even great-great-great-grandchildren of anyone who worships idols.
- b) Answer # 2: No, they are not: Ezekiel turned the transferability of sin on its' ear in the 6th century B.C.
- (1) Just before taken into Babylon, Ezekiel said God told him that sin was no longer transferrable between generations.
- (2) Instead, each person would be responsible for his or her own good or bad works.
- (3) Ezek. 18:1-9; 19-20 (KJV): *What mean ye that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live . . . ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, IT shall die. But if a man be just and do that which is lawful and right . . . hath executed true judgment between man and man hath walked in my statutes and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly he is just. He shall surely live. . . the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son (19-20 KJV).*

Shift # 3: Life After Death

a) The liberal folk argue that the idea of life after death gradually evolved from the Pagan sources: Zoroastrianism and the Greek Pagan religion.

(1) Before 623 B.C.: both good and bad people went under the earth to Sheol when they died. There, they led a shadowy energy-less existence separated from God.

(2) 623-586 B.C.: Monotheism, having been introduced by Abraham, grew though challenged while in Babylonian captivity. Polytheism was abandoned slowly and Jehovah was worshipped alone.

During this period, the Pentateuch was assembled from earlier writings. But the dead were still believed to exist in a shadowy existence in Sheol cut off from relatives and God.

(3) 586-332 B.C.: Up to Greek invasion, Zoroastrian religious beliefs were blended with Jewish beliefs about Sheol; but the dead now were thought of, for 500 years, as being resurrected to live a second life in a cleansed Jerusalem. Then, they would die and cease to exist.

(4) During and after the Greek invasion, all dead were thought of as being resurrected to be judged by God and sent ultimately, either to an eternal reward or a never-ending punishment.

Shift # 4: The Status of Women

The status of women during bible times traveled through three phases:

a) Through Hebrew scripture, a few women achieved significant stature. The vast majority were little better than slaves.

(1) They were inferior to men, e.g., Adam portrayed as ruling over Eve. Hebrew for “marriage” meant to become the master of the woman. Female slaves could be raped by male owners. Female owners of female slaves could assign her to continually submit to sex by the woman’s husband, e.g., Sarah and Abraham.

(2) A woman’s vow could be nullified by her husband. The man’s vow was binding.

(3) Women were not counted in the census.

(4) During 2nd Temple Period, women could not go out in public; not testify in court; or talk to strangers; were to be doubly-veiled when in public.

(5) Status scarcely above a slave.

(6) They were viewed as an item of property: The Tenth Commandment forbids coveting any piece of property owned by a neighbor including his house, wife, slaves, animals.

(7) A female slave could NEVER be given her freedom; a man could after 6 years.

(8) If a man seduced a virgin, it was an offense against her father, not the girl.

b) Jesus, overthrowing centuries of Jewish law and custom:

(1) Violated Old Testament regs. that required gender inequality.

(2) Ignored ritual impurity with woman having menstrual bleeding by healing her.

- (3) He talked freely to women, taught them (highly forbidden).
 - (4) About half of his followers were women.
 - (5) He appeared to a woman first after his resurrection.
 - (6) Women: Magdalene and the “other” Mary were the first evangelists of the resurrection.
- c) After Jesus’ resurrection, the epistles give mixed messages about the status of women.
- (1) Holy Spirit descended on both men and women at Pentecost.
 - (2) Paul referred to them as “a disciple, a deaconess, co-worker, colleague, co-leader of a house church.
 - (3) Gal 3:28 Paul said *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
 - (4) Other passages related to inferiority of women: husband to be head of his wife; women to wear head covering as a sign of inferiority; women to remain silent in church; submit to husband in all things; she must not teach; must not have authority over a man; is a weaker vessel compared to her husband.
 - (5) In the 20th and 21st centuries, women adopted more of a main-line status; though, some denominations still will not ordain women.

A Foolish Death

II Samuel 3:27-38

Saul, King of the Northern Kingdom, had decreed that fortune-telling was punishable by death; yet, he went himself to the witch of Endor seeking to know if he would win a coming battle with the Philistines. Though initially refusing, she agreed to the reading once Saul told her it was ok. She said he would lose both the battle and his life. Both happened. The kingdoms were drifting apart north and south into Israel and Judah respectively. Question: why would he seek her advice if he had no intention of following it?

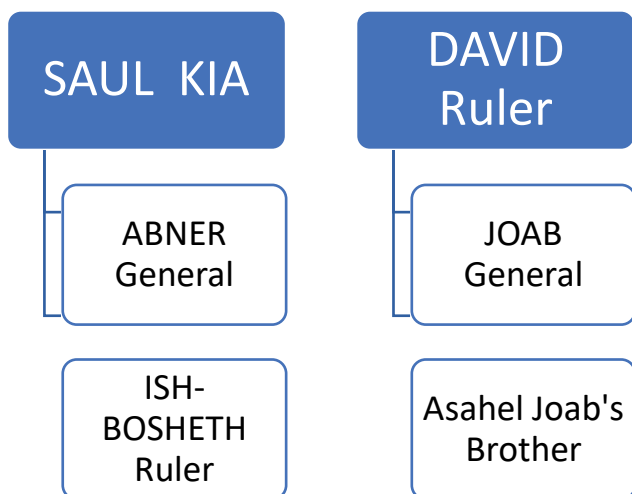
Six Characters in This Drama:

Abner, 1st cousin to **Saul**, was named **General of the Army** for Israeli, the Northern Kingdom.

Five years after Saul's death, Abner named **Ish-Bosheth**, Saul's own son, to be **Ruler of Israel**, still the Northern Kingdom.

David was **Ruler** of the Southern Kingdom, **Judah**, and **Joab** was **General of David's Army**. Finally, **Asahel** was brother to Joab (the General).

CAST OF CHARACTERS



Two Inciting Forces:

An inciting force is a problem-event that causes the viewer/reader to determine its' cause/effect or problem /solution.

Inciting Force # 1: While various skirmishes were occurring in a kind of civil war between the northern and southern kingdoms, Abner slept with one of deceased Saul's concubines. It was thought that Abner may have been planning to take over the kingdom from Ish-Bosheth at his earliest convenience.

Ish-Bosheth found out about it and rebuked Abner. Abner, angry, broke with Ish-Bosheth and went over to David's side in the southern kingdom offering to help David bring the two kingdoms together again.

Inciting Force # 2: In one of the skirmishes the two sides agreed to save bloodshed and decide the battle's outcome by having the best man from each side do battle (like David vs/ Goliath in the Valley of Elah). Abner's (northern) side lost.

Asahel, brother to Joab (General of the Southern Kingdom), sought out Abner and chased him trying to kill him. Asahel's side had already won! He was trying to "rub it in."

Abner, riding away, called on Asahel to stop. Asahel wouldn't stop. Asahel was quite close to killing Abner when Abner threw the butt of his spear backward at Asahel. It ran completely through Asahel killing him (self-defense).

In Summary, two, Inciting Forces (reasons), the two Camps were Apart: Immorality of Abner; the death of Asahel (that Joab could not forgive).

The feud continued between the north and south over Abner's immorality and a growing influence with David coupled with his having killed Asahel in self- defense.

Joab, by law could legally avenge the death of his brother, Asahel, if he could kill Abner before he could reach a City of Refuge. Note: *It may be legal, but that doesn't make it right!*



Gates of Hebron, City of Refuge

(Getty Images)

Abner tried and succeeded to negotiate peace with David in Hebron, capitol of the south (and a City of refuge). Further, Abner continued negotiations with David trying to unite the two kingdoms. The negotiations had succeeded and, David met with Abner in Hebron to plan a banquet in celebration of their negotiated treaty.

Abner asked to be excused from David to go northward and assemble all of the northern dignitaries to attend a proper ceremony.

Just as Abner left and was out of sight, Joab arrived from a raid and with plunder, learned what had happened, where Joab had gone, and why.

Joab was angry with David arguing that Abner was only trying to deceive David.

(II Sam 3: 24-25) Joab said, *What have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he is gone! You know Abner, Son of*

Ner; he came to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you are doing.

Joab left David and sent messengers after Abner. They found him at the well of Sirah. David knew nothing of Joab's deception.

Messengers brought Abner back and over to Joab for a private conference. This, just at the gate-way to Hebron. Abner went over from one side of the gates to the other side to meet with Joab. When he did, Joab stabbed Abner in the stomach (reminiscent of the way Asahel had died), and Abner died (just outside the gates of the City of Refuge).

A State Funeral

David held a state funeral for his enemy, Abner (General of the Northern Army). David walked in the funeral cortege just behind Abner's casket through the streets of Hebron. Abner was buried in Hebron inside the City of Refuge.

But David wept aloud for his friend as he walked behind the casket. He said, *Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth . . .* David gave a brief homily at the funeral: *Should Abner have died as the lawless die? Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered. You fell as one falls before wicked men . . .* Then David said, *Do you not realize that a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel this day? And today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me. May the Lord repay the evil doer according to his evil deeds.* (II Sam 3:28-39) *et. passim.*

Lessons from this Tragedy

1. For the greater good, David was willing to reconcile with his enemies and bring them into his own political household.
2. We should all love much, and trust little.
3. *As much as in you lies, be at peace with all men.* (Romans 12:18)
4. As with Abner, being close to the Kingdom is not good enough.
5. Remember, the law may say it is legal, but that doesn't make it right.
6. Forgiveness is not always easy; it may require a great deal of emotional strength.

How to Raise a Kid

His parents tried to raise him right, but he just seemed forever to attract trouble to himself. Once he was chased out of town. He wound up in trouble with the authorities.

He knew from personal experience about police brutality. He'd seen jails from the inside. He was tortured – in public yet – for fraud. Eventually, they said he had tried to overthrow the government, and that was a capital offense.

They found him guilty, and they executed him – but only as an example to others. After all, they just could not let other young men follow this young man's example.

Can you believe it, his mother attended his execution! She was in her forties. The media didn't cover the execution, but if they had, an interview would likely have gone like this:

Ma-am, what does his father do?

Construction work.

Well, ma-am, was your son a druggie?

Oh, no, no, no! Never that!

Then, he must have been a neglected child . . .

No, his father taught him a trade; took him into the family business.

Well, something must have gone wrong. Was he from a broken home?

Not at all, sir. In our home, we all love each other.

But ma'am, did he not go around calling himself a preacher? Did he not invite people to join his cultist group – named after himself?

Well, yes, in a way – but the rich were sent empty away.

Well, anyway, the king has been so jealous of his throne that he killed his own son just to keep him from taking it. How do you react to that?

My son did preach about a kingdom on earth. He preached about peace-making. He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God." He preached about going the second mile. He even spoke of being more loving than people rightfully expect to be. He said, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

Note: But the officials would have seen right through all of this goody-two-shoes language. They would've said . . .

Ma'am, we don't know how to tell you this, but your little boy needed to learn how to live with corruption in high places. He needed to learn how to deal with double-dealing. He needed to learn how to deal with cheating. Everybody's doing it.

What mother and father would want their little boy to turn out like Mary's little boy?

Mary might have told US a few things about how to raise a kid.

Ps. 78 says they were to teach their children scriptural quotations from the Torah, **THE LAW!!**

Early Childhood of Little Jesus:

In his first year, little Jesus' feet would not likely have touched the floor but a few times. Mary would have treated him like a little prince hugging, kissing, passing him first to one aunt then to another aunt or to an uncle. Cousins would have taken their turn.

Mary's cousin, Elizabeth would have come up from Hebron to Bethlehem just to see Jesus and hold him.

In his second year, behavior would have changed. They would have treated him like a little pig – pulling his little hands through all of the muck or gook available. They would have had him smell everything from flowers to rotten food. They wanted him to see, hear, taste, touch or smell his wonderful world.

In his third year of life, they would have gotten down to business teaching little Jesus the Torah – **THE LAW!** It would have been accomplished sitting on Joseph's knee, sitting at the family table (or dining mat). A quotation would have been given Jesus, and Jesus would have repeated it back to Joseph.

This learning process would have transpired over a lengthy period of time. Now that's quality time!

Family Life:

The family was committed to daily devotions and to prayer.

In the morning, Jesus and the family would each recite a scripture before doing anything else. They would each have recited another scripture in the evening before going to bed.

Jesus would have prayed numerous times each day. First, he would have prayed immediately upon rising for the day. He would have said grace before eating the morning meal – and again at the end of the meal. He would have said grace again both before and after the afternoon meal. Finally, he would have prayed again as he retired for the night.

Sabbath services might last five hours. Attendance was understood and expected – **THE LAW!**

There was a MEZUZZAH attached to the entrance door frame to the house. The Mezuzzah, a cylindrical box (usually wooden), was hollow with a small finger-size key-hole near the bottom. Inside the small cylinder was a parchment on which was written specific scripture in exactly 22 lines – **THE LAW!** Here is what was written there.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 *Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on*

your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on our gates.

And Deut. 11:13-21: So, if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today – to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul – then I will send rain on your land in its' season both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and He will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you. Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of our houses and on your gates so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

Ten times the name of God appears in these 22 lines.

If one should lean over to look through the finger-size hole near the bottom of the Mezuzzah, one would see written on parchment just inside and in plain view the words **EL SHADDI! (ALMIGHTY GOD!)**

Anyone entering or leaving Mary's home was required to touch that little finger-size hole, i.e., touch the name of God, kiss that finger, and recite a blessing. Here are two such blessings in the Christian bible:

1: *May the Lord preserve my going out and my coming in.*

Or:

2: *May the thoughts of my heart and the words of my mouth and the deeds of my hands be pleasing in thy sight O Lord.*

So little Jesus bursts into the house from whatever 1st century Israel's "Little League" might have been, excited to tell Mary about his game-winning home run. But Mary halts his exuberance and makes him return to the entrance kiss his finger, touch the name of God (God before all else), say *May the Lord preserve my going out and my coming in* (probably). And then, he could return and tell her of his home-run.

Perhaps it's Joseph who has burst out of the house to give the neighbor a piece of his mind, but stops at the entrance, kisses his finger, says *May the thoughts of my heart, and the words of my mouth and the deeds of my hands be pleasing in thy sight O Lord.* Kind of calms one's anger for the moment.

School was Something Else:

Precocious Jewish boys were expected to attend a Synagogue school if one were available nearby. If ever there were a precocious little Jewish boy, it was Jesus! He lived in Nazareth, and Sephora, the "county seat" was just up over the hill from Nazareth, about two miles away. So, it can

be assumed that Jesus probably attended the Synagogue school, after the family had returned from Egypt.

Mary would have gotten little Jesus up before dawn on his fifth birthday, bathed him; dressed him in a little hand-made “scholars robe” – probably blue and with little blue fringes sewn in its’ hem, and Joseph would have taken little Jesus by the hand and walked with him to his first day in school. Jesus’ little sandals would have kicked up small contrails of dust to catch on the blue fringes of his little scholar’s robe as they walked along.



Little Scholar's Robe

(Source Unknown)

At school, Jesus would have been expected to have recited all ten of the Ten Commandments – **THE LAW!**

Then, Jesus would have walked outside to meet his teacher. The teacher who probably lived next door, would have gotten down on his knees to enfold little Jesus in his arms. Every teacher had to hug a kid before trying to teach him. (If only this teacher had known just who he was hugging!)

Once inside, the teacher would have presented Jesus with a slate and a piece of chalk with these things already written on the slate:

- a. The Jewish alphabet which was read by the teacher, letter-by-letter, and Jesus repeated each one to the teacher.
- b. Two verses from the Torah – **THE LAW**! The teacher would read each verse to Jesus and explain it. Jesus would explain each verse to the teacher in turn.
- c. At the bottom of the slate was written: **THE LAW will be my calling**. Jesus repeated it all.

Jesus would then have held out his slate while the teacher, using a ladle, drizzled honey all over the slate. Jesus would have been asked to lick the honey off the slate corner- to- corner, i.e., “Lick the slate clean.”

As Jesus did this, he ate the verse of the law and the motto, **THE LAW will be my calling**. Then, he could say that he had fulfilled Ezekiel’s writing (Ezek 3:3) *Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it. So, I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.*

Having finished, the teacher would have said to Jesus, *And may THE LAW of God always be as sweet as honey to your soul.*

By now, it is lunch time. Most kids got a biscuit and a fried egg sandwich plus a couple of bagels. But Jesus was the new kid. Jesus would have gotten a sweet cake made of nuts, honey, figs, dates, and flour, all made by the teacher. Written on Jesus’ cake would have been a verse of **THE**

LAW: *As this cake gives you strength, may your strength always come from doing **THE LAW** of God.*



Jewish Sweet Cake

(Getty Images)

Then, the teacher would have prayed for little Jesus; that the angels would open Jesus' little heart and strengthen Jesus' little mind. (If only that teacher had known for whom he was praying!)

But Did it Work?

Eventually, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: *I am not come to destroy **THE LAW** but to fulfill **THE LAW**. Not one jot or one tittle-comma, be changed from the teaching of **THE LAW**.*

Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.

Suffer the little children to come unto Me for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Yes, it worked! Jesus' education warped him forever – but aren't you glad it did.

Jesus would have chosen a scripture that began with the first letter of his own Hebrew name, Yeshua, (Y) and that ended with the last letter of his own name (A). That scripture would serve as his “promise-scripture” throughout his life. What we Christians wouldn't give to know what that scripture was.

A Lesson for Us:

If we were to raise our kids just right, like sweet little Mary, perhaps our kids would find some cause for which they too are willing to lay down their lives. **What would we do then. . .**

Never Lose The Love of Christmas

(or)

“Don’t Bet the Farm”

In the Beginning: It was about 1000 B.C. When three ladies from Moab crossed the Jordan, widows all, deciding to migrate to Judea. On the way, Orca, one of two daughters-in-law became homesick and turned back to Moab. That left Naomi and Ruth, the other daughter-in-law, to complete the journey alone.

Settling in the little town of Bethlehem they found themselves gleaning in the fields of Boaz, a wealthy land-owner. There Ruth, a cutie, was quickly spied by Boaz. Soon, the two were in love and married, at a time when most marriages were arranged.

Ruth and Boaz began a 26 - generation march of God-chosen couples getting together in this march to the birth of the Christ Child. Taken from a human perspective, God made a series of risky decisions.

Risky Decision # 1: *We Want a Perfect Lamb!* In the world of animal husbandry, it is possible to create a perfect lamb – but it isn’t easy. Both the male and female must be carefully chosen by the husbandman for the characteristics desired to be included or avoided in the offspring. This, through 25 to 30 generations, such choices are necessary.

When the perfect lamb is born, the husbandman must decide whether to put it on display for others to see and be impressed with its' beauty, or to put it in the sheepfold with the other sheep.

If it is placed in the sheepfold with other sheep, it will be killed by the other sheep that do what sheep do, i.e., attack it because it is "different" or smash it into the sides of the sheepfold where it, being by nature, fragile and susceptible to disease, will soon die.

Understanding the multiple probability issues involved including:

- a) It being a time of arranged marriages;
- b) Of some couples choosing not to have a family;
- c) Others dying before a family came into existence;
- d) Difficulty estimating the number of individuals available for such a choice, etc.

Assuming only ten males and ten females being available in each generation, it would have provided a likelihood of one in 100 in the very first generation. Following that math, the end-number would be larger than most could comprehend. So, assume instead a likelihood of 1 in 10 for each generation.

Both Matthew and Luke enumerate the specific generations and names of parents in the lineage of the Christ Child. There were twenty-six generations.

Apologies to Paschal with his Triangle of Generational Multiplication and to Fibonacci's Series of 8, 16, and 24 generations, (i.e., a single pair giving

birth to a single offspring followed by succeeding generations doing the same resulting in 34 people involved in only 8 generations [the single offspring is counted once as the offspring and again as a parent of another offspring]). That's just one pair in each of 8 generations. Further, families had not one but 12 – 15 children.

Assuming then only a single offspring per generation, with one-in-ten chances each, in 26 generations the probability would look like this:

[illegible]

In 26 generations, the probability against a good outcome would have been at minimum 1 in ten-Octillion. With that sort of probability against a good outcome, **don't bet the farm!** You're going to lose!

BUT GOD DID – AND WON!

Risky Decision # 2; Who's to be the Mother? God chose a 12-13-year-old little girl. Today, she would have been in the bubble gum, you-tube, sleepover generation, i.e., the generation that stays up with girlfriends until early morning hours giggling about which boys are “hunks” and which are “icky”.

Think of it; God entrusted the **Redemptive Plan for all Mankind** to a 12-13-year-old (6th grade?) girl. Most modern-day realists would have said *You've GOT to be kidding!*

Risky Decision # 3: Who’s to be the “Earthly” Father? Mary was expecting when she met Joseph for the first time. The conversation likely went like this:

Uh, Joseph, there's something I've been meaning to tell you.

What?

I'm pregnant.

Wh', wh' what?? You're whaaat?

I'm pregnant.

Uh . . . who . . . who's . . . the . . . father?

God . . . (long pause)

Yeah . . . right . . .

Joseph could have charged her with prostitution resulting in a possible flogging or even a death sentence . . . BUT HE DIDN'T.

He could have placed little Mary in a circle of her own relatives including Anna, her mother, Joachim her father, Salome and Zebedee her sister and brother-in-law, Elizabeth her cousin, along with James and John her nephews.

Joseph would have thrown the first stone followed by the others who would have continued throwing stones until little Mary was dead. That is, they could have . . .BUT THEY DIDN'T.

Instead, Mary's soliloquy to her cousin, Elizabeth, given after Mary had traveled at least 50 miles south from Nazareth to Hebron, should be named:

Guess What's Happening to Me!

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all

generations will call me blessed for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him from generation to generation. . .

Risky Decision # 4: Who should make the announcement and how should it be made? There were numerous options open to God. He could have chosen a Roman Governor, Pro-Consul (Judge), the King, a High Priest, Member of the Sanhedrin (Supreme Court), Local Priest, or perhaps a Rabbi Teacher.

A public relations professional might have built hospitals, trained baby doctors, built docks to accommodate ships bringing foreign potentates to attend philosophical/theological lectures on the socio-economic-political-theological implications of the pending birth; built restaurants with chefs trained in exotic food preparation; and hotels for them all. BUT GOD DIDN'T!

Instead, God waited until little Mary and Joseph had arrived in the vicinity of Bethlehem – where Ruth and Boaz's decision 1000 years before had begun this portion of God's plan of redemption.

Then, he chose shepherd boys watching their flocks by night; who had likely been asked by the good folk of the synagogue to sit in the back because they smelled of stale sheep lanolin; who's egos were probably the consistency of mush having been the targets of numerous demeaning jokes.

He didn't even announce it himself; he hung out a single extra star in the night sky and sent one angel – just one -- to say, "*Fear not for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord . . .*"

Scared the boys nearly to death! But the heavens fairly exploded into song from a heavenly choir, who'd waited 1000 years for this moment, praising God and singing *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill to man.*

Risky Decision # 5: What to do With the Lamb? Like the perfect lamb, the master shepherd must decide what to do with his "lamb." God could put it on display to be seen and admired by the whole world. If so, the "lamb" would have been beautiful to see but of no practical value.

God placed his "Lamb" in the fold with all the other "sheep." Those "sheep" killed God's little "Lamb."

It happened on Thursday. But not to worry. It was only Thursday. **Sunday was coming . . .**



Babylon

This treatment of Babylon is “different.” The Jews in 597 B.C. were mostly a bunch of scrub farmers and fishermen. No Gross National Product; experimenting with various forms of government and religion including judges, kings, and including even the Canaanite worship of Baal.

Having been warned repeatedly in the days of Ezekiel and Jeremiah to stop their lawlessness and idolatry, God allowed them to be taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar.

Taken in three groups, only 8-12,000 Judeans were forced into exile. The Israelites in the Northern Kingdom were taken into exile toward Nineveh of Assyria and points north and northeast not to be heard from again (*The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel*).

Nebuchadnezzar didn't take everyone. He took those who could read and write, who understood business dealings, government, leadership.

Some Exiles Were "Special": Three young men taken by Nebuchadnezzar were indeed special. The birth of a child was unique in Judea. An expectant father would hire musicians to come and stand just outside his home waiting for the birth. If it was a little girl, they would all pack up their instruments and go home. But if the birth was a boy, they would break into song and dance the day or night away in celebration.

The little boy might not be named immediately. Some waited as long as a year to name the boy waiting for his personality to surface. The name eventually given was intended to reflect his personality. The child then was expected to live up to his good name all of his life.

Boy # 1: Hananiah: *The Grace of God*

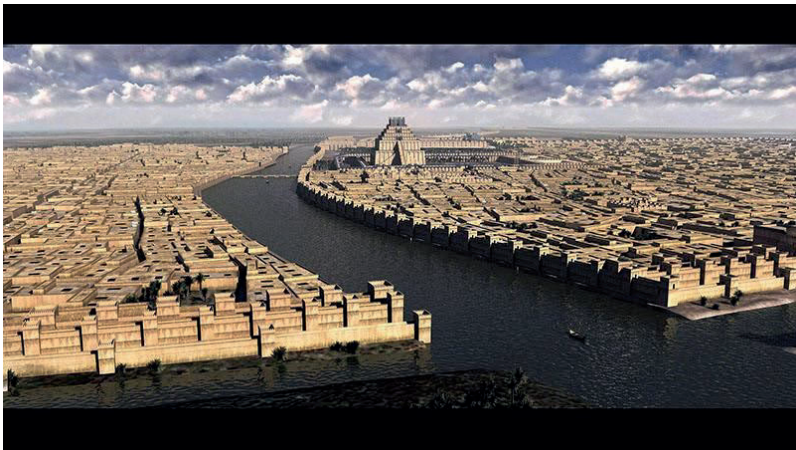
Boy # 2: Azariah: *The Lord is a Help*

Boy # 3: Mishaal: *He that is the Strong God*

Though they are known today as the Three Hebrew Children, they were in fact young adults – and smart!



City Plan of Babylon



3D View of Babylon

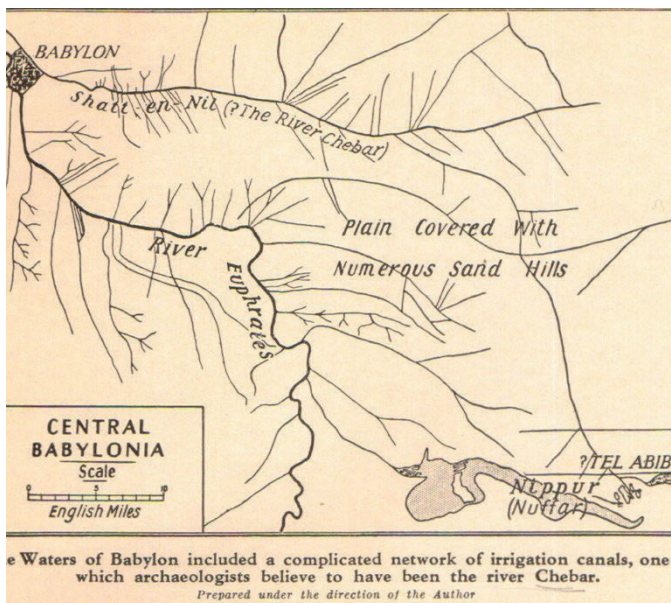
(Bing Images)

Babylon was “Special” too: Leaving a country populated by fishermen and farmers, the Jews arrived in a country that was a world-class culture. Babylon was a center of stable government, coded law that even predated the Mosaic Law of the Jews, and structured science. God had placed them in the center of a Divine Learning Experience.

Babylon, located 59 miles south of modern Bagdad, covered 2,000 acres of land; was relatively square in design running about 1.8 miles on each side; and had a population estimated to be around 200,000 in 597 BC. The city was bisected by the Euphrates River.

A number of canals served to irrigate nearby land for farming. One of the larger canals was called a river, the River Chebar.

Jeremiah told his fellow Jews to cooperate with their captors because they were going to be there a while.



(Image by Joann Mahar)

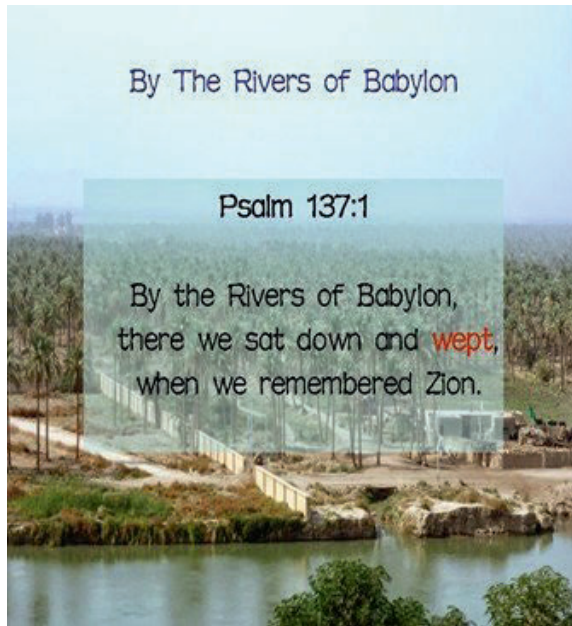
“This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon; “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they may, too, have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for if it prospers, you, too, will prosper. Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says. In other words, be quiet and learn!” (Jer. 29:4-11)

The Jews established their own village-settlement, the village **Tel Abib**, along the River Chebar. There, they began their 70-year diaspora.

Ezekiel turned 30 years old in Babylon, and following Jewish custom, he began his ministry at that juncture. Both Ezekiel and his wife died and were buried nearby – never returning to see their home country again. Psalms includes a quote related to Jews in Babylon:

(Ps. 137) By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land? If I forget thee Oh Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. (KJV)

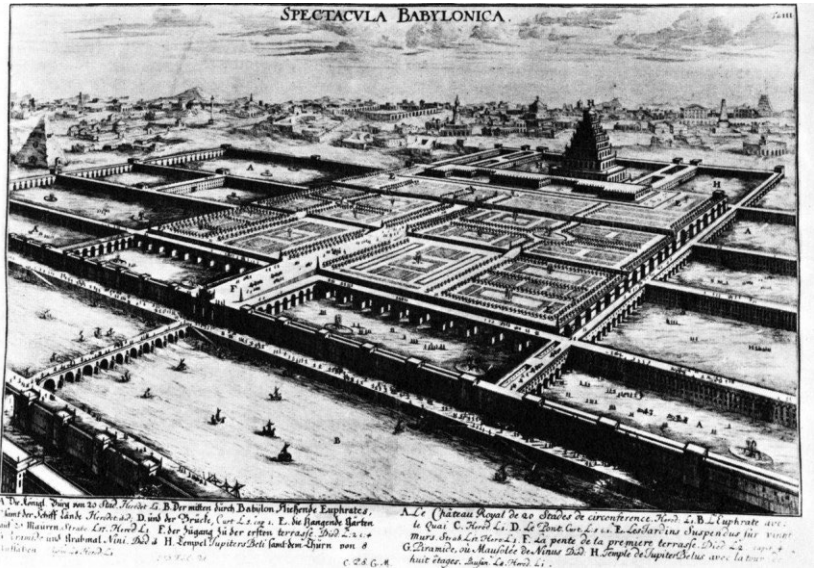
They were likely being taunted by the Babylonians during an annual festival celebrating either the god Marduk or the god Ishtar.



(Source unknown)

Higher Education and Religion in Babylon: Babylon was home to learned men. Thales of Miletus, a western philosopher likely studied there. Pythagoras may have developed his theory of a right triangle, *The square of the hypotenuse in a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides*, in Babylon. Matthew Henry's Commentary indicates Ezekiel may have been close friends with Pythagoras and may even have been to him a spiritual mentor.

Babylon also contained a Ziggurat, a structure containing their many (hundreds?) of gods. It had a penthouse at its peak where either the female goddess or a male god (probably their main god, Marduk) lived and was visited from time to time by the opposite-sex-god.

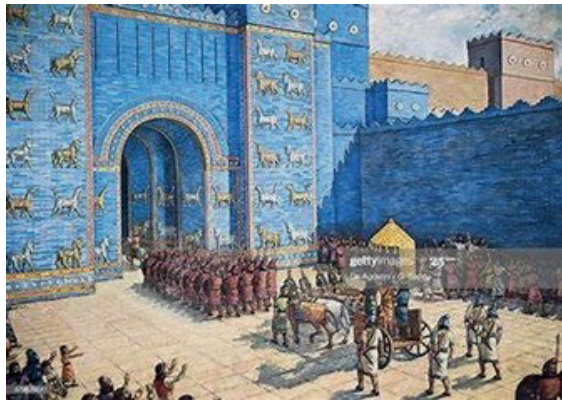


Ziggurat in Babylon

(Getty Images)

Babylon

At the entrance to the city was a special gate, the Ishtar Gate. Ishtar was one of their major gods. A reproduction of it exists both in Germany and the Museum of Ancient History in London.



Ishtar Gate

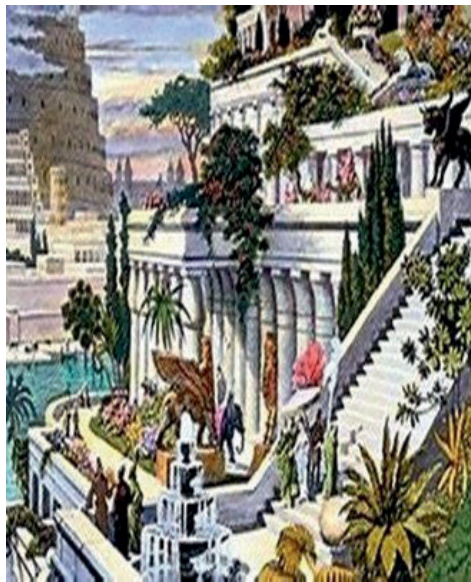
(Getty Images)

Architecture of Babylon: The Judeans entering Babylon through the Ishtar Gate experienced a world they could not have believed existed.

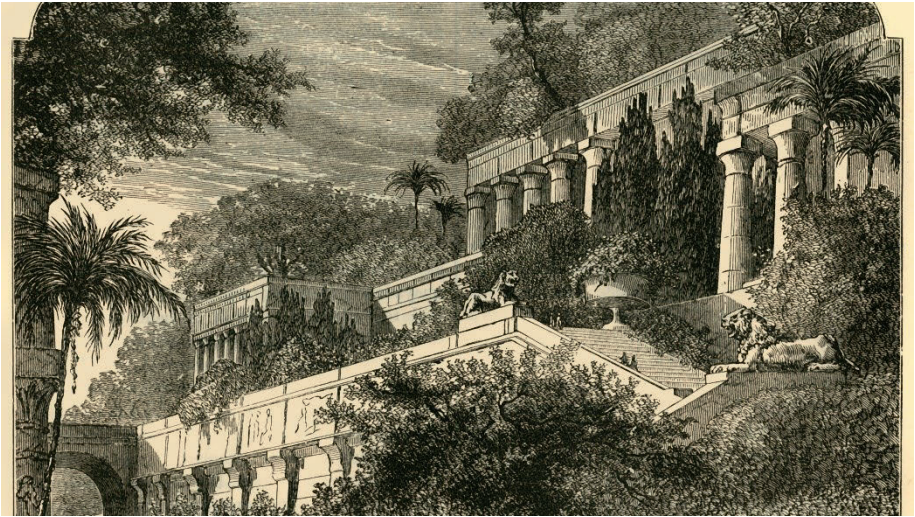
Hanging Gardens, were built by Nebuchadnezzar to simulate country life to appease a wife from the country who longed for the culture of the countryside.



(Image by ancientwonders.com)



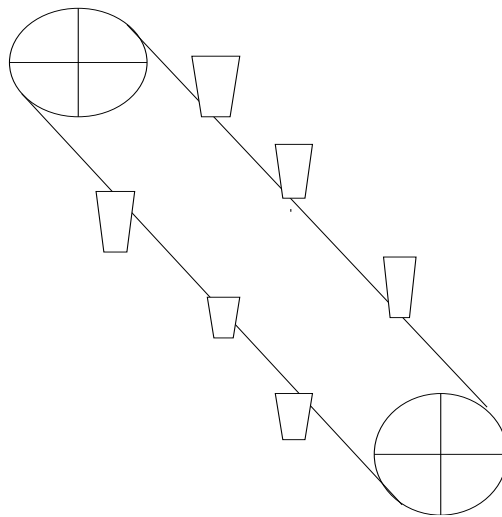
(Image by wikipedia.com)



(Getty Images)

A series of pumps had been invented and built to lift water from the Euphrates River up to plants growing at successively higher levels.

**WATER PUMP USED TO LIFT WATER FROM
EUPHRATES RIVER TO VARIOUS LEVELS OF
HANGING GARDENS OF BABYLON**



(Image by the author, from a written description)

Trouble in Paradise – was Settled by Jews. Having brought the Three Hebrew Children (young adults) to the city, Nebuchadnezzar sent them to college with free tuition and the finest clothing and food a Chaldean Monarch could afford.

In 2021 A.D. money, each one's education would have been worth half-a-million dollars! All free!

Some authors believe the three young men completed what we would consider a 4-year education in the finest "college" in existence and in only two years. Ok, so they were smart!

Upon graduation, each of these young adults was given a ranking job in Nebuchadnezzar's government – working in the provinces – quite a perk on top of a "half-million dollar" valued free education.

1st Indication of Trouble in Paradise: Consistent with standard immigration policy, Nebuchadnezzar changed their names.

Boy # 1: Hananiah became *Shadrach* (Servant of Sin)

Boy # 2: Mishaël became *Meshach* (Shadow of the prince)

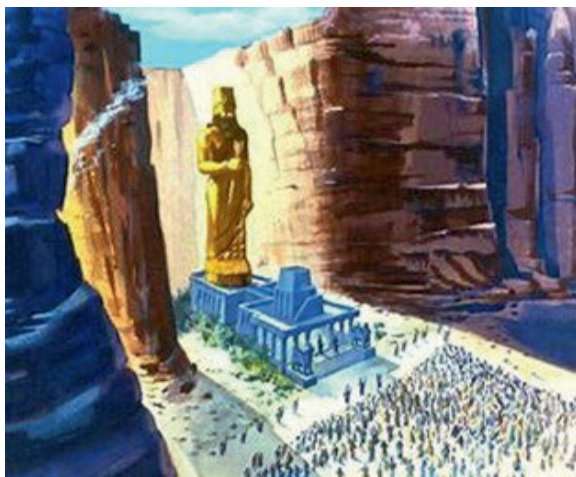
Boy # 3: Azariah became *Abednego* (Servant of Ishtar [remember the Ishtar Gate?])

2nd Potential Indication of Trouble in Paradise: Nothing is said of this in scripture but it is likely that Nebuchadnezzar, in pillaging Jerusalem, may have confiscated the Golden Laver, with the four golden lions holding it up, and taken it back to Babylon.

That may have been the source of the gold used to plate the 90' tall statue of himself used as a center piece for an official celebration.

3rd Indication of Trouble in Paradise: Daniel 3:7-12 details the drama in the celebration.

Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshipped the image of gold the King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.



(By freetitleimages.com)

At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Oh King, live forever! You have issued a decree, O King, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold; that whosoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the Province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshack and

Abednego – who pay no attention to you, O King. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.

In summary, there are three reasons why the Three Hebrew Children refused to bow:

Reason # 1: There is a possibility that the gold plating on the 90' tall statue had been confiscated from their temple back home; the Golden Laver used in Temple worship for physical/spiritual cleansing.

Reason # 2: Nebuchadnezzar could change their names, but he could not change the meaning their Jewish names had for them. They were each just living up to their own good name.

Reason # 3: To have bowed would have meant to them first, a denial of the grace of God; second, a denial of the help of the Lord; and third a denial of the strength of their God.

It simply may not have been in them to bow. They were not being stubborn. It was a request they could not consider. Nebuchadnezzar could change their names, but he could not change their allegiance to God!

In Conclusion: It is said that at the time of the deportations and because he had refused to pay more tribute, Nebuchadnezzar's men held Jehoichin (some say Zedekiah), Jewish leader, when they went into the exile and forced him to watch as they executed his sons. Then they gouged out his eyes.

The Gospel of Matthew indicates that through the seed of that leader came a man named Joseph who, one day, would marry little twelve-or-thirteen-year old Mary and become the “earthly” father and Mary the mother of our Lord.



(Unknown source)

Ezekiel prophesied from Babylon that there would someday be a messiah who would be to all mankind *a Spring of Living Water* flowing from Jerusalem. It was not understood by the Jewish priests.

Jesus was that *Spring of Living Water* and those who would drink from it would never thirst again.



Revelations

WARNING!

This lesson does not deal with the meaning of revelations. Meaning should remain the province of theologians. Instead, this treatment of the subject is restricted to “how to read Revelations.”

The difficulty understanding the book is in part because readers do not approach the content with the correct perspective.

Suggestion: Keep a bible nearby and actually read each passage as it is noted in this study.

Perspective: A Greco/Roman Play: John almost certainly was acquainted with both Jewish traditions and Greco/Roman dramatic traditions. Further, John almost certainly had Ephesus in mind when he wrote the

book. Ephesus was a sea port city on the West coast of modern-day Turkey. Patmos was only a few miles off Ephesus' western coastal port.

An amphitheater in Ephesus would seat 24,000 patrons at a time. Performances were daytime only because there were no stage lights for night time performances. The plays were so popular that merchants would close shop during a play. Actors arriving at the sea port would be escorted into town by slaves or employees carrying actors' luggage, costumes, and other equipment.

Structure of a Greco/Roman Play: These plays were written in seven acts.

An Inciting Force would start the first act. That is, there would be an event that would raise the audience's level of consciousness to expect life to be different. Characters, principals of the drama, would be introduced and their character shown. Their new perspective: life will be forever changed.

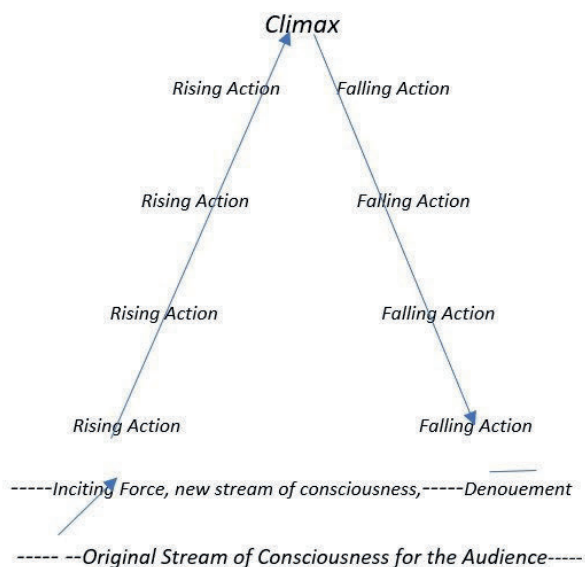
Rising Action: would continue through acts one, two and much of three. In this phase of the drama, the characters interact, the antagonist dominates the drama and appears to be winning the struggle.

The Climax: comes at or near the center of the drama. There is usually a single scene in which there is a change from the dominance of the antagonist to the dominance of the protagonist. In some dramas that scene is emotional.

The Falling Action: follows the climax during which the protagonist slowly overtakes the antagonist. Usually, the falling action and the rising action scenes are equal in number.

The Denouement: concludes the drama and lets the audience know that indeed life has forever changed. The antagonist has been properly dispatched, as have the other issues of the drama.

Structure of a Greco/Roman Play



The Setting on the Stage: Sometimes a chorus standing in front of the stage would sing as scenery was being changed (note the *new song of the Lamb*. (Rev. 5:8-14)

A casual reader would sometimes appear on stage to explain to the crowd some complication of the unfolding drama (see Rev. 1:7-8). This *herald* was an interpreter of the drama's theme to the audience. Verse

7 seems to present Jesus, The Christ, as the “star” or sponsor of this entire drama.

In this drama, the *skein* or rear wall (up stage) was visualized as the sanctuary.

The *prothyron* or kind of porch to the set (down stage) was visualized as the Holy Place.

The *proskenion* (center of the stage) area between the *prothyron* and *skein* was visualized as the Holy of Holies.

The *paraskenia*, what we call the wings of the set, contain the Great White Throne. This Great White Throne had 24 elders each on separate thrones arranged in semicircular fashion on either side of the White Throne, 12 Stage Left and 12 Stage Right (Rev 4 :3-4).

The *deus ex machina* was a very large teeter-totter type device behind the *skein* used to lift a “god” over the top of the *skein* and onto the stage where he could “solve” whatever problem the playwright had written himself into. Greeks and Romans were both quite accustomed to this device being used. (It was high-tech in the 1st century middle east.)

It is important to note that both John, the Revelator, and his audience understood this structure of Greco/Roman drama. They would have clearly understood what was happening as they heard Revelations read to them (not acted out).

Though modeled in dramatic form, Revelations was intended to be treated as a letter might be, read aloud in homes or in church assemblies.

At that time, most all books were scrolls with the title appended on a small piece of parchment or papyrus attached at one end. Revelations 1:1-3 indicates this as *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to Show to His Servants.*

The structure of the amphitheater in Ephesus may have been John's model for describing the physical setting of the events in Revelations.

Cast of Characters; Symbols:

The Deceiver: Satan

The Spirit: Christ

The Seven Promises: Facets that combine to make one great promise to believers that wherever Christ is, there we are overcomers.

The Seals: Parallel signs of approaching End of Times.

The Trumpets: Except for the more severe trumpets (judgments), they too are parallel signs of approaching end of times.

The Bowls: loosely comparable to approaching end of times.

The Temple: Either the restored Jewish nation or "The True Church" being protected by God during the Great Tribulation (folks disagree on this).

The Multitude in White: Either the Gentiles, or Jews who accepted Christ (folk disagree on this).

The Seventh Trumpet: Suggests the transfer of world empire into the hands of its' true king, Christ.

Gog: Represents all enemies of Christ; peoples in rebellion against the Messiah.

[Premillennials believe Christ will return before the millennium and that we'll have 1000 years of peace at the end of the present age.]

[Postmillennials believe Christ will return after 1000 years of peace.]

[Amillennials believe we're now in the millennium enjoying the 1000 years of peace brought on by the church.]

The Church: The Bride of Christ

Sea of Glass being Mingled with Fire: The perfect holiness of God (15:2)

A Rainbow: Represents God's grace (4:3)

Seven Spirits Are Sent Out: God's: All-knowing.

An Evil Dragon and Its' Angels: The kingdom of evil (12:7; 20:2-3)

Beast Rising Out of the Sea: An Evil messiah (13:1)

Another Beast: Arises out of the Sea: Think Cultic Priesthood (13:11)

7 Lampstands: The Church Universal (1:20)

4 Horsemen: War, civil strife, famine, death.

White Horses and Riders: The Word of God.

The Drama of Revelations: The reader can partition the book into seven major divisions or acts; each with seven minor divisions or scenes.

Act I: *The Church on Earth*; (Inciting Force and start of (Rising Action))

Setting: The (7) Golden Lampstands (1:9-20).

Letters to the Seven Churches: (Chs 2-3). Jesus' words, through John, identifies himself (1:12-20), and lets us know the truth about each church's loyalty to him and speaks his mind: (2:3 *You have forsaken your first love*; (3:3) *You are dead*. He pronounces rewards for the victor.

Scene 1: Ephesus, The Passionless Church (2:1-7).

Scene 2: Smyrna, Persecuted Church (2:8-11).

Scene 3: Pergamum, Tolerant Church (2:12-17).

Scene 4: Thyatira, Compromising Church (2:18-29).

Scene 5: Sardis, Dead Church (3:1-6).

Scene 6: Philadelphia, Missionary Church (3:7-13).

Scene 7: Laodicea, Arrogant Church (3:14-22).

Act II: God's Purpose in History (4:1-8:1) (Rising Action)

The Setting: God's Throne (4:1-8a); ref to creatures and elders (4:8b-11); the sealed book and the lamb (5:1-7); hymns (5:8-14).

The Seven Seals are opened (6:1-8:1), Together, the Throne, The Scroll, and the Lamb (4:1-5:14) form one vision having two parts: The Throne (Ch 4) The Lamb and the Scroll (Ch 5).

Emphasis is on the necessity of the Lamb to be worshipped i. e., because of his death. The Scroll includes the mystery of everything, the goal of history, and points to the seals representing events preparing for history's end, and also indicates that the seals are "events" preparing for the final termination of everything.

Each Seal coordinates with the signs of the coming end of all things as spoken of by Jesus (Mt 24:5-33), i.e., the "beginning of birth pains."

Scene 1: Rider on the White Horse (6:1-2).

Scene 2: A Rider and a Red Horse (6:3-4).

Scene 3: A Rider and a Black Horse (6:5-6).

Scene 4: A Rider and a Yellow Horse (6:7-8).

Scene 5: Prayers of the Martyrs (6:9-11).

Scene 6: The Terminal Events (6:12-7:17); Cosmic Catastrophes (6:12-17); Accepting of the Martyrs (7:1-8); then, the Martyrs appear in Heaven (7:9-17).

Herald Speaks: Addressing the audience, he discusses the 144,000 Israelites and the White-Robed crowd of people (7:1-17).

Scene 7: There is Silence in Heaven for 30 mins (8:1).

Act III: The Church in Tribulation. {Falling Action Begins}

The Setting: The Altars, and prayers of the saints (8:2-6).

Seven Trumpets blare out (8:7-11:18) There is some overlap from the 7th Seal to the first trumpet. The last three trumpets represent calamities, regarding their severity, demonic hordes (9:1-11)?

Herald Speaks: This second interlude involves A Little Book and Two Witnesses – it's a confirmation of John's prophecy.

Scene 1: Both Hail and Fire Fall (8:7).

Scene 2: Mountains are Cast into the Sea (8:8-9).

Scene 3: Stars Fall into Rivers and Springs (8:10-11).

Scene 4: The heavens are Darkened (8:12); an Eagle Announces Three more calamities (8:13).

Scene 5: (Calamity # 1) Pit of the Abyss; Locusts (9:1-12).

Scene 6: (Calamity # 2) Four Angels Released (9:13-15); two hundred million Horsemen (9:16-21); Angel with the Little Book (Ch 10); Periods of the Gentiles, Two Prophets, The Evil City (11:1-4).

Scene 7 (Calamity # 3) Worship in Heaven (11:15-18).

Here, the Rising Action reaches its' Climax. The protagonist becomes dominant; the Antagonist begins to weaken. Falling Action begins, i.e., WE BEGIN TO WIN!

Act IV: The Ultimate Redemption of the Church (11:19-15:4); {Falling Action}

The Setting: The Arc of the Covenant (11:19).

Seven Pageants are shown(12:1-15:4) A woman with the dragon seem to represent the covenant community; her nearing-childbirth represents the coming of the Messiah and of the new age (Isa. 26:17; 66:7,8; Mi. 4:10; 5:3)

The "Harvest of the Earth" gets Christians ready for difficulty as they near the end of the age. Their martyrdom is not in vain. The Lamb emerges on the throne of glory with exultant songs.

Scene 1: Woman and the Dragon (Ch12).

Scene 2: A Beast Arises from the Sea (13:1-10).

Scene 3: A Beast Arises from the Land (13:11-18).

Scene 4: The Lamb with the 144,000 martyrs (14:1-5).

Scene 5: Announcement of Doom to Babylon (14:6-13).

Scene 6: The Son of Man on a White Cloud and the mechanism of God's Wrath (14:14-20).

Scene 7: Hymn of the Lamb is sung by the redeemed (15:1-4).

Act V: The World in Agony (15:5-16:21). {Falling Action}

Setting: The Tent of Witness (15:5-16:1).

The Seven Bowls are emptied (16:2-21). God's judgment is emptied out in fulfillment of the prophesy: "The sun and the moon go dark; stars fall from the sky, heavenly bodies are shaken (Mt 24:29)

Scene 1: Plague # 1: boils on men (16:2).

Scene 2: Plague # 2: the Sea turns to blood (16:3).

Scene 3: Plague # 3: Rivers and Springs fill with blood ((16:4-7)

Scene 4: Plague # 4: The Sun becomes burning hot (16:8-9).

Scene 5: Plague # 5: Darkness to the Beast's Throne (16:10-11).

Scene 6: Plague # 6: Armageddon at the Euphrates(16:12-16).

Scene 7: Plague # 7: Even devastation in the air (16:17-21).

Act VI The Judgment of the World (17:1-20:3) {Falling Action}

Setting: An angel comes from the sanctuary (17:1-2).

The Seven Plagues (see Act V) happen (17:3-20:3). Babylon: a symbol of satanic deception in the world; The Beast: a symbol of the Roman Empire, i.e., the infrastructure of the world's satanic influence. Finally, there is the Marriage of the Lamb (19:6-10) followed by much praise from the redeemed.

Scene 1: A Woman appears on a bright red Beast (17:3-5).

Scene 2: The Beast is at War with the Woman (17:6-18).

Scene 3: Then, comes the ending glorious Oratorio (18:1-19:10).

Scene 4: The Word of God appears on the White Horse (19:11-16).

Scene 5: An Angel Stands in the Sun light (19:17-18).

Scene 6: The Battle of Armageddon (19:19-21).

Scene 7: At last, Satan is cast in to the pit (20:1-3).

Act VII The Church in the Millennium (20:4-22:5) {Falling Action and Denouement}

Setting: The church is declared supreme with Christ (20:4-6); Satan's authority is limited and is ultimately defeated (20:7-10).

God's Seven-Stage Plan is complete (20:11-22:5). Discussion of "Seven Final Things" where the ultimate defeat of Satan (see, Acts VI) is followed by a description of the New Jerusalem and its' dimensions with a description of how things will be without Satan.

Scene 1: Old Heaven and Old Earth (20:11).

Scene 2: Last Judgment (20:12-15).

Scene 3: New Heaven and New Earth (21:1).

Scene 4: New Jerusalem (21:2-8).

Scene 5: Description of the City (21:9-21).

Scene 6: City's Light Source (21:22-27).

Scene 7: City's Life Source (22:1-5).

Epilogue: Allusions to Genesis 1-3

Absence of death and suffering.

God dwells again with man as he did in Eden

Man has access to the Tree of Life, and the curse is removed. Creation is restored to its' pristine character.

As with the beginning of the drama, the notes of the introit are sounded, and again one can hear the voices of:

Angels

Jesus

The Spirit

The Bride

Lastly, John

The Message of Revelations:

It is a history of faith portraying both what is and what is to take place in the perspective of God's eternal purpose relative to man's salvation. It dramatizes the gospel message and is sent to the churches of Asia intended to be read aloud in the churches (1:3; 1:19). It includes the mind and purpose of God as seen in redemptive history.

Talking Points:

- The Sovereignty of God
- God's holiness, righteousness, justice, truth, eternity, love.

- A chosen people of God.
- A witnessing and martyred people.
- Elders of the congregation ruling with God or alternatively with Christ.
- The Lord of the Church.
- The efficacy of prayer.
- Symbolic representations.

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