

# Engaging the Christian Scriptures

*An Introduction to the Bible*

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**Glossary**

  
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**acrostic** A type of poem in which the first letter of each line or paragraph follows a particular pattern. Several biblical texts are acrostics in which the first letters of the successive verses spell out the Hebrew alphabet in order (e.g., Ps. 119, parts of Lamentations and Nahum).

**Alexander the Great** King of Macedonia who consolidated the Greek armies, conquered the Persian empire in 332 BCE, and gained control of territories in Egypt and Palestine. Alexander's conquests furthered the spread of Hellenism throughout the ancient world.

**allegory** An interpretive approach that identifies hidden meanings and symbolic values in texts. For example, an allegorical interpretation of the book of Jonah would identify Jonah's encounter with the great fish as an allegory for Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection.

**amanuensis** A secretary who aided in the production of texts in the Greco-Roman world. An amanuensis did not merely take dictation but could also be given the task of drafting, editing, or composing texts.

**Amarna Age** A period of Egyptian history in the fourteenth century BCE characterized by radical change under Pharaoh Akhenaton. Changes included the move of the capital city to Amarna and the introduction of a monotheistic religion.

**Amenemope, Wisdom of** An Egyptian wisdom text that has many points of comparison with Proverbs 22:17–24:22. This section of Proverbs probably has a literary relationship with the Wisdom of Amenemope.

**amphictyony** A system of states organized around a religious center. Martin Noth described Israel in the days of Joshua and Judges as an amphictyony, but the Israelite organization was looser than that of the Greek amphictyony.

**ancestral narratives** The narratives about Israel's ancestors (beginning with Abraham) found in Genesis 12–50.

**ancient Near East** The cultural setting of the biblical narratives. Geographically, the ancient Near East comprises the general area of the modern-day Middle East. The ancient Near East is known as the "cradle of civilization" because it was home to great civilizations such as the Sumerians, Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians.

**Antiochus IV Epiphanes** Seleucid king who came to power in 175 BCE and took the title Epiphanes ("God Manifest"). Antiochus IV brutally forced Hellenism on the Jewish people and desecrated the Jerusalem temple, which prompted the Maccabean Revolt. Many scholars see the book of Daniel as a reflection of Jewish persecution under Antiochus IV.

**apocalypse** A type of literature, influenced primarily by the prophetic tradition, that is characterized by elaborate visions/dreams, symbols, numerology, angels, cosmic upheavals, and an emphasis on the end times, including the final judgment, resurrection, and eternal salvation. The term comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which means "revelation." This revelatory literature, with its visions and related symbols, purports to reveal the future and/or heavenly

realm in order to interpret the circumstances of its readers. The books of Daniel and Revelation are the two biblical books that represent the apocalypse genre.

**apocalyptic/apocalypticism** An end-time perspective that sees reality in terms of two ages: the present evil age, which is dominated by sin and death and hostile to God's ways and God's people; and the age to come, which is a new heaven and a new earth where sin and death no longer exist. The transition from the present evil age to the age to come is facilitated by God's grand intervention (for early Christians this is Christ's return), which includes judgment of the wicked and vindication of the righteous.

**Apocrypha** A collection of Jewish religious books that include various literary genres and give insight into the time between the testaments. The word "apocrypha" means "hidden texts." Though Jews never considered them Scripture, some Christian groups came to regard these texts as part of the Christian canon and labeled them "deuterocanonical" because they became canonical later than the other writings. The Apocrypha includes 1, 2, and 3 Maccabees, Judith, Additions to Daniel and Esther, the Wisdom of Ben Sira, and 4 Ezra.

**apodictic law** A type of law given on the authority of the lawgiver that takes the form of a basic, universal statement. Most of the Ten Commandments are examples of apodictic laws.

**apostle** One closely associated with Jesus, particularly as a witness to his resurrection, who has been sent (Greek *apostellō*, "to send") to continue Jesus's work.

**apostolicity** A criterion early Christians used in the process of determining the parameters of the New Testament canon. A text meeting the criterion of apostolicity would have apostolic connections: written by an apostle, written in the time of the apostles, or written in agreement with apostolic teaching.

**archaeology** The study of human history through the excavation of material remains. Archaeology is a critical tool for interpreters because it gives insights into the culture and lives of the people the biblical texts portray.

**ark of the covenant** The most important visible symbol of YHWH's divine presence with the Israelite community. The ark was a golden box decorated with winged cherubs that contained the Decalogue, Aaron's blossomed rod, and manna. It rested in the Holy of Holies within the temple.

**Assyria (Assyrians)** One of the great empires of ancient Mesopotamia, which had its capital city at Nineveh. Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722/721 BCE and laid siege to Jerusalem in 701 BCE. The Assyrian empire fell to Babylon in the late seventh century BCE.

**Atrahasis Epic** A Mesopotamian flood narrative that may be the basis for the Gilgamesh Epic.

**Authorized Version** See King James Bible.

**autographs** The original texts of the Bible, which are no longer in existence.

**Babylon (Babylonians)** One of the great empires of ancient Mesopotamia that rose to power after defeating the Assyrians. Babylon first sacked Jerusalem in 598/597 and sent many of the city's inhabitants into exile. Judah fell completely to Babylon in 587/586 BCE, and another wave of Judeans went into exile. The Babylonian empire fell to Persia in 539 BCE.

**Bar Kokhba Revolt** Led by Simon bar Kosiba (later known as Simon bar Kokhba) in 132 CE, this was the last notable attempt by Judean Jews to oust the Romans. In response, the Romans leveled Jerusalem and forbade Jews from living in Judea. This revolt is also known as the second Jewish war/revolt.

**beatitude** A proverb-like saying that announces a blessing or congratulation. The most famous examples are Jesus's Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3–12).

**benediction** A brief word of blessing and thanksgiving to God.

**biography, ancient** Referred to as a "life" (Greek, *bios*; Latin, *vita*), ancient biography is a literary genre that selectively narrates a person's sayings, deeds, and death in order to portray the essence of that person. Ancient biographies were not intended to be objective but rather to persuade readers to adopt a particular perception of the subject and imitate the subject's life.

**Books of Moses** A way of referring to the first five books of the Bible that reflects the traditional association of these books with Moses.

**Book of the Twelve** The twelve Minor Prophets that scribes gathered together as a single prophetic collection arranged in rough chronological order and connected with catchwords and similar themes.

**Canaan** The region along the eastern Mediterranean coast that consists of modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan.

**canon** The normative list of authoritative or scriptural texts. The term comes from the Greek word for a measuring rod.

**canonical criticism** The determination of when, why, and by whom the layers of Scripture were considered authoritative and to what special purposes.

**casuistic law** A type of law that applies basic principles to various contexts in a community's life. This type of law often takes the form of "If this thing happens, then this consequence follows." Much of the Covenant Code are examples of casuistic laws.

**catholic** A term for something universal or general.

**Catholic Epistles** A canonical collection that coalesced in the late third century and included James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude. The modern category "General Letters" is based on the Catholic Epistles, though the General Letters adds the book of Hebrews.

**Central Hill Country** A major geographical division of Palestine that lies between the coastal plain and the Jordan Rift. This region includes—from north to south—Galilee, Samaria, and Judah.

**christology** Theological reflection that explores the significance and identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

**Chronicler, the** The proposed compiler and editor of 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah whose work reflects the Second Temple period and theological-political concerns of that period.

**circumcision** The procedure of removing the foreskin from male genitals. Circumcision was a sign of God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17) and became a major Jewish identity marker.

**Coastal Plain** The geographical region of Palestine that runs along the shore of the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

**Code of Hammurabi** An eighteenth-century BCE Babylonian law code that reflects rigid social stratification and the principle of *lex talionis*.

**codex (plural, codices)** An ancient book form constructed by stacking sheets of vellum or papyrus and binding them along one edge.

**composite letter** A letter constructed by bringing together multiple smaller letters or fragments of letters and editing them into a unified letter.

**covenant** A formal agreement that binds two parties together in a relationship that is mutually beneficial. Covenants were often formed between parties of unequal power where the stronger party would promise to provide security for a weaker party that promised to provide loyalty.

**Covenant Code** The law code following the Ten Commandments that expands those ten basic statements and applies them to daily life (Exod. 20:22–23:44).

**cult (cultic)** A term referring to organized worship, often occurring in a temple setting.

**Cyrus** The Persian ruler who in 538 BCE issued an edict that allowed the exiled Israelites to return to their homeland. The book of Isaiah refers to Cyrus as the chosen one of YHWH.

**Day of Atonement** An annual feast day in Israelite worship that had to do with the cleansing of impurity for the purpose of restoring and renewing the relationship between YHWH and Israel. The feast involved purification offerings, confession of sin, and the removal of a scapegoat from the community.

**Day of YHWH** In the tradition of the Latter Prophets, the day of victory and reign of YHWH over those who oppose the divine will. At times, Israel is included among those who oppose YHWH because of corrupt religious and social systems.

**Dead Sea Scrolls** A collection of scrolls discovered in 1949 in caves near the Dead Sea. The collection includes Hebrew biblical manuscripts dating from the mid-third century BCE to the first century CE, which draw from a variety of text types and represent the oldest known Hebrew manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.

**Decalogue** *See* Ten Commandments.

**Deutero-Isaiah** *See* Isaiah, book of.

**Deuteronomic (Deuteronomistic)** Language or theology that reflects the perspective of the book of Deuteronomy, especially ideas related to covenant.

**Deuteronomistic History** A name for the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings that tell the history of Israel up until the exile from a Deuteronomistic perspective.

**Diaspora** A Greek term commonly applied to Jews who lived outside Palestine. Frequently, Diaspora Jews had different theological and cultural practices (temple worship, food laws, circumcision, relationship to Greco-Roman culture) from Judean Jews.

**diatribe** An ancient literary technique that involved voicing a theoretical opponent's position before stating one's own opinion.

**Docetism** A Christian heresy that emerged in the late first or early second century CE and denied the humanity of Jesus Christ. The word "Docetism" derives from the Greek *dokein*, "to seem." Docetists believed that Jesus only "seemed" to be human. Some adherents distinguished between the spiritual Christ and the human Jesus.

**documentary hypothesis** The theory that the Pentateuch developed from the combination of several preexisting documents. The classic statement of this hypothesis came from Julius Wellhausen in 1878 and was accepted by scholars for the next century. Wellhausen referred to the different documents as J, E, D, and P.

**dynamic equivalence** A translation method that focuses on the function of the original language and attempts to re-create that reading experience in the target language so that the meaning of the original language is faithfully expressed. Accordingly, this method is often described as a "meaning for meaning" translation.

**Eden, garden of** The garden into which God placed Adam and Eve to live and provide care for it. After Adam and Eve eat from the forbidden tree, God expels them from the garden of Eden and places angelic guards at its entrance.

**emperor cult** Worship of the Roman emperor as a god, which became increasingly important in the Roman Empire after the death of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE. While initially emperors were worshipped only after their deaths, some Roman emperors eventually demanded worship while

they were still living. Emperor worship was closely associated with political loyalty to the Roman Empire.

***Enuma Elish*** The Babylonian creation epic, which takes its name from its opening words. The epic dates back to the Akkadians in the third millennium BCE and describes creation as the result of war among gods and goddesses as the earth is shaped from the defeated body of the goddess Tiamat.

**Epicureans** A Greek philosophy that aimed to free humans from the fear of death and the fear of the gods by arguing that the gods do not exist and humans are free to pursue the best possible life.

**Essenes** A sect of Judean Jews in the first century CE who believed that in the afterlife, a person's soul would experience reward or punishment based on how a person lived. Accordingly, they strove to live pure and righteous lives without the distractions of wealth and, in some cases, marriage. They criticized the temple establishment for being corrupt and often isolated themselves into their own communities.

**etiology** An explanation of a current reality through the narration of its origins.

**exile, Babylonian** The period from 587/586 BCE (the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon) to 538 BCE (Cyrus of Persia's edict allowing the return of Israel to their land) during which large numbers of Judeans were in exile in Babylon. This period prompted significant theological reflection and religious-political shifts with the destruction of the temple and end of the monarchy.

**exodus event** The story of how God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt using miraculous signs and supernatural events.

**Farrer Theory** Austin Farrer's solution to the Synoptic Problem. The theory postulates that Matthew used Mark and that Luke used both Mark and Matthew. This solution maintains Markan priority without Q.

**Fertile Crescent** The name given to the arable region that curves from the Persian Gulf westward toward Syria and down through Palestine into Egypt. The name derives from the crescent-like shape this area has when viewed from afar.

**Five Scrolls** *See* Megilloth.

**formal correspondence** A translation method that takes a literal approach to translation by staying as close as possible to the form of the original language both in its grammar and word order. This method is often described as a "word for word" translation.

**form criticism** The analysis of types of literature and classification of them according to forms such as hymns, laments, and sagas. Once the forms have been identified, the settings and intents behind the various forms can be determined.



**Former Prophets** A division of the Hebrew Bible that consists of the books Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings.

**General Letters** A modern designation for a group of New Testament writings comprising Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude. These writings tend to address a general Christian audience. This collection is based on the ancient collection known as the “Catholic Epistles,” which did not include Hebrews.

**gentiles** The term for non-Jewish peoples. Gentiles were also sometimes referred to as “the nations.”

***Gilgamesh Epic*** A Mesopotamian epic poem about a hero named Gilgamesh, a ruler who searches for eternal life. The poem includes a flood story comparable to the Genesis story of Noah.

**gnosticism** A movement in antiquity that took root among a variety of religious adherents, including some early Christians. Gnosticism focused on a saving knowledge (Greek, *gnosis*) that was only given to an elite few. This special knowledge espoused a dualism that considered the physical or material realm to be evil whereas good could only be found in the spiritual realm.

**gospel** Meaning “good news,” this term initially referred to an oral announcement or proclamation but came to be associated specifically with the message of and about Jesus Christ. In the second century CE, “gospel” became a designation for the literary texts that tell the story of Jesus’s life and ministry.

**Gospels** Writings that narrate the life and ministry of Jesus. The biblical Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The genre of the Gospels is best understood as ancient biography: portrayals of Jesus that reflect the theological and literary concerns of their authors. The four Gospels coalesced into a collection no later than the latter half of the second century and quickly gained wide acceptance as authoritative.

**Habiru** Groups who caused various kinds of conflict in Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia during the fourteenth century BCE. Some of these conflicts could have involved rebellious elements among slave labor.

**Hasmonean dynasty** The string of politically weak, Jewish leaders who reigned over an independent Judea between 142 and 63 BCE.

**Hebrew Bible** The collection of Jewish Scriptures, which is arranged into three parts: the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nevi'im*), and the Writings (*Ketuvim*). The Hebrew Bible is also known as the “Tanakh,” which is an acronym based on the Hebrew titles for the three parts.

**Hellenism** Greek culture and ideas; usually associated with the spread of the Greek empire by Alexander the Great.

**hermeneutics** The art and process of interpretation.

**Herod Antipas** The ruler of Galilee and Perea during the time of Jesus (6–39 CE). The son of Herod the Great, Herod Antipas was a client ruler of Rome.

**Herod the Great** Ruler of Judea at the time of Jesus’s birth (37–4 BCE). A client ruler of Rome, Herod the Great is known for his expansion of the Jerusalem temple and, according to the Gospel of Matthew, ordering the mass execution of male babies around Bethlehem in an effort to eradicate the threat to his throne.

**historical Jesus** The term for the “Jesus of history” who stands behind the interpretive narratives of the Gospels. Scholars use a variety of methods and criteria to determine which material in the Gospels is historical and which is fiction. Scholarly conclusions about the historical Jesus exhibit tremendous variety.

**Holiness Code** The material in Leviticus 17–26 comprising instructions to the community in how to reflect the holiness of YHWH in their worship and community life.

**holy** The state of being distinct. Holiness in Scripture is based on the holiness of YHWH and is not a way to separate from the world but a way to relate to the world based on the distinct covenant relationship between God and God’s people.

**homily** A term for a sermon.

**household code** Instructions addressing relationships within the Greco-Roman household such as those between husbands and wives, servants and masters, and parents and children. Biblical examples of household codes appear in Ephesians 5:22–6:9, Colossians 3:18–4:1, and 1 Peter 2:18–3:7 and inform material in 1 Timothy 3:1–8, 5:1–6:2, and Titus 2:1–10.

**Hyksos** A Semitic group who came to power in Egypt between 1700–1550 BCE. The story of Joseph is often related to the period in which the Hyksos were in power.

**idolatry** The worship of idols, which were material figures or images that represented deities. Idolatry was widespread in the ancient world, and is strictly prohibited in the biblical tradition. In addition, the biblical tradition forbids the fashioning of any kind of image representing YHWH.

**inclusio** A literary device in which similar material (e.g., words, phrases, or images) brackets or frames a section of text.

**intercalation** A literary device in which one story is framed by another. This “sandwich” storytelling style is particularly prominent in the Gospel of Mark.

**Isaiah, book of** An Old Testament book included in the Latter Prophets. Scholars typically argue that the book originated in stages. Chapters 1–39 (Proto-Isaiah) relate primarily to the eighth-century prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem; chapters 40–55 (Deutero-Isaiah) come from an exilic

prophet who carries the Isaianic tradition into the sixth century; and chapters 56–66 relate to the time after the return from exile (Trito-Isaiah).

**Israel, kingdom of** The northern kingdom after the division of the united monarchy. The kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria in 722/721 BCE. The name “Israel” can also refer to the nation of Israel as a whole or to the ancestor Jacob whom God renamed “Israel.”

**JEDP** *See* documentary hypothesis.

**Jeroboam I** The first ruler of the northern kingdom of Israel after the division of the united monarchy. Jeroboam I established sanctuaries with golden calves at Bethel and Dan to prevent Israelites from associating with the Davidic ideology in Jerusalem at festival time and to support the northern economy. He reigned from 922–901 BCE.

**Jerusalem Council** The assembly of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem that met to debate the question of how Gentiles come to receive salvation. The assembly concluded that Gentiles are not required to keep Jewish ritual laws but should abstain from things associated with idols, sexual immorality, strangled food, and blood. The account of the Jerusalem Council is found in Acts 15 (see also Gal. 2:1–10).

**Jordan Rift** The geographical region of Palestine that runs from Mount Hermon in the north down to the Dead Sea. The Jordan Rift provides the location for the Jordan River, which flows from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea.

**Judah, kingdom of** The southern kingdom after the division of the united monarchy. The kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon in 587/586 BCE.

**judge** An Israelite tribal leader during the period from Israel’s entry into Canaan until the establishment of the monarchy. The judges were primarily military leaders who periodically delivered the Israelites from various oppressors.

**King James Bible** A translation of the Christian Scriptures that first appeared in 1611 and exerted tremendous influence on British and American cultures for centuries. Translated from Hebrew and Greek by a committee of translators from Oxford, Cambridge, and Westminster, the King James Bible is also known as the “Authorized Version.”

**King’s Highway** One of the major highways between Damascus and Egypt in the ancient Near East. It ran through the Transjordan Plateau east of the Jordan River and was valuable for military and trade purposes.

**lament psalms** A major type of psalm characterized by a cry out to God, description of a crisis, plea for help, and statement of trust that God has heard the prayer. Lament psalms often conclude with a vow to praise the God who comes to deliver.

**Latter Prophets** A division of the Hebrew Bible that consists of the books Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

**Levites** The priestly clan tasked with caring for the tabernacle and its worship regalia.

***lex talionis*** The law of retaliation, which is defined by the principle that punishments should fit the crimes, or “an eye for an eye.”

***logos*** A Greek term that carried a variety of meanings in antiquity (e.g., word, statement, thought). Stoic philosophers used the term *logos* to refer to the unifying agent or logic of the universe, and Jewish writers used the same term to refer to God’s creative and redemptive work in the world. The author of the Gospel of John builds upon these preexisting conversations in the prologue to his Gospel (John 1:1, 14).

**Luther, Martin** The Protestant Reformer who translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into German between 1522 and 1534. Luther’s German Bible became greatly influential in German literature and theology.

**LXX** *See* Septuagint.

**Maccabean Revolt** The thirty-five year Jewish uprising that began in 167 BCE under the leadership of the priest Mattathias and his five sons. The revolt was a response to Seleucid pressure to offer pagan sacrifices and enforce Hellenistic culture in Judea.

**magi** Based on the Greek word *magoi*, a term for Eastern wise men who studied the stars, dreams, and other forms of divination.

**Magnificat** The traditional name for the Virgin Mary’s song in Luke 1:46–55. The name derives from the Latin translation of the song’s opening words (“my soul magnifies the Lord”).

**Manual of Purity** The material in Leviticus 11–16 that addresses preparation for worship in terms of clean (a state acceptable for worship) and unclean (a contagious state unacceptable for worship).

**Manual of Sacrifice** The material in Leviticus 1–7 that presents the ritual for five sacrifices for both laity and priests that constitute a large part of ancient Israel’s worship.

**manuscripts** A term that means “handwritten” and refers to copies of the biblical text produced before the invention of the printing press.

**Mari Tablets** A collection of texts from Mari, a capital city in northern Mesopotamia on the Euphrates River, which reveal third- and second-millennia-BCE customs of people who were ancestors of the Hebrews.

**Masoretic Text** The text of the Hebrew Bible that serves as the base text for Old Testament textual criticism. The Masoretic Text (MT) is named for the generations of Masoretic scribes who worked between 500 and 1000 CE to standardize and preserve the Hebrew text.

**Megilloth** The collection of “brief scrolls”—also known as the “Five Scrolls”—consisting of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations. These books are part of the Writings and each has some association with a Jewish festival.

**Mesopotamia** The region that begins on the east at the Persian Gulf and moves north and west toward the Mediterranean Sea. The name means “in the midst of rivers” or “between rivers,” which is a reference to the centrality of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to this region.

**messiah** A Hebrew term meaning “anointed one,” which is most often used in the Old Testament for kings. It comes to be associated with an ideal, future Davidic king. The term translates into Greek as *christos* and becomes the dominant title used for Jesus.

**messianic secret** Primarily found in Mark’s Gospel, the term for Jesus’s practice of keeping his identity a secret until after his arrival in Jerusalem. Jesus commands both demons (Mark 1:24–25, 34; 3:11–12) and his disciples (Mark 8:29–30; 9:7–9) not to share their knowledge of his identity until this point.

**Mount Sinai** The place where Moses encountered YHWH in a burning bush and to which he returned to receive the law and conclude the Mosaic covenant.

**narrative criticism** A study that pays close attention to the way features such as character and characterization, plot development, point of view, and language shape the meaning in the text.

**Nazirite** A segment of the Hebrew community that was to embody the community’s holiness by following the vow of not cutting their hair, avoiding strong drink, and avoiding the uncleanness of corpses. In the initial taking of the Nazirite vow, their hair was cut and offered to YHWH as a symbol of the giving of life to the deity.

**Olympian gods** The gods and goddesses of classical mythology (e.g., Zeus/Jupiter, Poseidon/Neptune, Athena/Minerva) who resided in a hierarchical society on Mount Olympus.

**Omri** A king of the kingdom of Israel who established Samaria as the northern capital and founded a brief dynasty of economically and militarily successful rulers.

**oracle** Short prophetic speeches that typically include a proclamation from God about coming trouble or hope and a reason for that proclamation related to the loyalty or disloyalty of the people or the loyalty of YHWH.

**Palestine** A name for the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The name Palestine derives from the name “Philistine,” the people group who lived on the coast, which the Greeks applied to the whole region.

**papyrus (plural, papyri)** A paper-like material made from papyrus plants that was used for writing in the ancient world. Papyri fragments of New Testament writings are very important witnesses to the earliest forms of these texts.

**parable** A brief, fictive story that teaches a lesson or principle. Though found in the Old Testament, parables are most often associated with Jesus's teachings in the Gospels.

**paraenesis** A style of rhetoric in which familiar, traditional moral instructions are grouped together in order to encourage audiences to continue living in a particular way.

**parallelism, antithetic** A type of parallelism in Hebrew poetry in which the second line articulates a contrast to the first.

**parallelism, stair-step** A type of parallelism in Hebrew poetry in which the second line takes the thought a step further than the first.

**parallelism, synonymous** A type of parallelism in Hebrew poetry in which the sense of the second line is similar to that of the first.

**Parousia** The Greek word for the "presence" or "arrival" of an individual that the New Testament writings apply to Jesus's expected return.

**Passover** A special feast in the worship of ancient Israel that was celebrated in the spring as a reminder of God's deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt.

**Pastoral Letters** The collection of New Testament writings comprising 1–2 Timothy and Titus. The letters are part of the Pauline corpus, though their Pauline authorship is disputed. They are called pastoral letters because they offer instruction and advice to Timothy and Titus for effective pastoral leadership in their respective churches.

**Pentateuch** The name for the first five books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This section of the Hebrew Bible is also known as the Law or "Torah."

**Pentecost** Also known as the Festival of Weeks, one of three major festivals in Israel's calendar. It originated as a celebration of the first fruits of harvest, but eventually came to include the commemoration of the giving of the Torah. This festival is significant in the Christian tradition because of its association with the giving of the Holy Spirit to Jesus's followers (Acts 2).

**Persia (Persians)** One of the great empires of ancient Mesopotamia. The Persians succeeded the Babylonian empire in controlling Mesopotamia in 539 BCE and allowed the Israelite exiles to return to their homeland. Persia fell to the Greeks in 332 BCE.

**pharaoh** The term for the ruler of ancient Egypt.

**Pharisees** A sect of Judean Jews that probably emerged in the second century BCE who strove to embody the virtuous life the Mosaic law prescribed so that they would be rewarded for their faithfulness in the afterlife with bodily resurrection. They were skillful interpreters of Scripture and revered the oral traditions. After the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, the Pharisees morphed into rabbinic Judaism.

**Pontius Pilate** A Roman official who served as the governor of Judea from 26–36 CE. In the biblical account, Pilate is the official who ordered the crucifixion of Jesus.

**postexilic** The period of Israelite history following the return from exile in 539 BCE.

**priest** Religious figures whose roles centered on worship and sacrifice in the temple. In Second Temple Judaism, priests took on considerable political power and often came to be associated with oppressive imperial figures.

**Primeval History** The material that narrates the history of the first age, beginning with creation and concluding with the Tower of Babel, in Genesis 1–11.

**prophecy** Speech on behalf of a deity. Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament can involve speech about the future acts of God, but more often is preaching about God's will for the present. Prophecy often uses shocking language to get the attention of a crowd.

**prophet** Messengers from a deity who speak on behalf of the deity. Israelite prophets bring ancient Israel's faith traditions to bear in interpreting life for the people of faith and apply these traditions to the present relationship of the community with YHWH.

**Prophets** One of the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible. The Prophets, or *Nevi'im*, consists of the books Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve.

**Proto-Isaiah** *See* Isaiah, book of.

**proverb** A compact, memorable, applicable teaching about life. The etymology of the Hebrew term for proverb (*mashal*) suggests that such sayings in ancient Israel include a comparative element.

**psalm** A song or poem used in worship. The book of Psalms contains psalms of various types (e.g., laments, hymns, thanksgivings).

**pseudonymity** The practice of writing under a false name. This practice was common in the Greco-Roman world, especially in philosophical traditions in which a disciple would write in the name of the philosophical founder.

**Ptolemies** The Greek descendants of Alexander the Great's general Ptolemy who gained control of Egypt—and at some points Palestine—after Alexander's death.

**Q source** Based on the Two-Source Hypothesis solution to the synoptic problem, the hypothetical source reconstructed from the approximately 220-230 verses shared by the Gospels of Matthew and Luke but not Mark. It gets its name from the German word for “source” (*Quelle*).

**rabbinic Judaism** The Judaism that developed out of Pharisaic Judaism after the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE. The predecessor of modern forms of Judaism, rabbinic Judaism focused on the study of the Hebrew Scriptures in synagogues and the leadership of teachers or rabbis.

**reader response criticism** Searching for meaning through leaving the historical circumstances of the text in favor of the circumstances of the reader and his or her values, beliefs, etc.

**redaction criticism** The study of the compilation or editing of a text that involves determining why and how texts developed the way they did.

**Red Sea** Traditionally the sea across which Moses led the Hebrews as they were leaving Egypt in the exodus. The more accurate translation of the Hebrew is “the sea characterized by reeds or vegetation.”

**Rehoboam** The son of Solomon who becomes the first king of Judah after the division of the kingdom. He reigned from 922–915 BCE.

**rhetorical criticism** The identification of any type of recurrent pattern such as repetition, word plays, or other strategies (argumentative or literary) that contribute to the persuasive nature of the text.

**Roman Empire** The ancient civilization that at its height held territories in Europe, Africa, and Asia. The Roman imperial period began in 27 BCE when the Roman Senate made Octavian Caesar emperor and gave him the title “Augustus.” The western half of the Roman Empire fell in the late fifth century CE, and the eastern half fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

**Rosetta Stone** An inscription in three languages on black granite that, upon its discovery around 1800, made it possible to translate previously undecipherable Egyptian inscriptions by comparing the Greek version to the two Egyptian languages of demotic and hieroglyphics.

**sacrifice** Something a worshipper offers to a deity as a sign of devotion and means of securing divine favor.

**Sadducees** A sect of Judean Jews that probably emerged in the second century BCE and were often associated with the Jerusalem temple and the upper classes of society. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, an afterlife, or in the authority of oral traditions about the law.

**Samaritans** A branch of Judaism that developed during or soon after the Babylonian exile and continues into the modern era. The Samaritans held the Pentateuch as authoritative Scripture, but



their temple was on Mount Gerizim and there was often cultural and religious tension between them and the Jews from Galilee and Judea.

**Satan** A Hebrew term meaning “accuser.” By the time of the New Testament, this title came to be associated with the supernatural adversary of YHWH and Jesus who leads humans to sin.

**scapegoat** A key part of the Hebrew Day of Atonement festival. Priests would confess the community’s sin over the goat and then the goat would be removed from the community, symbolizing the removal of the community’s sin and the restoration of the community’s relationship with YHWH.

**Scripture** Those writings that function authoritatively for the faith and practice of a religious group.

**Second Temple** The Jewish temple in Jerusalem that was built in the late sixth century BCE at the end of the Babylonian exile. The period of Israelite history after the reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple after the Babylonian exile until the Roman destruction of the temple in 70 CE is known as the Second Temple period.

**Seleucids** The Greek descendants of Alexander the Great’s general Seleucus who gained control of the Syrian region north of Judea after Alexander’s death. By 198 BCE, the Seleucids had become the established overlords of Palestine as well. The Seleucids were viewed very negatively by most of the Jews.

**Septuagint** The Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, often abbreviated as “LXX,” which served as the primary form of Scriptures for many Jewish and Christian communities in the first centuries BCE and CE. The translation process probably began at the beginning of the third century BCE in Alexandria, Egypt with the Pentateuch. By the end of the second century BCE, the Septuagint expanded to include the Prophets, most of the Writings, and some additional Jewish religious texts.

**sign act** The term given to prophecies that take the form of symbolic actions the prophet performs.

**source criticism** The attempt to determine the “author,” sources, and intentions of a text.

**Stoics** A Greek philosophy that sought the inner peace that comes from living in accordance with reason and the divinely ordered universe as opposed to the fear of the gods or other fearful aspects of life beyond one’s control.

**synchronistic dating** The type of dating that appears in the 1–2 Kings account of the divided monarchy and gives the dates of a king’s reign alongside the dates of the other (northern or southern) kingdom.

**syncretism** The mixing of religions.

**Synoptic Gospels** The name given to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke because these Gospels share similar structure, content, and wording.

**Synoptic Problem** The term for the ambiguous literary relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Luke and includes questions about which Gospel was written first and what source material the Gospel writers used.

**Syro-Ephraimite Crisis** The name given to the events surrounding the northern kingdom's unsuccessful efforts to pressure Judah into a military alliance with Syria and Egypt against the Assyrian empire (736–732 BCE). Assyria suppressed the alliance and established vassal kings to prevent future resistance.

**tabernacle** The mobile wilderness sanctuary that the Israelites built after the exodus event. The tabernacle served as the site of worship and sacrifice and the home of the ark of the covenant.

**Ten Commandments** The “ten words” of commandment that YHWH gave to Moses on Mount Sinai following the exodus event (Exod. 20). Also known as the “Decalogue,” the Ten Commandments are central to the shape of Old Testament faith.

**tetragrammaton** The term for the divine name YHWH because of the four letters that comprise the name. The name became so holy to ancient Israel that they developed the practice of not pronouncing or writing out the whole name.

**textual criticism** The work of reconstructing the earliest forms of a text through analyzing and comparing diverse manuscripts.

**theodicy** The term given to questions related to the justice of God. The traditional articulation of the issue is how one can claim an all-good and all-powerful God in the face of evil and suffering in the world.

**Torah** One of the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible. The Torah, also known as the “Pentateuch” or “Law,” comprises the books Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

**tradition history** The history of traditions in ancient Israel or early Christianity that involves the study of key memories and their development in the Old and New Testaments.

**Transjordan Plateau** The geographical region of Palestine that lies to the east of the Jordan River and was home to people groups such as the Moabites and Edomites.

**Trito-Isaiah** *See* Isaiah, book of.

**Two-Gospel Hypothesis** A solution to the Synoptic Problem that argues that two Gospels—one of which is Matthew—serve as sources for the last Gospel written. In the fourth century, Augustine proposed that Matthew was written first, Mark was an abbreviation of Matthew, and

Luke used both Matthew and Mark as sources. Nineteenth-century scholar J. J. Griesbach modified this theory by positing that Mark drew upon both Matthew and Luke.

**Two-Source Hypothesis** A solution to the Synoptic Problem that argues that the authors of Matthew and Luke independently used Mark's Gospel and a hypothetical source known as "Q" as written sources of information for composing their Gospels.

**Tyndale, William** The translator of the first printed English Bible, known as the Tyndale Bible, which appeared between 1526–1530. Tyndale translated from Greek and Hebrew rather than Latin.

**variant readings** Discrepancies among biblical manuscripts that came about because of both unintentional errors on the part of scribes while copying and intentional changes created by scribes for literary, theological, and political reasons.

**Via Maris** One of the major highways between Damascus and Egypt in the ancient Near East. This "Way of the Sea" followed the Mediterranean coast and was valuable for military and trade purposes.

**Vulgate** Jerome's fourth-century Latin translation of the Christian Scriptures, which served as the Bible for Western Christianity for nearly a thousand years. The term *vulgate* means "common," and so that title refers to the common version of the Latin Bible that was used in the Western church and that the Roman Catholic Church designated as the official canon of the Bible at the Council of Trent (1545–1563).

**wisdom literature** The name commonly given to the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. These books are related to the Israelite wisdom movement, which was concerned with finding the order of the universe and the best way to live a good life within that order. The wisdom tradition is associated with instruction and guidance both within family contexts and in the royal courts.

**Writings** One of the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible. The Writings, or *Ketuvim*, include the books Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1–2 Chronicles.

**Wycliffe, John** The producer of the first English translation of the Bible in manuscript form, which he translated from the Latin Vulgate (1384).

**YHWH** *See* tetragrammaton.

**Zealots** A revolutionary Jewish movement in the first centuries BCE and CE that sought to expel the Romans from Judea. The Sicarii were a splinter group of Zealots who were especially radicalized.