

Sacred Time and Sacred Space

by

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Preface

One of the anomalies of modern secular society is that people no longer have a sense of the sacred. Traditionally, both in Judaism and in Christianity, certain places and certain times were sacred. The altar-sites of the patriarchs, Jerusalem and Mt. Zion, the first and second temples--all these special places played their roles in the faith of the ancients. For Christians, Jesus was quite specific that he must die in Jerusalem and his apostles must return there where at Pentecost the Spirit descended while they “stayed continually at the temple” (Lk. 24:53). Sacred time was also important. Israel’s liturgical calendar becomes the pattern for the Christian liturgical calendar. Passover and Yom Kippur have their counterparts in Good Friday and Easter. Christians have not always appreciated their heritage in the sacred land of Israel and the sacred time of Israel’s calendar, and this study aims to help fill that gap.

The following studies of the Holy Land originally were given in preparation for a trip to Israel by some twenty-five members of Troy Christian Chapel. For ten days in 1995, the group ranged from Masada, the ancient stronghold of David, to Bethsaida, the home village of several of the apostles. The highlight was wading through Hezekiah’s tunnel in Jerusalem, flashlights beaming and waist deep in water from the Gihon Spring. For almost half a mile under the Hill of Ophel in Jerusalem we followed the ancient water channel that has been there since 701 B.C. It is one of the few sites whose authenticity is hardly debated. The studies about the sacred calendar of Israel were composed as a series and presented to a mid-week Bible study group. Should you ever have the opportunity to visit the Holy Land, by all means do so. It will vastly increase your appreciation and understanding of the biblical narratives in a way that pictures cannot do.

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‘Eretz Ha-Qodesh

What popularly goes by the name “the holy land” (*‘eretz ha-qodesh*) has had several names throughout history. The earliest biblical records call it the “land of Canaan,” that is, the territory settled by the descendants of Noah’s grandson, Canaan (Ge. 10:6, 15-19). Later, due to the Philistine settlements on the south coast, the area came to be known as Palestine, or “the land of the Philistines” (Ex. 13:17). During the period of Israel’s divided monarchy, the southern nation was called Judah (even though it also included the territory of Benjamin and the majority of the Levites) and the northern nation was called Israel (even though it claimed only ten of the original twelve Israelite clans).¹ By the time of the Romans, the holy land was called *Syria Palestina*.

God described this land to the Hebrew slaves coming out of Egypt as “a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8), and “a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven” (Dt. 11:11). It was a land, which depended not only upon the annual rainfall, but also upon such water sources as springs and streams (Dt. 8:7-9). The biblical statements are particularly descriptive. The holy land was terrain suitable for farmers, shepherds and beekeepers. It was characterized by abrupt changes in elevation. Above all, it was arid. God specifically told them that it was not like the fertile, river-irrigated silt belts of Egypt along the Nile Delta (Dt. 11:10). Nevertheless, he promised them that his eyes were on this land perpetually (Dt. 11:12).

The title “holy land” has become popular because Palestine is a spiritual center for three of the world’s great religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Jerusalem is the “holy city” *par excellence* for the same reason. It is remarkable how many biblical place names in Palestine are identifiable. More than half of the places in the Hebrew Bible have undisputed identification, and nearly all those in the Christian New Testament are known.² Such identifications rely upon tradition (which, admittedly, is sometimes faulty), the lay of the land, ancient wells and springs, the excavation of tells, and the long-established main lines of traffic.

One of the most serious concerns for all inhabitants of Palestine was water. The normal years were characterized by three periods of rain, the early rains (October), the winter rains (January and February), and the latter rains (March and April). However, with some frequency Palestine underwent severe droughts, some as long as three years (cf. 1 Kg. 17:1; 18:1). To conserve water, the residents

¹ In some of the prophets, particularly Hosea, the northern nation was also called Ephraim after its most significant clan.

² E. Blaiklock, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Atlas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969) 3.

constructed wells, cisterns and watersheds, and along with the natural springs and streams, these became critical historical sites. Life itself depended upon the water supply.

The Geographical Features of the Holy Land

There are five major geographical features in the holy land. They are the *coastal plain*, the *central hill-lands*, the *Negev*, the *Arabah* and *Jordan rift with its two seas*, and the *transjordan*. Each of these regions has distinctive features.³

The Coastal Plain

The coastal plain lies along the edge of the Mediterranean Sea with a relatively straight coastline for over two hundred miles. Its width varies from about three miles in the north up to over twenty-five miles in the south. The major promontory, which juts out from the otherwise straight coastline, is Mt. Carmel, rising to 1740'. South of Carmel is the Plain of Sharon. The entire coastal shore has no naturally protected harbors, but two maritime sites are worthy of note. At Joppa, off-shore reefs made it possible to maintain a precarious harbor, and at Caesarea, Herod the Great built an artificial entry port for the Romans, the ruins of which still exist as a tribute to ancient engineering. As one moves toward the south of the coastal plain, sand dunes become increasingly common. South of Sharon is the Philistine Plain, rich in ground water, which in ancient times was the homeland of the Philistines with their military pentapolis of Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Gaza.

The Central Hill-lands

The backbone of the holy land is formed by the central hill-lands, a range of mountains nearly 4000' in elevation in upper Galilee and still as high as 2500' in the south. In the north, there is upper and lower Galilee, distinguishable largely by differences in elevation. Upper Galilee has twice the altitude of lower Galilee.

Bounding Galilee on the south is the Plain of Esdraelon.⁴ This diagonal plain runs from Mt. Carmel, on the coast, to Mt. Gilboa, somewhat south of the Sea of Galilee. In ancient times, the Esdraelon was extremely important for north-south travel along the coastal route, since the broken hills surrounding Mt. Carmel made for very difficult travel, and the best alternative was to use the pass at Megiddo into

³ Much of the discussion of these geographical features come from Blaiklock's work, cited earlier, as well as C. Pfeiffer, *Baker's Pocket Atlas of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), C. Pfeiffer, *Baker's Bible Atlas* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) and *Eerdman's Atlas of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

⁴ Also called the Plain of Megiddo and the Plain of Jezreel.

the Esdraelon, where there was a break in the mountain range. Esdraelon, because of its strategic importance, was the site of several famous battles in the Old Testament. Because of its relatively flat terrain, it was suitable for chariotry.

Below the Esdraelon is Samaria, with its north-south angled valleys. The two most important peaks are Mt. Ebal (3,083') and Mt. Gerizim (2,889'). Between them is the Shechem Pass where the Israelites once stood on the slopes of the two mountains and called back and forth the blessings and cursings of the covenant.

The Judean highlands contain three distinctive regions. To the west, rising out of the coastal plain, is the *Shephelah*, or foothills, which rise from less than 300' to more than 1300'. In the middle are the central mountains, the most important (though not the highest) being Mt. Zion at Jerusalem. Farther east is the Wilderness of Judea, characterized by several springs and abrupt slopes that run steeply towards the Jordan and the Dead Sea. The most important escarpment in the wilderness is Masada, which rises over 1000' above the surrounding terrain.

The Negev

The Beersheba region, which lies at the south of the central hill-lands, forms the northern border of the Negev. This desert steppe (semi-arid plain) is roughly shaped like a triangle, with the apex pointing southward.⁵ Most of the area has an annual rainfall of less than five inches, and the area has been largely inhabited by Bedouin nomads from ancient times to modern. Here, the ancient Israelites spent forty years, leading their flocks and herds from place to place in search of food and water.

The Sea of Galilee, Jordan Rift, Dead Sea and Arabah

To the east of the central hill-lands runs a deep trench well below sea level containing three bodies of water, the Sea of Galilee (-696),⁶ the Jordan River and the Dead Sea (-1294). The mountains of Galilee dominate the landscape around the Sea of Galilee. The headwaters of the Jordan River are in upper Galilee, and the Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee on its northern shore and exits at the south, meandering southward until it empties into the Dead Sea. The actual length of the Jordan River between the two seas is triple the air mileage. Near the Dead Sea, the most famous of the Jordan fords is at Jericho. The Dead Sea itself, the lowest depression on earth, registers the highest salt content of any body of water (30-35%). The Dead Sea has

⁵ In biblical times, the name Negev applied to the area south of Beersheba and north of Kadesh Barnea. In modern times, however, the name is applied to the extended region all the way south to Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba, cf. A. Rainey, *ISBE* (1986) III.511.

⁶ Also called Chinnereth, Gennesaret and Tiberias

no outlet, but below it, still following the line south, is the *Arabah*, a deep trench some three to nine miles wide and over a hundred miles long.

The Transjordan

To the east of the Jordan rift lies the transjordan, the ancient home of two and a half northern Israelite clans (Reuben, Gad, half of Manasseh) and the ancient land of the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom. North of the Yarmuk creek is the plateau of Bashan (Golan Heights). Between the Yarmuk and Jabbok creeks is Gilead, the best of the agricultural land in the transjordan. Ammon and Moab are to the east of the Dead Sea. Mt. Nebo, where Moses viewed the promised land, rises just east of the northern tip of the Dead Sea. Edom is southeast of the Dead Sea, and in a small basin is Petra, the famous city carved from the rock faces by the Nabateans.

The Land and the History

Many sites in Palestine have deep historical significance for the history of the Old and New Testaments, and further, some of them have significance for the history of Christianity.

The Galilee

Galilee in the Old Testament

A number of villages and sites in the lower Galilee⁷ are associated with the life of Jesus. However, the Galilee has a history stretching back into the ancient stories of the Israelites, even though it was not in the mainstream of Israelite life. The primary ancient Israelite clan, which was allotted the region of the Galilee under Joshua, was Naphtali (Jos. 19:32-39). However, Naphtali's holdings were tenuous, at best, and the Naphtali fief was not able to gain control over two important Canaanite cities during the period of the judges (Jg. 1:33).⁸ Also during this same period, another tribe, the clan of Dan, relocated to the Galilee. Originally, the clan of Dan was allotted holdings in the central coastlands (Jos. 19:40-46). However, the Dan clan had difficulty in driving out the Canaanites from their coastal allotment (Jos. 19:47), so

⁷ The name "the Galilee" (from *gali'l* = ring, circle), which always appears in the original languages with the definite article, is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. The significance of its name is unclear, though it might be related to the fact that the area was encircled by non-Jewish populations on all but its southern border (cf. Is. 9:1).

⁸ These two cities reflect ancient Canaanite religious names: *Beth-Shemesh* (= Temple of the Sun) and *Beth-Anath* (= Temple of Anath). Anath, a goddess of war, was the sister of Ba'al in the Canaanite pantheon.

they migrated to the far north in order to be near their closest clan relative, Naphtali (Jg. 18).⁹ In their migration, the Danites convinced a maverick priest from Ephraim to join them (Jg. 17-18), and after they had attacked, torched and occupied the Canaanite village of Laish in the Galilee, they set up a shrine which endured for several hundred years until the exile in 721-2 BC (cf. 1g. 18:27-31). Later, at the beginning of the divided monarchy, Jeroboam I selected this shrine as one of the two cult centers for the northern nation which had rejected Mt. Zion and the religious innovations of David's family (1 Kg. 12:29-30).

Tel Dan,¹⁰ the longest continuous excavation in Palestine, has been under the direction of Avraham Biran since 1966.¹¹ Among the many artifacts discovered is an installation from the 9th or 10th century BC which has baffled archaeologists. It consists of a sunken basin, its rim at ground level, with basalt slabs sloping toward the open mouths of sunken pottery jars. The two major theories are that it is a cultic installation for a water ceremony or that it is an olive press.¹² Other important finds include a clay plaque depicting a dancer playing the lute from pre-Danite Laish, a 20' long building containing almost intact pottery vessels (a tomb?), an 18th century BC triple-arched gateway into the city with an extensive rampart flanked by two mud-brick towers, a 60' long rectangular structure added in the 8th century BC to the already existing *bamah* (= high place) built by Jeroboam I, incense shovels, a bronze and silver scepter head uncovered beneath an 8th century altar, and most striking of all, a 9th century BC inscription in a stela which contains the phrases "House of David" and "king of Israel."¹³

In addition to Tel Dan, several excavations have been conducted in the Golan Heights (Bashan) to the east of the Sea of Galilee in the biblical land of Geshur. Several sites have been examined since 1987. The most important of these, at least for Israelite history, is at Tel Hadar, a major Geshurite royal stronghold. Geshur was an ancient kingdom going back to the time of Joshua. Geshur was originally within

⁹ It may be remembered that both Naphtali and Dan were the sons of Bilhah, the slave belonging to Rachel who became Jacob's concubine (cf. Ge. 30:1-8).

¹⁰ A *tell* (Arabic for "mound") is a Near Eastern site containing the remains of human occupation over long periods, sometimes thousands of years. Characteristic of such mounds are flat summits and even slopes. Early settlers tended to build on a low hill (for defensive advantage) next to a reliable water source and often at a natural crossroads. When a city was destroyed by fire, war or natural disaster, successive builders found it convenient to lay out a new community over the previously existing site. This process continued from Neolithic to Roman times, and fifteen to twenty layers of occupational debris are not unusual. As the layers increased in height, the locations became even more strategic, especially with the construction of city walls.

¹¹ A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000-586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) 16.

¹² "Is the Cultic Installation at Dan Really an Olive Press?" *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1984) 52-58.

¹³ J. Laughlin, "The Remarkable Discoveries at Tel Dan," *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1981) 20-37; "Avraham Biran: Twenty Years of Digging at Tel Dan," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1987) 12-25; A Biran, "Tel Dan Scepter Head," *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1989) 29-31; "'David' Found at Dan," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1994) 26-39.

the territorial allotment of the transjordan half-tribe of Manasseh, but the Israelites were unable to subdue it (Jos. 13:13). The Geshurites were brought into close alliance with Israel when King David married a Geshurite princess (2 Sa. 3:3), by whom he fathered Absalom. Later, after Absalom had murdered his half-brother, he fled to the land of his maternal grandparents for sanctuary (2 Sa. 13:37-38).¹⁴ Also in this same area is the mysterious Rogem Hiri, discovered in 1967 during the Six-Day War. This unique site consists of five concentric stone circles, the outer one nearly a third of a mile in circumference. The configuration with its radial walls was almost certainly intended to symbolize religion and cosmology, probably as alignment fixing devices for celestial phenomena (somewhat on the order of Stonehenge in England). The cairn also includes an ancient burial chamber, which has been opened for excavation.¹⁵

Galilee in the New Testament

Even before the northern nation went into exile in 721-2 BC, the region of Galilee was shaped by the outside forces to the north. Solomon ceded twenty Galilean cities to Hiram of Tyre, Phoenicia to pay his debts (cf. 1 Kg. 9:10-14). Later, in the time of the divided monarchy, the Galilee was absorbed into the Assyrian Empire after the invasion by Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kg. 15:29).

For the next several centuries, the Galilee passed in turn to Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, Egypt and Syria. As late as the Maccabean Period (2nd century BC), the Jewish population in Galilee was small, but the Maccabees brought Galilee under their rule and began the effort to Judaize it. In 63 BC, the whole area passed into Roman rulership, and then it was governed successively by Herod the Great and his son, Herod Antipas.¹⁶ In New Testament times, however, the Galilee came into its own as a Jewish center of fervent patriotism as well as the center for much of the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all agree that after the imprisonment of John the Baptist, Jesus went into the Galilee to commence his public ministry (Mt. 4:12//Mk. 1:14-15//Lk. 4:14-15). Though there were short trips to Jerusalem for the pilgrim festivals, (Jn. 2:13; 7:1-10; 11:55--12:1), the greater portion of Jesus' public teaching and ministry occurred in the north around the cities and areas near the lake. Though his home village was Nazareth (cf. Mt. 2:22-23; 21:11), at the commencement of his preaching mission he moved to Capernaum, a fishing village on the coast of the Sea of Galilee (Mt. 4:13). Various villages in the Galilee figure in the gospel stories,

¹⁴ M. Kochavi, T. Benner, I. Spar and E. Yadin, "Rediscovered! The Land of Geshur," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1992) 30-44.

¹⁵ Y. Mizrahi, "Mystery Circles," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1992) 46-57.

¹⁶ K. Clark, *IDB* (1962) 344ff.; W. LaSor, *ISBE* (1982) 11.390.

including Nazareth (Jesus' boyhood home and the site of a sermon by Jesus), Sepphoris (probably the city of Joanna, wife of Herod's finance minister), Cana (where Jesus performed two miracles), Capernaum (site where Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and the base for his Galilean ministry), Chorazin (site of many "mighty works"), Bethsaida (home of Philip, Andrew and Peter and possibly other apostles), and Tabgha (traditional site of the loaves and fishes miracle).

In the east of Galilee is the famous lake. Fishermen plied its coasts, using seine nets, cast nets, and floating trammels.¹⁷ Tabgha is the traditional site where Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes (cf. Mt. 14:19//Mk. 6:41//Lk. 9:16//Jn. 6:11) and where Peter caught the great draft of fish (cf. Lk. 5:1-7).¹⁸ Fishermen and sailors were Jesus' earliest companions, and some of his preaching was conducted from small boats just off-shore (Mk. 3:9). One such boat from this very period was recovered from the lake mud in 1986. Popularly called "the Jesus Boat," the hull can be dated to between the late 1st century BC and the middle 1st century AD from the seventeen pieces of pottery recovered from within it. Radio-carbon tests of the wood have confirmed this dating. The large stern platform of the boat helps explain how once, during a storm, Jesus was in the stern of such a boat asleep, probably beneath the platform (cf. Mk. 4:37-38). The "pillow" mentioned in Mark's Gospel was probably the sandbag of ballast, called a "ballast pillow" in Arabic, used to trim the boat when under sail. When not in use, the ballast pillow was stored under the stern deck. Whether or not the so-called "Jesus boat" was ever used by the Lord cannot be determined, but it is certainly of the class of boat he used and from the same time period.¹⁹

Little in Nazareth can be identified with confidence from the time of Jesus, other than the steep brow of the hill where his own people once attempted to push him off (cf. Lk. 4:28-30). The site of the ancient synagogue is in doubt, and several locations have been suggested by archaeologists. There has been uncovered, however, a 1st century inscription in Hebrew containing the name Nazareth. The earliest remains of the Church of the Annunciation date to about the 5th century, though beneath it are the older remains of a Byzantine church which probably predates Constantine. Charcoal graffiti has been found in the older church containing *IH* (abbreviation for "Jesus" in Greek), crosses, and invocations to God. Mary's well,

¹⁷ Light is shed on several stories in the Gospels by the fishing techniques used in these various methods, cf. M. Nun, "Cast Your Net Upon the Waters: Fish and Fishermen in Jesus' Time," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1993) 46-56, 70.

¹⁸ D Shenhav, "Loaves and Fishes Mosaic Near Sea of Galilee Restored," *BAR* (May-Jun. 1984) 22-3 1. That this site is the one mentioned in the gospels is unverifiable. Furthermore, the site of the loaves and fishes multiplication may have been on the northeast coast of the lake (cf. Jn. 6:1), not at Tabgha.

¹⁹ S Wachsmann, "The Galilee Boat," *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1988) 18-33.

a spring on the north side of the city, is known from the 12th century.²⁰

About three or four miles from Nazareth was Sepphoris, a Greco-Roman urban city reconstructed by Herod Antipas with colonnaded streets, a forum, a theater, a palace and villas. At Sepphoris the Romans maintained a huge armory, and when Jesus was about eleven years old, a Galilean named Judas ben Ezekias led an armed revolt against the Romans, raiding this armory. Roman vengeance was swift and efficient. Both Roman infantry and cavalry mustered to crush the rebels. Sepphoris was burned to the ground, and its citizens were sold into slavery. Two thousand rebels were rounded up and crucified on crosses set in lines along the public road.²¹ Continuing archaeological investigation at Sepphoris indicates that the rebuilding project continued throughout the lifetime of Jesus. Thus, Jesus was exposed to a sophisticated urban culture with 30,000 inhabitants made up of Jews, Arabs, Greeks and Romans. Hence, Nazareth was less provincial than has been popularly assumed and Jesus was not simply a rustic having limited contact with the larger culture of the Roman Empire. During the time of Jesus, Sepphoris was the largest city in the area and the seat of local government. While the New Testament does not specifically mention Sepphoris, it does say that Jesus went throughout all Galilee, and Sepphoris may have been included (cf. Mt. 4:23). Perhaps one of Jesus' followers, Joanna the wife of Herod Antipas' finance minister, was from Sepphoris (Lk. 8:3). Several of Jesus' parables feature kings and the affluence of court life. The local color for such parables probably came from Jesus' knowledge of this Greco-Roman metropolis.²²

Capernaum, the center for Jesus' public ministry, was on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee. The city was a prosperous fishing village, containing both Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. In it, archaeologists have discovered a Roman bath house (2nd-3rd century) as well as fragments dating to the 1st century. After the Roman Empire became Christian (4th century), Capernaum became a popular site for pilgrimages. Graffiti of the Chi-Rho symbol and crosses have been found.²³ Recently, a hoard of gold coins were uncovered (282 dinars minted in Damascus in about 695-743 A.D.), and they are valued at over a quarter million dollars.²⁴

Italian archaeologists claim to have uncovered the very house where Jesus stayed, the home of Peter (cf. Mk. 1:29//Mt. 8:14). Beneath the mosaic floor of a 5th century octagonal church in Capernaum, they found the remains of yet another

²⁰ W. Mare, *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1983) 330.

²¹ W. Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 121.

²² R. Batey, "Sepphoris, an Urban Portrait of Jesus," *BAR* (May/Jun. 1992) 50-62.

²³ J. Laughlin, "Capernaum from Jesus' Time and After," *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1993) 54-61.

²⁴ H. Weiss, "Gold Hoard Found at Capernaum," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1983) 50-53.

building containing Christian graffiti (crosses, prayers to Christ). This structure, a 4th century house church, was superimposed upon a 1st century home. While the 1st century home cannot positively be identified as Peter's, the likelihood of the church being built over it as a shrine is strong. By the middle of the first century, the walls of the home had been plastered, and it ceased being an ordinary home and became used for some sort of public services, probably Christian, given the graffiti indicating Jesus as "Lord" and "Christ." Furthermore, inscriptions have been found which apparently bear the name "Peter." All these evidences are circumstantial, but they combine to suggest that this may, indeed, have been the home of the famous apostle.²⁵

The synagogue where Jesus preached may also have been identified. The gospels always speak of "the Capernaum synagogue," and archaeologists, while excavating a 3rd-5th century synagogue, have uncovered the remains of yet an earlier one, a 1st century synagogue. If so, it may well have been the synagogue where Jesus preached, a synagogue built by a Roman centurion whose servant Jesus healed (cf. Lk. 7:1-10)²⁶

One of the most recent excavations is at Bethsaida at the north end of the lake and just east of the Jordan River entrance. Initial probings began in 1987 to place the village, since more than one theory existed about its location. Once discovered, various fishing implements, seals, and coins have been unearthed. Apart from Jerusalem and Capernaum, Bethsaida is the most frequently mentioned village in the gospels. Its name, meaning "house of fishing," properly indicates the vocations of most of its residents. After the village was destroyed in the First Jewish War (66-73 A.D.), it was never rebuilt, so the very first level is from the first century.²⁷

Other sites in or near Galilee include Tiberias (just over eight miles south from Capernaum) and Chorazin (less than a mile north of Capernaum), and the site of the demoniac's healing. Tiberias contained a famous hot springs, and it was the site of the ancient royal palace of Herod Antipas. On one occasion, Jesus was met by people who crossed the Sea of Galilee from Tiberias (cf. Jn. 6:23).²⁸ Chorazin, along with Bethsaida, were villages condemned by Christ because they refused to repent (Mt. 11:21-24). The Chorazin synagogue and various other structures have been excavated, though these are not as early as the 1st century.²⁹ On the east side of the

²⁵ J. Strange and H. Shanks, "Has the House Where Jesus Stayed in Capernaum Been Found?" *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1982) 26-37.

²⁶ J. Strange and H. Shanks, "Synagogue Where Jesus Preached Found at Capernaum," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1983) 24-31.

²⁷ J. Rousseau and R. Arav, *Jesus and His World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995) 19-25; R. Arav and R. Freund, eds., *Bethsaida* (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University, 1995).

²⁸ Y. Hirschfeld, "Tiberias: Preview of Coming Attractions," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1991) 44-51.

²⁹ Z. Yeivin, "Ancient Chorazin Comes Back to Life," *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1987) 22-36.

lake are the excavations at Kursi, near an escarpment where the swine miracle took place.³⁰ To the southeast of the lake are the excavations at Hammat Gader, the site of a complex of Roman baths (4th century).³¹

The Esdraelon

Esdraelon, a Greek derivation of the Hebrew name Jezreel, lies between the Galilee and Samaria. The valley is divided into two sections by the pass between Mt. Moreh and Mt. Gilboa. Since ancient times, it has served as a major corridor through the rugged hills of Palestine. When Israel invaded Palestine under Joshua, control of the Esdraelon was hard to break due to the iron chariotry of the Canaanites. At the end of Joshua's life, large tracts of land still remained in the hands of the indigenous nations (cf. Jos. 13:1), and the western clan of Manasseh, to whom the Esdraelon was allotted, failed to dislodge them (cf. Jos. 17:16; Jg. 1:27-28).

The entire Israelite national history was punctuated by critical battles fought in the Esdraelon. Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera's army along the Kishon River (cf. Jg. 4:7, 12-15; 5:19-21). Gideon defeated a coalition of Midianites, Amalekites and others in this same valley (cf. Jg. 6:33ff.; 7:1). Saul and Jonathan were casualties here in a deadly conflict with the Philistines (cf. 1 Sa. 29:1, 11; 31:1, 8; 2 Sa. 4:4). Their decapitated corpses were exposed on the walls of Beth Shean (1 Sa. 31:8ff.). Josiah was mortally wounded here when he attempted to prevent the forces of Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt from joining those of Asshur-uballit of the refugee Assyrian government. The Babylonians already controlled Haran in upper Mesopotamia, but the Egyptians and Assyrians were hoping to take it back. Josiah interposed Judah's militia between the Egyptians and the Assyrians in the Esdraelon, hoping to prevent their union (cf. 2 Kg. 23:29-30; 2 Chr. 35:20-24). The outcome was a disaster. Josiah was shot, and though he made it back to Jerusalem, he did not survive.

Other events associated with the Esdraelon are significant, also. The Omride dynasty built a summer palace there, and Ahab came from this palace to Mt. Carmel where Elijah staged the famous contest between Yahweh and Ba'al (1 Kg. 18:16ff., 45). Sometime later, Ahab confiscated the vineyard of Naboth which adjoined the royal properties (cf. 1 Kg. 21:1ff.). Because of this crime, Elijah predicted that both Ahab and Jezebel would die there (1 Kg. 21:19, 23). True to the prophet's prediction, first Ahab, then his son, and finally his wife were killed (1 Kg. 22:34-36; 2 Kg. 9). Later, Jehu's vicious massacre of the entire royal family and others associated with the court occurred there (2 Kg. 10), and because of this bloodbath, the prophet Hosea

³⁰ V. Tzaferis, "A Pilgrimage to the Site of the Swine Miracle," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1989) 44-51.

³¹ V. Hirschfeld and G. Solar, "Sumptuous Roman Baths Uncovered Near Sea of Galilee," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1984) 22-40.

predicted that God would judge the kingdom of Jehu for this massacre. He would “break Israel’s bow in the Valley of Jezreel” (Ho. 1:5).

In the New Testament, the Esdraelon lay between the southern border of Galilee and the northern border of Samaria. Nain, where Jesus raised to life the widow’s son (cf. Lk. 7:11ff.), may very well have been on the slopes of the Old Testament “hill of Moreh” (Jg. 7:1).³² Jesus ministered along the northern edge of the Esdraelon during his great Galilean ministry. Nazareth, his boyhood home, was just north of the Esdraelon. Also on the north side of the Esdraelon is Mt. Tabor, the traditional site of the transfiguration (though this conclusion is, at best, a speculation, not an identification).³³ Of course, we should assume that Jesus passed through the Esdraelon on his trip through Samaria (cf. Jn. 4:4), and later in his ministry, he healed ten lepers along the border (cf. Lk. 17:11ff.; cf. Lk. 9:52). Still later in the New Testament, the Elder John marked *Har Megiddo* in the Esdraelon as the site of the last great battle at the end of the world (cf. Rv. 16:12-16).³⁴

A number of archaeological excavations have been carried out in and around the Esdraelon. Beth Shean, during the earliest period of Israelite history, was occupied by the Philistines (which, in turn, explains why they were in the Esdraelon during the fateful battle with Saul). Much later, the Greeks and Romans built a magnificent city there, complete with a bathhouse, theater, fountain and colonnaded street.³⁵ Throughout Palestine, including the Esdraelon, archaeologists have uncovered a considerable number of *bamot*.³⁶ Such shrines are located in Beth-Shean, Taanach and Megiddo in the Esdraelon.³⁷

One of the most important sites for excavation has been Tel Megiddo (about 15 acres), regarded by many as the single most important archaeological dig in Israel from biblical times. Located on the strategic trade route *Via Mans*, which linked Egypt with Syria, Anatolia and Mesopotamia, Tel Megiddo has been excavated three times and is currently undergoing a fourth dig. Among the things uncovered have been a jasper seal bearing the inscription “To Shema, servant of Jeroboam,” a *bamah*

³² R. Earle, *ISBE* (1986) III.480.

³³ The tradition can be traced back to Cyril of Jerusalem (4th century AD), but it is unlikely to be correct inasmuch as Jesus had just been to Caesarea Philippi, far to the north. Nevertheless, because of the tradition a Christian church was built on the site by the mother of Constantine in 326 AD, cf. K. Jung, *ISBE* (1988) IV.7 14. By the 7th century, three shrines had been erected on its summit, one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, cf. G. Van Beek, *IDB* (1962) IV.508-509.

³⁴ The name “Armageddon” is a corruption of the Hebrew *Har Megiddo* (= Mt. Megiddo).

³⁵ “Glorious Beth-Shean,” *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1990) 16-31.

³⁶ The Hebrew word *bamah* (= high place) refers to a shrine usually built on some elevation (cf. 2 Kg. 17:9-11). The shrine consisted of a raised platform built of stones where religious rituals were performed. Sacrifices were offered, and both the Israelites and the Canaanites used them (cf. I Sa. 9:12, 14; 10:5; 1 Kg. 3:2,4; 11:7-8; Is. 15:2; 16:12).

³⁷ B. Nakhai, “What’s a Bamah?” *BAR* (May-Jun. 1994) 21..

built from field stones and dating to about 2700 BC, a cuneiform fragment of thirty-seven lines which contain a portion of the Mesopotamian flood story called *The Gilgamesh Epic*, and a palace in which were discovered a hoard of ivories. Solomon established Megiddo as the seat of his fifth tax district (cf. 1 Kg. 4:7, 12), and he used forced labor to build royal and military structures at the site (cf. 1 Kg. 9:15). A considerable amount of his architectural work has been uncovered, as well as work by later Israelite kings, including palaces of ashlar masonry, a six-chambered gateway,³⁸ a set of stables,³⁹ a water system⁴⁰ and a large grain silo (able to hold about 12,800 bushels of grain).⁴¹

Further west, on the coast south of Carmel, are two other important archaeological digs. One is at Tel Dor, where a clan of the Sea Peoples⁴² settled about 1200 BC. The clans of Asher and Manasseh were allotted Dor by Joshua (cf. Jos. 19:24-31; cf. 17:11; 1 Chr. 7:29), but they were unable to occupy it (cf. 1g. 1:27). The Israelites finally conquered it in about 1000 BC (2 Sa. 24:6-7).⁴³ Under Solomon's reign, Dor became the seat of his fourth tax district (cf. 1 Kg. 4:7, 11). Dor apparently flourished during this period, when it became Israel's principle port under the united monarchy. Still, many of the inhabitants were Phoenician, and shortly after the nation divided under Rehoboam, the archaeological evidence seems to indicate that Dor was destroyed by Shishak of Egypt (cf. 1 Kg. 14:25), though perhaps it was rebuilt by the Israelite King Ahab.⁴⁴ Later, in 733 BC, Dor was conquered by the Assyrians and annexed as part of an Assyrian province.⁴⁵

Just south of Dor is Caesarea, the other important site on the coast. Caesarea, as the name implies, was built during the Roman Period by Herod the Great in honor of Augustus. According to Josephus, Caesarea Maritima was as large as Piraeus, the port at Athens, and if so, then it was one of the two or three largest ports on the

³⁸ It is debatable if this gateway is as old as Solomon, but underneath it is another two-chambered gateway which may correspond to the biblical statement concerning the Solomonic structures. For a defense of the Solomonic dating of the six-chambered gate, see V. Fargo, "Is the Solomonic City Gate at Megiddo Really Solomonic?" *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1983) 8, 10, 12-13.

³⁹ Popularly called "Solomon's Stables," this structure has been beset with controversy. First, not all archaeologists agree that they are stables, and most archaeologists believe they date to the 9th, not the 10th century BC, thus putting them in the period of the Omride Dynasty rather than the period of Solomon, cf. I. Finkelstein and D. Ussishkin, "Back to Megiddo," *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1994) 39-40.

⁴⁰ The Megiddo water system includes a spring, spring chamber, stairs, tunnel, and stepped shaft. Some of the structures date to the time of Solomon, and other improvements date to the time of Ahab, cf. D. Cole, "How Water Tunnels Worked," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1980) 10-15.

⁴¹ Finkelstein and Ussishkin, 26-43.

⁴² The Sikils at Dor were a tribe related to the Philistines.

⁴³ E. Stern, "The Many Masters of Dor: Part I," *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1993) 22-31.

⁴⁴ E. Stern, "The Many Masters of Dor: Part II," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1993) 18-29.

⁴⁵ E. Stern, "The Many Masters of Dor: Part III," *BAR* (May-Jun. 1993) 38-49.

Mediterranean. Remarkably, Caesarea was built on a shore with no natural harbor, and to compensate for this, Herod built a great stone breakwater more than 200' wide and 1500' long on the south of the harbor as well as a smaller breakwater on the north.⁴⁶ In the summer of 1982, scuba divers uncovered wooden forms used by Herod's divers to mold Roman hydraulic concrete, which was poured through leather tubes into the wooden forms after they had been lowered to the ocean floor.⁴⁷ Herod began building the city of Caesarea with imported white marble in about 13-12 BC, and it was completed in ten or twelve years. It included a palace, civic halls, an amphitheater, a hippodrome, a system of aqueducts, warehouse vaults, a temple, sewers and a high defense wall. When the Romans annexed Judea in AD 6, they chose Caesarea as the seat of provincial Roman government.

In the earliest Christian era, Philip the evangelist concluded his preaching tour in Caesarea (cf. Ac. 8:40). Later, Paul used this port several times in his travels (cf. Ac. 9:30; 18:22; 21:8). After his arrest in Jerusalem, he was incarcerated there for two years (cf. Ac. 23:23-24, 33; 24:27). Of course, he debarked from Caesarea as a prisoner on his final trip to Rome. Besides Paul, Peter also visited Caesarea, where he was divinely directed to the home of a centurion, who subsequently became a Christian (cf. Ac. 10:1, 23-24). Luke reported that Herod Agrippa I was struck down by one of God's angels at Caesarea because of his egotism (cf. Ac. 12:19b-23)⁴⁸

The Jordan Rift

Following southward from the Sea of Galilee, the deep trench which holds the Jordan River, the Dead Sea and the Arabah extends in almost a straight line for more than two hundred miles. In the ancient history of Israel, the Jordan River formed the final formidable obstacle barring entry into the land under Joshua. Moses pleaded with God to let him cross the river (Dt. 3:23-28), but when he was refused, the task was passed down to Joshua (Jos. 3-4). The Jordan was not easily crossed at will, and during the period of the judges, control of the fords was strategically important. Ehud won the southern fords from the Moabites (Jg. 3:28). When Gideon fought the Midianites, many Midianites were trapped by the Israelite army at the central fords (Jg. 7:24-25). In Jephthah's war with Ephraim, he stationed guards at the fords who required a password from anyone who wanted to cross (cf. Jg. 12:4-6). A large number of Ephraimites were executed when they could not properly pronounce the password. Later, during the time of Saul, the special forces from Jabesh-Gilead which crossed the Jordan to reclaim the corpse of Saul were compelled to make their

⁴⁶ Josephus indicated that the blocks of stone were 50' x 18' x 10', and they were submerged to a depth of about 120'.

⁴⁷ L. Vann, "Herod's Harbor Construction Recovered Underwater," *BAR* (May-Jun. 1983) 10-14.

⁴⁸ R. Bull, "Caesarea Maritima: The Search for Herod's City," *BAR* (May-Jun. 1982) 24-40.

crossing under the cover of night (1 Sa. 31:11-13). During the civil war between the clan of David and the clan of Saul, Saul's surviving son established his battle headquarters in the transjordan (2 Sa. 2:8). Later still, when David abdicated the throne during the Absalom revolt, he also forded the Jordan to escape (2 Sa. 17:22). Elijah and Elisha both crossed the Jordan near Jericho by miracles (2 Kg. 2:8, 13-14), and Elisha performed two other miracles at the river. In one, he ordered a Syrian military officer to bathe in it for healing (cf. 2 Kg. 5:10-14), and in the other he caused a lost axhead to float to the surface (2 Kg. 6:1-7).

In the New Testament, the Jordan River gains its notoriety from the baptisms performed there by John the Baptist (Mt. 3:6, 13//Mk. 1:5, 9//Lk. 3:3//Jn. 1:28; 3:23) and the disciples of Jesus (Jn. 3:26; 4:1-3). John's baptisms were conducted at Bethabara (near Jericho) and Aenon near Salim (south of Beth Shean). During Jesus' Galilean ministry, he crossed the Jordan near the Galilee lake, and of course, on his last trip to Jerusalem he crossed the fords at Jericho.

At its end, the Jordan flows into the northern tip of the Dead Sea (also called the Salt Sea, the Sea of the Arabah and the Eastern Sea). All biblical references to the Dead Sea are in the Old Testament. The Dead Sea has no outlet, and evaporation keeps pace with the incoming waters of the Jordan River and the various other smaller tributaries which empty into it. On its western shore was the tribal holdings of Judah, while on its eastern shore were the ancient nations of Moab and Edom.

Several important historical sites are associated with the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. Unquestionably, the most important site on the Jordan is Jericho, the major city at the south end of the Jordan Valley. The city was the first target of Joshua's military invasion after crossing the Jordan fords (Jos. 6-7). Under excavation for many years, the archaeological picture at Jericho is beset with technical problems and scholarly controversy. Early excavators (mid-19th and early 20th century) did not have sufficient knowledge of pottery to properly date their work. Later, John Garstang worked at the site from 1929-1936, concluding that the invasion by Joshua occurred in about 1400-1388 BC, a date that generally fits into the biblical narrative. His work revealed that the Jericho of that period was destroyed by a great conflagration, aided by an earthquake. In 1952, however, Kathleen Kenyon began work on the mound. Her conclusions were that Garstang's dating was far too late and that no strongly fortified city existed at the time of Joshua's invasion. Since that time, archaeologists and biblical scholars have wrangled with the problem. Part of the issue hinges on coordinating the evidences at Jericho with the data from other digs regarding Joshua's invasion. Some scholars interpret the evidence in line with Garstang's original date (which tends to support the authenticity of the biblical

account),⁴⁹ while a majority follow the conclusions of Kenyon (which conflict with the biblical account).⁵⁰ One thing everyone agrees upon. Jericho suffered a violent overthrow sometime between 1550 and 1400 BC.

A second biblical narrative associated with the Dead Sea is the story recounting the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Ge. 19). The site of Sodom and Gomorrah has not been identified, though speculation for a long time has been that the cities lie beneath the waters of the Dead Sea. More skeptical scholars have questioned whether the cities ever existed at all, and some consigned them to a mythological but not an historical existence. Thus, when Giovanni Pettinato, the chief Ebla epigrapher, announced that the names of the five biblical “cities of the Plain” had been uncovered in the Ebla cuneiform tablets (3rd millennium B.C.), it caused quite a stir (cf. Ge. 14).⁵¹ Further examination cast doubt on the announcement,⁵² though Pettinato defended his position.⁵³ When the water level in the Dead Sea dropped sufficiently to examine the sea floor (due to irrigation from the Jordan north of the sea), archaeologists found no evidence of the two cities in the southern seabed. However, two American archaeologists believe they have found evidence of the five ancient Cities of the Plain at Bab Edh-Dhra and nearby sites on the east of the sea.⁵⁴

Finally, by far the most well-known site related to the Dead Sea is the excavation and discoveries at Qumran. Qumran is important for the light it sheds on the diversity of first century Judaism as well as for the manuscript evidence it provides for the Hebrew Bible. Qumran was discovered in 1947 by a Bedouin shepherd boy searching for a lost goat along the cliffs of the northwestern Dead Sea shore. Since that time a considerable scholarly discussion, and sometimes scholarly war, has been waged over the identification of the original community and the publication/translation of the scrolls found there.

First, there is no unanimous opinion about the group who established Qumran. The majority opinion, following the conclusion of the director of excavations, Roland de Vaux, is that they were Essenes. If so, this reactionary group, which flourished

⁴⁹ B. Wood, “Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho,” *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1990) 44-57.

⁵⁰ P. Bienkowski, “Jericho was Destroyed in the Middle Bronze Age, Not the Late Bronze Age,” *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1990) 45-49, 68-69. Wood’s defense of his reconstruction is also contained in this same article, “Dating Jericho’s Destruction: Bienkowski is Wrong on All Counts.”

⁵¹ H. Shanks, “Syria Tries to Influence Ebla Scholarship,” *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1979) 45-46.

⁵² “Ebla Evidence Evaporates,” *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1979) 52-53; “New Ebla Epigrapher Attacks Conclusion of Ousted Ebla Scholar,” *BAR* (May-Jun. 1980) 56; A. Archi, “Are ‘The Cities of the Plain’ Mentioned in the Ebla Tablets?,” *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1981) 54-55.

⁵³ G. Pettinato, “Ebla and the Bible--Observations on the New Epigrapher’s Analysis,” *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1980) 38-41.

⁵⁴ “Have Sodom & Gomorrah Been Found?,” *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1980) 26-36.

during the time of Jesus, belonged to one of three major theological groups within Judaism (the others being the Sadducees and Pharisees). Active in Jerusalem until the 70s BC, they made a radical break with the temple and normative Jewish society. Withdrawing to the shores of the Dead Sea, they awaited the end of the world with its war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness.⁵⁵ In the Jewish wars of the late 60s and early 70s, Qumran was destroyed by the Roman army.

Several minority opinions have surfaced also concerning the identity of the group at Qumran. Some have concluded that Qumran was not a commune at all, but rather, a winter villa for wealthy Jews. Others have suggested that Qumran was a military fortress. The most recent conjecture is that it was a customs post and rest stop for travelers along a major trade route.⁵⁶

Far more attention has focused upon the scrolls themselves than upon speculation about the community, though naturally the two are related. For both Jews and Christians, prior to the discovery of the scrolls there were no copies of the text of the Hebrew Bible earlier than the 9th-11th centuries.⁵⁷ However, the scrolls, some of which date well before the time of Jesus, pushed our material evidence of the text backwards a thousand years. Every book in the canonical Hebrew Bible except Esther is represented among the scrolls, and they are now our oldest witness to the Old Testament in its original language.⁵⁸

Two additional controversies have surrounded the scrolls since their discovery, one theological and the other academic. Theologically, scholars have debated the meaning of the scrolls for understanding the Judaism of the first century and the relationship of Qumran ideas to Christian thought. It has been speculated that John the Baptist was once a member of Qumran, and his practice of baptism might have had its roots there. Christian ideas about the Messiah, Jesus' teachings on divorce, the notion of vicarious suffering, Christian baptism, the Eucharist, dualism in John's Gospel, the charismatic gift of prophecy, the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment have all been connected to the theology of Qumran to greater or lesser degrees.⁵⁹

More recently, the publication and translation of the scrolls became an extremely agitated controversy. The issue revolved around the fact that when the

⁵⁵ W. Farmer, *IDB* (1962) II.143-149.

⁵⁶ A. Crown and L. Cansdale, "Qumran: Was It an Essene Settlement?," *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1994) 24-35, 73-77.

⁵⁷ This was due to the Jewish practice of reverently burying old copies of Scripture in secret storage rooms (called *genizah*). The standard sources for study of the Old Testament at that time was the Masoretic Text of the Jews, the copies of the Septuagint, and the Samaritan Pentateuch.

⁵⁸ Y. Yadin, *The Message of the Scrolls* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957); W. LaSor, *ISBE* (1979) I.883-897.

⁵⁹ M. Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (New York: Scribners, 1961).

scrolls were discovered in mid-century, their publication and translation was divided up among several scholars. While a number of the scrolls have been available for some time, many have been locked away in the vaults of universities and museums and unavailable to the larger scholarly community. The lion's share of these unpublished scrolls (more than fifty of them) had gone to a Polish scholar and former Catholic priest, J. T. Milik. He and the other handful of privileged scholars who possessed the unpublished scrolls seemed to consider their access to them a private affair, and as Milik said to *Time* magazine, "The world will see the manuscripts when I have done the necessary work." The "necessary work," however, stretched into decades, and pressure began to build against the scholars who held scrolls as well as against Israel's Department of Antiquities, who presumably had authority for publication. All sorts of accusations and theories circulated about the unpublished scrolls, including the notion that they contained material so theologically embarrassing to the Roman Catholic Church that the Pope had pulled rank on Father Milik and forbade their publication.⁶⁰ In the end, the gridlock was broken by a computer. Two scholars took a concordance of the scrolls, originally assembled in the 1950s and finally published in 1988, and with the help of computer technology, managed to reconstruct the texts under the title, *A Preliminary Edition of the Unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls*.⁶¹

The Sinai, the Negev and the Territory of Judah

The Sinai Peninsula and the Negev are significant, especially for the history of the Old Testament. During the patriarchal period, Abraham lived in the Negev at Beersheba, among other places (cf. Ge. 21:22-34; 22:19).⁶² Hagar, Abraham's slave wife who was expelled from his family, wandered in the Negev, where an angel assisted her survival (cf. Ge. 21:14-21).⁶³ Later, Isaac and Jacob also visited the site (cf. Ge. 26:23-33; 46:1).

⁶⁰ The full intrigue of this battle, including accusations, lawsuits, and the final availability of the unpublished scrolls can be followed in the articles of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, "At Least Publish the Dead Sea Scrolls Timetable!" (May-Jun. 1989); "Dead Sea Scrolls Scandal," (Jul.-Aug. 1989); "What Should Be Done About the Unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls," (Sep.-Oct. 1989); "Dead Sea Scroll Variation on 'Show and Tell'--It's Called 'Tell, But No Show,'" (Mar.-Apr. 1990); "Scroll Editors Spurn \$100,000 Offer to Publish Book of Photographs of Still-Secret Texts," (Jul.-Aug. 1990); "Who Controls the Scrolls?" (Mar.-Apr. 1991); "Chief Dead Sea Scroll Editor Denounces Judaism, Israel; Claims He's Seen Four More Scrolls Found by Bedouin," (Jan.-Feb. 1991); "Dead Sea Scrolls Update: From the Press," (Nov.-Dec. 1992); "Another View of the 'Dead Sea Scrolls Scandal'" (May-Jun. 1992); "Lawsuit Diary," (May-Jun. 1993); "MMT as the Maltese Falcon," (Nov.-Dec. 1994).

⁶¹ "BAS Publishes Dead Sea Scrolls," *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1991) 4.

⁶² For the viewpoint that Tel Es-Seba at Beersheba is also the city of Ziklag, in the time of David (1 Sa. 27:1-7), see V. Fritz, "Where Is David's Ziklag?" *BAR* (May-Jun. 1993) 58-6 1.

⁶³ Beersheba is the most important site in the Negev, and it has been under excavation for a number of years, cf. Z. Herzog, "Beersheba of the Patriarchs," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1980) 12-28.

Much later still, when the Israelites left Egypt, they first traveled southward toward the Sinai mountains where they camped at the foot of Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai).⁶⁴ There, Yahweh entered into covenant with the nation and gave to them the Book of the Covenant and the Ten Commandments (cf. Ex. 19-24). From Sinai, they traveled northward toward the land of Canaan through the “great and terrible desert” (Dt. 1:19; cf. 8:15), eventually arriving at Kadesh Barnea.⁶⁵ At Kadesh in the Negev, they broke covenant with Yahweh by refusing to go into the land (Nu. 14), and consequently, Yahweh sentenced them to thirty-eight more years of camping in the desert until the first generation had died (Dt. 2:14-15). Eventually, they entered Canaan from the east rather than the south, crossing the Jordan near Jericho. However, during their desert sojourn, the Israelites were successful in conquering the Negev city-state of Arad (Nu. 21:1-3).⁶⁶ After the conquest of Jericho under Joshua, Ai was the next city they attacked (Jos. 7-8).⁶⁷ Then followed the remainder of the conquest and the history of Israel in Canaan. When the land was divided among the twelve clans, the northern Negev was part of the allotment to Judah and Simeon (cf. Jg. 1:16-17).

During the period of the judges, the center of worship was at Shiloh, where the tabernacle was pitched (Jos. 18:1; Jg. 18:31) and the allotment of land had been conducted (cf. Jos. 18:3-10; 21:1-2ff.). Shiloh was in the territorial holdings of Ephraim. Here, Eli and Samuel served as priests (1 Sa. 1:3, 24; 3:21). Tel Shiloh has been excavated, and while the exact location of the tabernacle has not been identified, the general location is well enough known.⁶⁸ More famous than Shiloh, however, was the eventual building of the first temple in Judah during the time of

⁶⁴ The exact location of Mt. Sinai is debated among scholars and archaeologists. In the first place, the modern Sinai Mountains are a range, not a single peak. The most popular site is Jebel Musa, but a half dozen other sites are backed by various scholars also, cf. I. Beit-Arie, “The Route Through Sinai,” *BAR* (May-Jun. 1988) 36-37. For more information on Sinai and the exodus from the archaeologists’ viewpoint, see I. Beit-Arie, “Fifteen Years in Sinai,” *BAR* (Jul-Aug. 1984) 26-54.

⁶⁵ Excavations at Tel Kadesh-Barnea so far have been inconclusive regarding any remains from the period of the exodus. In fact, there is some question as to whether or not Kadesh has been correctly identified, cf. R. Cohen, “Did I Excavate Kadesh-Barnea?” *BAR* (May-Jun. 1981) 20-33.

⁶⁶ Later still, Arad was conquered again by Joshua (cf. Jos. 12:7, 14). The excavation at Arad is important because the city had uninterrupted Israelite occupation from the 10th century BC to the 6th century BC. In every layer of strata for 350 years, inscriptions have been found--more than 100 texts and fragments, cf. Z. Herzog, M. Aharoni and A. Rainey, “Arad, An Ancient Israelite Fortress with a Temple to Yahweh,” *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1987) 16-35.

⁶⁷ Like Jericho, the site at Ai (modern Khirbet et-Tell) is beset with problems, the most formidable being an absence of human occupation during the period when the Israelites supposedly attacked it, cf. Z. Zevit, “The Problem of Ai,” *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1985) 58-68. However, whether or not the site has been correctly identified is also an issue, cf. E. Blaiklock, *NIDBA* (1983) 14.

⁶⁸ For information on the excavation of Tel Shiloh, see I. Finkelstein, “Shiloh Yields Some, But Not All, of Its Secrets,” *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1986) 22-41; A. Kaufman, “Fixing the Site of the Tabernacle at Shiloh,” *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1988) 46-52.

Solomon.⁶⁹ Solomon also built a string of fortified cities on his southern border in the Negev to protect against invasion (1 Kg. 9:15-19).⁷⁰

Prior to the time of David, the perennial enemies of Judah were the Philistines who occupied Judah's western border.⁷¹ The Philistines were among the first to begin smelting iron in Palestine, and their control of the iron industry gave them a distinct military advantage (cf. 1 Sa. 13:19-22).⁷² Considerable excavation has been conducted in Ashkelon,⁷³ Ekron,⁷⁴ and Tel Batash (biblical Timnah, where Samson found his first wife, cf. Jg. 14:1-2).⁷⁵ The Philistines, like Israel, also migrated to Palestine (cf. Am. 9:7), coming to the south coast of Palestine in the invasion of the Sea Peoples from the Aegean.⁷⁶

Archaeologically speaking, one of the most famous digs in southern Palestine is at Tel Lachish. Lachish, situated about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem in the Judean hills, was a fortified city-state from very early periods. In the conquest of Canaan, Joshua defeated the king of Lachish, who was allied with four other kings (cf. Jos. 10:3, 5ff.). Excavations have confirmed a major destruction during the 12th century BC.⁷⁷ After the Israelite kingdom split, Lachish was heavily fortified by Rehoboam of Judah (2 Chr. 11:5-12)⁷⁸ and from that time, it was possibly the most important Judean city next to Jerusalem itself.⁷⁹ In 701 BC, Sennacherib of Assyria campaigned in Judah, laying siege to all Judah's fortified cities, Lachish being one of

⁶⁹ It may well be that a factor behind the secession of the north from the south was residual bitterness for moving the center for worship from Shiloh to Jerusalem. Ephraim lost its role as holding the central shrine, and when the kingdom divided, Ephraim reclaimed its lost prominence at the Bethel Shrine.

⁷⁰ An extraordinary number of these fortresses have been uncovered, built to three plans, some oval, some square and some rectangular, cf. R. Cohen, "The Fortresses King Solomon Built to Protect His Southern Border," *BAR* (May-Jun. 1985) 56-70.

⁷¹ A general summary of the archaeological information we now have on the Philistines can be found in T. Dothan, "What We Know About the Philistines," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1982) 20-44.

⁷² J. Muhly, "How Iron Technology Changed the Ancient World and Gave the Philistines a Military Edge," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1982) 40-54.

⁷³ L. Stager, "When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled in Ashkelon," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1991) 24-43; L. Stager, "Eroticism & Infanticide at Ashkelon," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1991) 34-53; N. Logan, "No Grid Lock at Ashkelon--The View from the Square," *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1988) 34-37.

⁷⁴ T. Dothan and S. Gitin, "Ekron of the Philistines," *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1990) 20-36; S. Gitin, "Ekron of the Philistines: Part II" *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1990) 32-42.

⁷⁵ G. Kelm and A. Mazar, "Excavating in Samson Country," *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1989) 36-49.

⁷⁶ B. Wood, "The Philistines Enter Canaan," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1991) 44-52; A. Raban and R. Stieglitz, "The Sea Peoples and Their Contributions to Civilization," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1991) 34-42; V. Karageorghis, "Exploring Philistine Origins on the Island of Cyprus," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1984) 16-28.

⁷⁷ In fact, Lachish may have been as critical a conquest as Jericho in Joshua's campaign, cf. D. Ussishkin, "Lachish, Key to the Israelite Conquest of Canaan?" *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1987) 18-39.

⁷⁸ The huge gate at Lachish is the largest and most impressive one yet unearthed from ancient Israel, cf. D. Ussishkin, "Restoring the Great Gate at Lachish," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1988) 42-47.

⁷⁹ D. Ussishkin, "Answers at Lachish," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1979) 18.

them (2 Kg. 18:13-14, 17; 2 Chr. 32:9).⁸⁰ In the Babylonian invasion of Judah under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, Lachish was one of the last three fortified cities to be destroyed before the kingdom collapsed (cf. Je. 34:7). In the 1930s, British archaeologist John Starkey uncovered the famous “Lachish Letters,” correspondence written with a reed pen in iron carbon ink on ostraca. These twenty-one letters or fragments of letters must date to shortly before the fall of Jerusalem described in Jeremiah 34, for they describe the extreme military situation. One of the most famous lines from these letters (Letter IV), written from an unidentified military outpost north of Lachish, reads in part, “And let (my lord) know that for the beacons of Lachish we are watching, according to all the indications which my lord hath given, for we cannot see Azekah.”⁸¹ Apparently, Azekah had already fallen to the Babylonian army. Soon, Lachish would fall, and then Jerusalem.⁸² The letters even refer to a “prophet” who was demoralizing the country, the very same charges leveled at the biblical Jeremiah just before Jerusalem fell (cf. Je. 38:1-4).

As is to be expected, since direct material remains from Jesus are nonexistent, archaeological information is scant. The Jerusalem-Jericho road is the setting for Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-35). The wilderness of Judea, where Jesus spent 40 days with the wild animals, was where angels sustained him and where the temptations took place (cf. Mt. 4:1//Mk. 1:12//Lk. 4:1-2). At Bethlehem, the ancient city of Naomi, Ruth, her great-grandson David, and the birthplace of Jesus (cf. Ru. 1:1, 22; 4:18-21; 1 Sa. 16:1; 20:6; Mt. 2:1; Lk. 2:4-7),⁸³ is the cave where traditionally Jesus was born.⁸⁴ Bethany is where Jesus raised Lazarus from the

⁸⁰ In Sennacherib’s own words which exist in ancient Assyrian cuneiform records, he “laid siege to 46....strong cities, walled forts and to countless small villages (of Judah) in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth-) ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breaches as well as siege machines,” cf. Ussishkin, “Answers,” 29. Bas-reliefs have been uncovered depicting the siege of Lachish from the excavations of Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh, cf. Ussishkin, “Answers,” 24-25.

⁸¹ Azekah was less than seven miles from Lachish.

⁸² R Wright, “Lachish and Azekah Were the Only Fortified Cities of Judah that Remained,” *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1982) 72-73. For a somewhat different, but similar reconstruction of the situation of the letters, see O. Horowski, “Yadin Presents New Interpretation of the Famous Lachish Letters,” *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1984) 74-77.

⁸³ There is an interesting word-play on the name Bethlehem in the Book of Ruth. The Hebrew form of the name is *Beth* (= house) and *lehem* (= bread), hence, “house of bread.” The story of Ruth begins with a famine in Bethlehem, that is, “no bread in the ‘house of bread’” (cf. 1:1). Later, after moving from Bethlehem to Moab for several years and then returning, Naomi came back to the “house of bread” to find not only bread, but also, posterity through the child of Boaz and Ruth (4:16-17).

⁸⁴ The biblical narrative indicates that Jesus was placed in a manger (feed trough) after his birth (Lk. 2:7, 12, 16), which in turn gave rise to the notion that he was born in a caravanserai (a sort of hostelry for travelers) or a stable accompanied by draft animals. Actually, the biblical account does not specify the place where Jesus was born except to say that it was in Bethlehem and that it was not at the “inn.” The earliest tradition (2nd century AD) is that Jesus was born in a cave, cf. *The Protoevangelium of James*, 18-19 and Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, LXXVII. Most scholars have given credence to the cave tradition, an opinion that crops up each December as a foil to the more popular but unlikely depiction of an English stable, cf. K. Laub, “Scholars Contend It was ‘Away in a

dead (cf. Jn. 11:1), where he spent the night just before the triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Jn. 12:1; cf. Mk. 11:1//Lk. 19:29), and where Mary anointed his feet with expensive perfume (Mk. 14:3//Jn. 12:1-3).

Jebus, Jerusalem, and the First Temple Period

When the Israelites invaded Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, the city of Jerusalem already had a lengthy history going back into the early and middle bronze ages. Abram had encountered the priest-king of *Salem* after rescuing his nephew, Lot, and he had tithed to him from the war spoils (cf. Ge. 14:17-20). Later, in the Amarna Letters of the 14th century BC, the name of the city was *Urusalim*, and still later, in Assyrian records, it is *Urusilimmu*. Several biblical passages indicate that during Jebusite occupation, the city was called Jebus (cf. Jg. 19:10-11; 1 Chr. 11:4). The Masoretic pointing in the Hebrew Bible gives *Yerushalayim*, while the more familiar *Yerusalem* comes from the Aramaic Old Testament. Scholars generally agree that the prefix means “foundation of,” though they do not all agree on the meaning of the suffix. If *Shalem*, then it is simply a place name, but if the vocalization is related to the Hebrew *Shalom*, then it is “foundation of peace.”⁸⁵

In the invasion, Joshua fought and defeated a coalition of kings led by Adonizedek of Jerusalem (Jos. 10). The king of Jerusalem, along with the others, was hung (Jos. 10:26; cf. 12:10a), but it is clear that while the clans of Judah and Benjamin were allotted Jerusalem on the border of their territorial holdings (Jos. 15:8; 18:28), the city remained firmly in the hands of the Jebusites (Jos. 15:63). After the death of Joshua, Jerusalem was briefly controlled by the clan of Judah (1g. 1:8), but this control was apparently short-lived (Jg. 1:21; cf. 19:11-12). It would not be until the time of David that this Canaanite stronghold would pass into the hands of the Israelites permanently.

The story of David’s conquest of Jebus is brief but intriguing (2 Sa. 5:6-9//1 Chr. 11:4-7). The capture of Jebus was possibly accomplished by using the watershaft at the Gihon spring, either by ascending the shaft itself or by capturing Jerusalem’s water source and denying the city water.⁸⁶ Subsequently, David established Jerusalem as the political and religious center of the nation (2 Sa. 5:9-12; 6:1-19; 1 Chr. 11:7-9; 15:1--16:43). He immediately began to make plans to build a

Basement,” *Detroit Free Press* (Associated Press, Dec. 16, 1994) 1A. The term *katalyma* (= inn, lodging, guest room) may suggest that since there already were guests in the guest room at the ancestral clan home of Joseph, the birth occurred in the storage cave beneath (or behind) the home. Incidentally, the biblical account makes no mention of animals being attendant at the birth. The site of the Church of the Nativity may well mark the actual location.

⁸⁵ M. Burrows, *IDB* (1962) 11.843-844; W. LaSor, *ISBE* (1982) II.998ff.

⁸⁶ The translational problem of the word *tsinnor* (= watershaft, scaling hooks) and the other speculations concerning this military feat can be followed in H. Shank, *The City of David: A Guide to Biblical Jerusalem* (Washington: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1975) 31-37; T. Kleven, “Up the Waterspout,” *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1994) 34-35.

permanent temple (2 Sa. 7:1-3), and though Yahweh forbade him, David's son Solomon erected the first temple on the site that David had selected, Mt. Zion to the north of the Hill of Ophel (1 Chr.21:25--22:1; 2 Chr. 3-7)⁸⁷

The City of David is considerably smaller than modern Jerusalem. It lay to the south of the modern city on the Hill of Ophel, bounded on the east by the Kidron Valley and the Mt. of Olives and on the west by the Tyropoean Valley. South of the City of David lies the Valley of Hinnom, which curves northward on the west side. The major water source in ancient times was the Gihon Spring, located in a cave on the eastern slope. Since the Jebusite wall was built higher on the slope than the spring in order to provide an impregnable defense, the Jebusites also built an underground shaft to the spring in order to have access to the water in case of siege.

Two hundred and fifty years after David, Hezekiah built a 1750' tunnel connecting the Gihon Spring on the east slope to the Pool of Siloam on the west slope of Ophel (2 Kg. 20:20; 2 Chr. 32:2-4, 30). This S-shaped tunnel, which was constructed by tunneling from both the east and west so as to meet in the middle, still exists. In 1880, an account of its construction (called the Siloam Inscription) was found inscribed in ancient Hebrew in the middle of the tunnel.⁸⁸ The northern crew, tunneling through much harder rock than the southern crew, made slower progress. After months of digging in their separate tunnels, wondering if their engineers had directed them with enough precision to meet, the men of one crew heard through about 100' of solid rock the vibrations and sounds of the other crew. Zig-zagging back and forth, the two crews edged closer to a meeting. When they were only about 4 1/2' apart, they could hear each other's voices. And after they met, they left the following account:

This is the story of the boring through. While [the tunnelers lifted] the pick-axe each toward his fellow and while 3 cubits [remained yet] to be bored [through, there was heard] the voice of a man calling his fellow--for there was a split [or overlap] in the rock on the right hand and on [the left hand]. When the tunnel was driven through, the

⁸⁷ For a discussion concerning the architectural features and the various interpretations of the biblical data, see V. Fritz, "Temple Architecture: What Can Archaeology Tell Us About Solomon's Temple?" *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1987) 38-49. While a decade ago most scholars had concluded that no actual remains survived from Solomonic Jerusalem, more recent excavations have modified that conclusion. One archaeologist is certain that part of the eastern wall of the Temple Mount is of Solomonic construction, cf. E. Laperrousaz, "King Solomon's Wall Still Supports the Temple Mount," *BAR* (May-Jun. 1987) 34-44. Also, a gate has been uncovered that seems to fit the criteria for a first temple period, cf. E. Mazar, "Royal Gateway to Ancient Jerusalem Uncovered," *BAR* (May-Jun. 1989) 38-51. Archaeologists and designers, working together, have created a model of the First Temple Period Jerusalem, which can be seen on guided tours through the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, cf. R. Gonen, "Visualizing the First Temple Jerusalem," *BAR* (May-Jun. 1989) 52-55.

⁸⁸ S.Parker, "Siloam Inscription Memorializes Engineering Achievement," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug.1994) 36-38.

*tunnelers hewed the rock, each man toward his fellow, pick-axe against pick-axe. And the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir for 1200 cubits. The height of the rock above the head of the tunnelers was a hundred cubits.*⁸⁹

The first temple and the city of Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonian army (2 Kg. 24//2 Chr. 36//Je. 52).⁹⁰ Siege ramps were built against the walls, and when the walls were breached, the Israeli army fled. The temple furnishings and utensils of value were taken as booty to Babylon, and the remaining temple structure, the palace and the homes of the citizens were torched. The walls around Jerusalem were broken down by the Babylonian army, and the best of the citizens were taken as captives to Mesopotamia.

Jerusalem and the Second Temple Period

After the first temple was destroyed in 586 BC, the temple mount remained unoccupied for about half a century. Then in 538 BC, when Cyrus the Great of Persia issued a proclamation that dislocated peoples could return to their homelands (cf. 2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezr. 1:2-4; 6:3-5), many of the Jews in Babylon took full advantage of this opportunity. The leader of the returning group was Sheshbazzar, a prince of Judah (Ezr. 1:8). Zerubbabel, who presumably succeeded Sheshbazzar,⁹¹ was the primary leader in building a second temple, first by rebuilding the great altar for sacrifice (Ezr. 3:1-6), then by laying a foundation for the second temple edifice itself (Ezr. 3:7-13), and finally by finishing the actual sanctuary (Ezr. 4-6; Hg. 1; Zec. 4).

The design of the second temple shared approximately the same pattern as the first one. It contained the same furniture in the Holy Place as before (lampstand, table for holy bread, and altar of incense), though in the Most Holy Place, only a stone marked the place where the Ark of the Testimony once stood.⁹² In about 445 BC, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and led the community in rebuilding the walls of the city (Ne. 1-7). Then, when the Persian Empire fell to Alexander the Great, Jerusalem and Judea passed into a very troubled period during which the Greeks attempted to

⁸⁹ Shanks, 40-62; D. Gill, "How They Met," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1994) 20-33, 64.

⁹⁰ Of the remnants that exist from the first temple period, one of the most fascinating is the excavation of tombs which may have housed corpses of the later kings of Judah, cf. "Have the Tombs of the Kings of Judah Been Found?" *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1987) 54-56.

⁹¹ Some expositors have thought that Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were identical, but most biblical scholars understand them to have been two individuals. In any case, Zerubbabel is the name actively associated with the temple reconstruction project. Sheshbazzar mysteriously disappears from the accounts, and it is assumed that he died.

⁹² S. Westerholm, *ISBE* (1988) IV.769.

Grecianize the Jews. The climax of this effort came under Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria, who appointed his own high priest, Menelaus, over the Jerusalem temple. Menelaus was not even a member of the high priestly family, and furthermore, his primary claim to the office was the size of his bribe. The resistance faction among the Jews was successful in ousting Menelaus, but Antiochus Epiphanes took affront, and he wreaked vengeance by attempting to wipe out the Jewish religion altogether. He forbade sacrifice and the ritual of circumcision, he banned the Sabbaths and the liturgical calendar, he forced the Jews to eat pork, and he erected an altar to Zeus in the very temple court. Jews who resisted were exterminated.

Finally, in open aggression against this oppression, a priest named Mattathias and his sons led a revolt against their Hellenistic overlords and won Jewish independence.⁹³ There followed about a century of Jewish independence during which the descendants of Mattathias (the Maccabees) ruled as priest-kings. The Maccabees consolidated their holdings, seized Idumaea (ancient Edom), took control of Samaria, and destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim. It was during this period that the two rival theological groups called the Pharisees and Sadducees emerged as well as the sectarians who withdrew to Qumran. In 63 BC, however, Jewish independence was once more lost when Pompey the Great conquered Palestine for Rome. Anthony established Herod the Great as king over Palestine (37-4 BC), and it was during the final period of Herod's reign that the birth of Jesus occurred (Mt. 2:1).⁹⁴

Whatever else may be said about Herod, he was a prolific builder, and one of his most important projects was to enlarge and reconstruct the second temple and its surrounding courts. In the end, the top surface of the temple mount was effectively doubled. To do this, Herod built a giant new enclosure wall on the west, raising the elevation of the western slope about 100' and filling in the intervening spaces of the Tyropoean Valley. This construction permanently changed the topography. Portions of the giant enclosure wall can be seen today (formally known as the Western Wall and colloquially as the Wailing Wall). Near the southwest corner of the enclosure wall, archaeologists discovered on a large ashlar block the Hebrew inscription, *To the place of Trumpeting to [declare]....*, probably the place where the beginning and ending of the Sabbaths were announced.⁹⁵ Another inscription which dates to Herod's temple is one which barred Gentiles from passing beyond the barrier at the risk of execution.⁹⁶

⁹³ This event has been honored ever since by the Jewish celebration of *Hanukkah* (= dedication).

⁹⁴ D. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960) 13-40.

⁹⁵ B. Masar, "Excavations Near Temple Mount Reveal Splendors of Herodian Jerusalem," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1980) 55.

⁹⁶ The Greek inscription reads, "No Gentile shall enter within the partition and barrier surrounding the temple, and whoever is caught shall be responsible to himself for his subsequent death." Of course, in the New Testament, St. Paul's arrest in Jerusalem resulted from the accusation that he brought a Greek beyond the barrier (cf. Ac. 2 1:27-

The attempt to precisely locate the second temple has been attended with considerable debate. It has long been assumed that the Muslim Dome of the Rock was built on the same site as the second temple, but the question has been reexamined periodically. One recent theory (Kaufman) is that the temple was located somewhat further north from the Dome of the Rock, and that the small Muslim cupola called the Dome of the Tablets is the approximate site of the ancient Most Holy Place of both the first and second temples.⁹⁷ Other theories are more consonant with the traditional assumption.⁹⁸ Today, the archaeological work in and around the temple mount necessarily must be attended with considerable diplomacy, especially since a large portion of the area belongs to the famous Muslim shrine where Mohammed is believed to have ascended into heaven.⁹⁹

Excavations around the temple mount and the Old City include work on some of its eight gates.¹⁰⁰ For centuries, the main entrance to Jerusalem's walled Old City has been the Damascus Gate. The gate that now exists, along with the present walls around the Old City, were built in the 16th century by Suleiman the Magnificent. Much earlier, in the Roman Period, a main entrance to the city was located here as well, probably built by Hadrian in the 2nd century AD.¹⁰¹ Another famous gate, the double-arched Golden Gate, was mortared over during the Middle Ages and remains permanently closed. Traditionally, it was at this site that Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (though, of course, the existing Golden Gate is much later than the time of Jesus). Beneath the present Golden Gate, however, is yet another gate. While the dating of the gate is debated, it could be as early as Solomon!¹⁰²

Visually reconstructing the Jerusalem of Herod has been a monumental work that is ongoing. With the help of archaeologists, master modeler Alec Garrard has recreated Herod's work in a 12' x 20' model.¹⁰³ Historically, Herod's edifice survived

29).

⁹⁷ A. Kaufman, "Where the Ancient Temple of Jerusalem Stood," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1983) 40-58.

⁹⁸ L. Ritmeyer, "Locating the Original Temple Mount," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1992) 24-45. The Ritmeyer article contains a helpful diagram which puts side-by-side diagrams showing twelve different scholarly and archaeological theories about the location of the temple, p. 44. Even more recently, Ritmeyer claims to have discovered actual niches in the Rock where the ark once rested, cf. "The Ark of the Covenant: Where It Stood in Solomon's Temple," *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1996) 46-55, 70-72.

⁹⁹ H. Shanks, "Excavating in the Shadow of the Temple Mount," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1986) 20-38.

¹⁰⁰ The eight gates to the Old City, beginning at the south and moving clockwise, are: Dung Gate, Zion Gate, Jaffa Gate, New Gate, Damascus Gate, Herod's Gate, Lion's Gate (also called St. Stephen's Gate) and Golden Gate.

¹⁰¹ M. Magen, "Recovering Roman Jerusalem--The Entryway Beneath Damascus Gate," *BAR* (May-Jun. 1988) 48-56.

¹⁰² J. Fleming, "The Undiscovered Gate Beneath Jerusalem's Golden Gate," *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1983) 24-37.

¹⁰³ K. Ritmeyer, "Herod's Temple in East Anglia," *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1993) 62-67; K. and L. Ritmeyer, "Reconstructing Herod's Temple Mount in Jerusalem," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1989) 23-42.

until AD 70, when during the Jewish revolt of 66-74, the Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Jesus in Jerusalem

So far as the biblical records are concerned, Jesus' contacts with the city of Jerusalem were occasional until just prior to his arrest and crucifixion. He was at the temple when an infant (Lk. 2:22ff.), he visited when he was twelve years old (Lk. 2:41ff.), and he may have visited annually with his parents at the pilgrim festivals. If we had only the synoptic gospels to rely upon, it would appear that Jesus conducted virtually all his ministry in Galilee and the north until the Passover when he was arrested and killed. John's Gospel, however, demonstrates that Jesus maintained contact with Jerusalem throughout his ministry. He attended at least two Passovers in Jerusalem (Jn. 2:13, 23; 11:55; 12:1, 12), the Feast of Booths (Jn. 7:2, 10), Hanukkah (Jn. 10:22-23) and one other pilgrim festival there (Jn. 5:1).¹⁰⁴ Thus, a considerable amount of the Fourth Gospel occurs in the context of Jerusalem, including the cleansing of the temple, the conversation with Nicodemus, the healing of the invalid at Bethesda, the debate about Jesus' messiahship and origins, the healing of the man born blind, the Good Shepherd sermon, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and finally, his arrest and passion.

Of the various gospel stories prior to Jesus' last week in Jerusalem, four have geographically critical locations. The temple scene occurred in the Court of the Nations (Jn. 2:14). Herod's reconstruction of the temple included a series of concentric courts and terraces. The Court of the Nations was the lowest outer enclosure, paved with marble, and open to all people so long as they observed the prescribed rules for decorum. It was as close as Gentiles could get to God. This was the place, however, where the temple hierarchy chose to allow money-changers to set up booths for currency exchange.¹⁰⁵ Also, there were marketing stalls for the animals considered fit for sacrifice. The Pool at *Bethesda* (= House of Mercy), where Jesus healed the invalid, was apparently near the Sheep Gate (cf. Ne. 3:1). Early tradition speaks of twin pools having five porticoes known as the Sheep Pool or Bethesda (Jn. 5:2). In the early 5th century, a Byzantine Church was built over the site, and archaeological work has tended to support the tradition that ancient Bethesda lies within the property of St. Anne's Church.¹⁰⁶ The Pool of Siloam, where the man born blind washed from his eyes the mud pack with which Jesus had anointed him, was

¹⁰⁴ During one Passover he apparently chose to stay away from Jerusalem (cf. 6:4; 7:1).

¹⁰⁵ Currency with Caesar's image or the impress of pagan deities was considered a defilement, so offerings and/or purchases had to be made with temple coinage, cf. E. Edersheim, *The Temple* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 46; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 138.

¹⁰⁶ D. Wicand, *ISBE* (1979) I.465-466.

the exit of Hezekiah's tunnel bringing water from the Gihon Spring to the western side of the Hill of Ophel (Jn. 9:7). It can be visited today. The raising of Lazarus occurred in Bethany (modern El-Azariéh), less than two miles from Jerusalem on the Jericho Road (Jn. 11:1). It is from Bethany that Jesus began his triumphant entry into Jerusalem during his final week there (cf. Mk. 11:1ff.).

The actual steps of Jesus in Jerusalem during the course of his final week of ministry cannot be precisely identified, other than his appearance at the temple. However, his route on the night of the betrayal can be fixed with a fair degree of certainty, beginning with the prayer in Gethsemene through the events of the crucifixion. The farewell meal occurred in an upper room (Mk. 14:15//Lk. 22:12).¹⁰⁷ From there, Jesus crossed the Kidron to the Mt. of Olives and entered a garden called Gethsemene, meaning "the Oil Press" (Lk. 22:39; Mk. 14:32//Mt. 26:36; Jn. 18:1). The Mt. of Olives is easily identified. Tourist brochures (not always reliable) claim that the olive trees at this traditional site may be 3000 years old.¹⁰⁸ Jesus was arrested on the Mt. of Olives by the temple guard and taken to the home of Caiaphas, the current high priest, where he was interrogated by Annas, the high priest emeritus (Jn. 18:12~14).¹⁰⁹ Beneath the present 1931 Church of St. Peter is a cave, thought by some to be the site where Jesus was detained by the high priests.¹¹⁰ From Caiaphas' home, Jesus was taken to a hearing before Pontius Pilate in the Antonia Fortress (Jn. 18:28).¹¹¹ The Fourth Gospel identifies the location as the *Gabbatha-Lithostroton* (= stone pavement). The most likely site for this event is the excavated stone pavement beneath the Convent of the Flagellation, the Convent of Our Lady of Sion, and the Greek Orthodox Convent.¹¹² Jesus also appeared briefly before Herod Antipas (Lk. 23:6-7), probably in the old Hasmonean palace.¹¹³ Once more brought before Pilate,

¹⁰⁷ The tourist site of the upper room has no claim to authenticity.

¹⁰⁸ *Holy Land Study Guide* (Educational Travel Agency, Inc.), 16. Against this, however, E. M. Blaiklock says the trees can only be verified as going back to the 7th century AD, *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 212. According to Josephus, all the trees in the environs of Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans during the siege in 70 AD. It is just possible that the present trees have grown from the roots of olive trees the Romans destroyed.

¹⁰⁹ Archaeologists are doubtful that the place in the Hinnom Valley called *Akeldama* (=Field of Blood) is the original site of Judas' suicide (Mt. 27:5, 7; Ac. 1:18-19), cf. L. and K. Ritmeyer, "Akeldama: Potter's Field or High Priest's Tombs?" *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1994) 22-35, 76. It may, however, contain the tomb of Annas who examined Jesus!

¹¹⁰ The chances of identifying Caiaphas' home, given the destruction of the city by Titus and its later rebuilding by the Romans, are slim.

¹¹¹ The Antonia Fortress (or Tower of Antonia), named after Mark Antony, had been erected by Herod near the northwest corner of the temple grounds. In Herod's times, a stairway led directly from the tower into the temple's Court of the Nations. Paul, also, was incarcerated here (cf. Ac. 21:37ff.), and the tower was destroyed by Titus in AD 70.

¹¹² W. Mare, *NIDBA* (1983) 201. However, there is another site, the fortress in the upper city adjacent to the three towers built by Herod the Great, which is favored by some authorities. No stone pavement has been uncovered there.

¹¹³ Y. Aharoni, et al, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 3rd ed (New York: Macmillan, 1993) 240.

Jesus was sentenced and then led out for crucifixion. The traditional route, the *Via Dolorosa* (= way of suffering), is marked today by the Roman Catholic fourteen stations of the cross.

Golgotha (= skull),¹¹⁴ the site of the crucifixion (Jn. 19:17//Mt. 27:33//Mk. 15:22), has long been debated. The primary identifying mark is that it was outside the city wall and apparently on a hill (Jn. 19:20; He. 13:12-13)¹¹⁵ Two primary sites have been defended, Gordon's Calvary and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Gordon's Calvary, favored by some (and so-named after General Gordon of the last century), is a grassy knoll above the so-called Grotto of Jeremiah. However, the hill's resemblance to a human skull (eyeholes and rounded top) are not ancient. The rival site, based on statements by Eusebius and Jerome (late 4th century), lies within the precincts of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Probability favors this site, but there can be no certainty. Of course, for those willing to abandon tradition, Golgotha has been claimed on virtually every side of the city.¹¹⁶

Jesus' burial was in a tomb nearby Golgotha (Jn. 19:41-42). Two very different sites vie for recognition as well, each associated with the two most popular sites for Golgotha. They are the site at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the site near Gordon's Calvary called the Garden Tomb. This latter site has now been rejected by archaeological investigation. To be sure, the site is an ancient burial ground (8th-7th centuries BC), but it was not used again for burial purposes until the Byzantine Period.¹¹⁷ Wherever the true site of Golgotha and the tomb, the general location of Jesus' ascension into the heavens from the Mt. of Olives near Bethany is identifiable (cf. Lk. 24:40; Ac. 1:2-12).

Palestinian Christianity and the First Jewish Revolt

It is well known that the earliest Christians were Jews. What is not often appreciated sufficiently are the many implications of this fact, both geographically, politically and religiously. In the first place, Jews who became Christians were not obliged to renounce their Jewish heritage. They still maintained a deep appreciation for Torah (Ac. 21:20), they still attended synagogue worship (Ac. 13:14f.; 14:1; 17:1-2, 10, 16-17; 18:4, 19, 26; 19:8; Ja. 2:2)¹¹⁸ and they continued to use the temple precincts at Jerusalem for worship (Ac. 2:46; 3:1; 5:21, 42).¹¹⁹ Some Jews apparently

¹¹⁴ We do not know why the place was so-named. Speculation is that either the site resembled a skull, or else, it was a place where skulls were left.

¹¹⁵ The idea that it was on a hill is due to Mark's statement that it could be seen at a distance (cf. Mk. 15:40).

¹¹⁶ D. Payne, *ISBE* (1982) 11.524.

¹¹⁷ G. Barkay, "The Garden Tomb: Was Jesus Buried Here?" *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1986) 40-57.

¹¹⁸ The Greek text of Ja. 2:2 uses the term *synagogues*, though most versions do not retain this reading.

¹¹⁹ We would assume, however, that the temple sacrificial system for atonement was not followed any longer, and

maintained their traditions as Pharisees after converting to Christianity (Ac. 15:5; 23:6). Circumcision was still practiced for those who were firmly within the Jewish ethnic circle (Ac. 16:3).¹²⁰ Jewish vows, which were consummated at the Jerusalem temple, were still being practiced by Jewish Christians (Ac. 21:23-26; 24:17-18). Thus, the center for Christianity, in the earliest period, was quite definitely Jerusalem. In fact, had it not been for the tension and persecution which erupted after the martyrdom of Stephen, the church might never have moved beyond the Jewish ethnic circle (Ac. 8:1-5, 36-38, 40; 11:19-21).

So closely connected was Christianity to Judaism that in the official eyes of the Roman government, Christianity was simply one more sect of Judaism among many others.¹²¹ Judaism was well known to have a variety of theological sects, of which the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes were the most well known. Since Judaism was a legal religion, the earliest Christians were not hampered by the Romans. It was only after tensions developed between Christianity and traditional Judaism that official Roman opinion began to change, and eventually, after the first Jewish revolt, Christianity came to be understood as distinct from Judaism and thus passed into a non-legal status. The four decades between the death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem was a period when Jews and Christians maintained a distinctive, if troubled, relationship. Even during the missionary travels of Paul, invariably the first place he began preaching the messiahship of Jesus was in the local Jewish synagogue of whatever town he happened to be in at the time. In Paul's defense before the crowd in Jerusalem, he frankly introduced himself as "a Jew" and addressed the Jewish crowd as "brothers and fathers" (Ac. 21:39; 22:1; cf. 23:1). He had no compunctions about retaining his claim to Pharisaic Judaism when it was to his advantage to do so (Ac. 23:6).

While religious tensions continued to escalate between traditional Judaism and Christianity, political tensions escalated between the Jews and the Romans. The Roman procurators (administrators) in Jerusalem were not sensitive to Jewish needs. Some were brutal (notably Pontius Pilate), others were corrupt, and most were incompetent. When the mistakes of these Roman leaders were added to ethnic strife, social unrest and severe economic problems, the Jews finally revolted in 66 AD. This was the first great Jewish revolt against Rome. Initially, the Jews were successful, for they caught the Romans by surprise. However, by AD 67 Vespasian had marched from Syria into Galilee and began the slow but deliberate reconquest of Palestine in

we know that the Jewish Christian views of the temple were sufficiently different to bring them into sharp conflict with the traditional temple hierarchy (cf. Ac. 6:13-14).

¹²⁰ Of course, for those not within the Jewish ethnic circle, circumcision was resisted (cf. Ac. 15:1-2; Ga. 2:3).

¹²¹ Even when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, it was the official position that the dispute between the Jews and Paul had been over "questions about their law" (Ac. 23:29) and about "their own religion" (Ac. 25:19).

the name of Rome.¹²² By AD 68, the whole country except for Jerusalem and a few isolated strongholds had been subdued. In the summer of AD 70, Jerusalem fell to the Roman general Titus, Vespasian's son. The Jewish temple was destroyed, just as Jesus had predicted forty years earlier (cf. Mt. 24:2//Mk. 13:2//Lk. 21:6, 20-24). The final bastion of Jewish resistance was at Masada, Herod's desert fortress, and though it took some time, Masada fell also in AD 73 or 74.¹²³ Thus, the second temple period came to an end.¹²⁴ The only Jewish theological sect to survive the first Jewish revolt was that of the Pharisees, and under the remnants of Pharisaic leadership, Judaism passed into its "rabbinic period" (AD 70 through the 6th century). During this time, Judaism produced the Mishnah, the Palestinian Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud. There was, of course, a second Jewish revolt (132-135 A.D.) under Bar Kokhba, but this one ended in disaster similar to the first one.¹²⁵

But what about the Christians during this upheaval? Since Palestinian Christianity occupied the same geographical area affected by the war between the Jews and the Romans, the Christians could hardly have been untouched. Two factors, however, ameliorated the effect of the Jewish wars upon the Christians. One was that due to Paul's gentile mission, the center of Christianity by AD 70 was no longer Jerusalem alone. Rather, various strong Christian churches in several cities throughout the empire had become local centers, such as, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. The other was due to the fact that many Christians fled from Jerusalem before the fall of the city. According to the ancient Christian historian Eusebius, many Christians, acting on information "commanded by revelation," fled the city and escaped to Pella in the Decapolis.¹²⁶ Pella remained an important center for Christianity thereafter.¹²⁷ Following the Jewish wars, probably about the mid-80s, an irreparable division occurred between Judaism and Christianity. Some of this bitterness, no doubt, was due to the fact that when the Jews revolted against Rome, the Christians refused to join them. Thus, Christian Jews were viewed by non-Christian Jews as traitors to the Jewish cause. Many Jewish Christians were killed by

¹²² One of the most important Roman victories was at Gamla, and archaeologists have been excavating it for well over a decade, cf. D. Syon, "Gamla: Portrait of a Rebellion," *BAR* (Jan.Feb. 1992) 20-37.

¹²³ Masada was the last outpost of Jewish resistance, and rather than allow themselves to be taken prisoner, the Jewish forces chose to commit mass suicide. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, each man killed his own family. Ten men were then selected to kill the rest. One of the ten was then selected by lot to kill the remaining nine. The final one set the fortress ablaze and then took his own life, cf. E. Netzer, "The Last Days and Hours at Masada," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1991) 20-32.

¹²⁴ S. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, ed. W. Meeks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 16-17; M. Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World* (New York: Scribners, 1973) 189-205.

¹²⁵ Details of the second revolt can be found in Y. Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba* (New York: Random House, 1971).

¹²⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 111.5. Eusebius also concluded that the Jewish wars and the destruction of Jerusalem were a direct fulfillment of Jesus' predictions in the Olivet discourse.

¹²⁷ S. Cohen, *ISBE* (1962) 111.710.

Jewish insurrectionists.¹²⁸ By the mid-80s, the bitterness had grown to the point where an addition was made to the traditional Eighteen Benedictions which constituted the daily prayers of all pious Jews. These benedictions were repeated in every synagogue service. The addition is called the *birkat ha-minim* (= curse upon the heretics), and the *minim* were probably the Christians. The addition read, “For the apostates let there be no hope, and let the arrogant government be speedily uprooted in our days. Let the Nazarenes¹²⁹ and the heretics be destroyed in a moment, and let them be blotted out of the book of life and not be inscribed together with the righteous. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant.”¹³⁰ This curse forced Jewish Christians out of the synagogues altogether. The words of Jesus had come to pass that his followers would be expelled (Jn. 16:2).

So, even before the 2nd century AD, Christians were no longer perceived by the Romans as being a sect of Judaism. This change opened the way for the imperial persecutions against the church. Christians would later accuse Jews of betraying them to the Roman inquisitors.¹³¹ Christianity had become a *religio illicita* (= an illegal religion). While Christians returned to Jerusalem after the Jewish wars, in the absence of a Jewish temple and given the prevailing bitterness between the Jews and the Christians, Christianity and Judaism went their separate ways.

Jewish Fasts and Festivals

Christianity owes a great deal to its Jewish heritage, and it readily admits this fact. Unlike other world religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other faiths with which biblical Christianity is entirely discontinuous, Judaism and Christianity have common roots. The Hebrew Bible is the Christian Old Testament. Christian worship was cast, in large part, after the pattern of temple and synagogue worship. Redemptive history, the mighty acts of God, and the prophetic word from the creation to the return from exile is as much a part of the Christian heritage as it is the Jewish heritage. The earliest Christians were Jews, and the New Testament, while distinctively Christian, appeals again and again to Hebrew theology, thought forms, idiomatic language and tradition. Finally, the Christian year is, at least in germ, an outgrowth of the Hebrew liturgical year. So, while Christianity has a partial discontinuity with Judaism, because of the Christ event, it is by no means a total

¹²⁸ L. Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, trans. R. Guelich (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 60.

¹²⁹ The Nazarenes are more than likely a direct reference to Christians who followed Jesus of Nazareth, cf. Ac. 24:5.

¹³⁰ From the Twelfth Benediction, cf. G. Beasley-Murray, *John [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) lxxvi-lxxvii.

¹³¹ R. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 42-43.

discontinuity.

Christians can learn much from the patterns of the Jewish liturgical year, not only about the Jewish faith but also about the Christian faith and its Hebrew roots. This is the impetus for the present study of Jewish fasts and festivals. Most of the observed times come from the Hebrew Bible, though at least one celebration, Hanukkah, is intertestamental. In the end, it is hoped that this study will enhance our appreciation of the Christian heritage with its roots in the faith of Israel.

The Hebrew Liturgical Year

The liturgical year is the marking off of time into special periods of worship. In the ancient world, virtually all calendars were liturgical in nature. For many peoples, such as the Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Canaanites, there were both fixed and irregular religious festivals. Some were monthly, some annual. Many practiced a New Year festival, and in Mesopotamia, the New Year festival was the single most important day of the year. In Egypt, also, New Year's day was an important religious celebration as were the birthdays of the gods and goddesses. Most nations in the ancient Near East celebrated both a Spring and Fall festival, especially those religions defined by fertility, such as the Baal and Asherah cult. Such observances were intended to honor the deities, express thanksgiving for the harvest, mark transitions in the yearly cycle, provide entertainment, and give the ruling authorities recognition. In Mesopotamia, there was daily sacrifice plus daily meals served to the gods and goddesses. To some days were attached the superstitions of bad luck, especially the 7th, 14th, 19th, 21st and 28th days of the month. Both in Mesopotamia as well as in Canaan, the gods were depicted as "dying and rising," that is, dying in the winter and rising in the spring. Lamentation associated with the annual death of Tammuz (Eze. 8:14), for instance, was one kind of ritual for the annual death of a god. Sacred prostitution at the Canaanite *bamot* (= high places), a type of imitative magic, was intended to rouse Baal from his wintry death, and the high places were commonly denounced by the prophets of Israel.¹³²

So, when Israel came out of Egypt to enter the land of Canaan, Moses first took the people to Mt. Sinai so God could instruct them in a new way. This new way was the Torah, and it regulated their lives by a covenantal bond. Part of this covenant was a new form of worship which marked Israel off from the surrounding nations. Israel's worship was arranged in a liturgical calendar, with fixed times and procedures for worship. Provision also was made for worship which was not fixed by the calendar, such as, voluntary offerings, vows, fasts and so forth, though in this

¹³² "Religions of the Biblical World," *ISBE* (1988) IV.79-107; H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, trans. I. Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973).

study we shall pay more attention to the fixed events. The Torah was very clear: God's people were to separate themselves from the worship patterns of the Canaanite nations where they were going (Dt.4:1-4, 15-20, 25-26; 5:7; 6:13-15; 7:1-6; 8:19-20; 11:16-21; 12:1-7; 13:1-18).

Instead, Yahweh mandated an entirely new pattern. This new pattern took into account the same seasonal changes celebrated by the other nations, such as harvests and new moons, but it revolved entirely around Yahweh and his mighty acts.

The Lunar Year

Unlike our modern solar calendars, the Hebrew calendar was lunar, that is, it was based upon the thirty-day cycles of the moon.¹³³ The Old Testament uses three systems of counting the twelve months, one Canaanite (with references to at least four of the months), one Babylonian (with references to seven of the months), and one numerical (i.e., first month, second month, and so on). The numerical system is the most common, though the Babylonian system becomes more prominent in the later texts of the Old Testament.¹³⁴

The first day of each month was set apart for worship and is often associated with Sabbaths (cf. 1 Sa. 20:5, 24; 2 Kg. 4:23; Is. 1:13; 66:23; Eze. 45:17; 46:1, 3; Am. 8:5; Hos. 2:11). Special offerings of animals, grain, flour, oil and wine were required (Nu. 28:11-15), accompanied by the sounding of trumpets (Nu. 10:10). Even in the New Testament, the new moons were still being observed (Col. 2:16). The new moon of the seventh month was given special prominence with the memorial blowing of trumpets (Lv. 23:24; Nu. 29:1-6; 2 Chr. 5:3; Ezr. 3:6; Ne. 8:2).¹³⁵ From the second temple period, archaeologists have discovered in the excavated rubble an inscription which once graced the southwest cornice of the temple mount. It says, "To the place of the trumpeting..."¹³⁶ Eventually, the new moon of the seventh month became celebrated as *Rosh Hashanah* (= head of the year), the Jewish New Year celebrated by Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed Jews today.

Rosh Ha-Shanah (The New Year)

Originally, the Jewish year in the Hebrew Scriptures began in the spring on the anniversary of the exodus from Egypt (cf. Ex. 12:1-2). As such, New Years day was in the Spring. However, there was no description of a new year's celebration as such.

¹³³ The two Hebrew words which are used to designate "month" are *yerah* (derived from *yereah* = moon) and *hodesh* (which doubles as a word for "month" as well as for the "new moon").

¹³⁴ D. Morgan, "Calendar," *JSBE* (1979) 1.575.

¹³⁵ Some interpreters call this the "Feast of Trumpets," since it is categorized with the "feasts of the Lord" in Lv. 23:1-2, 23-25). It consisted of the ritual blowing of trumpets, sabbatical rest, sacred assembly and offerings.

¹³⁶ B. Mazar, "Excavations Near Temple Mount Reveal Splendors of Herodian Jerusalem," *BAR* (Jul-Aug. 1980) 55.

The closest thing in the Hebrew Bible to the title *Rosh ha-Shanah* (= head of the year) is Ezekiel's reference to this date in his vision of the new temple (Eze. 40:1). In Ezekiel, however, there is no indication that Rosh ha-Shanah refers to a celebration.

Given that the Hebrew year began in the spring, it is an anomaly that in later Judaism Rosh ha-Shanah is celebrated in the fall (in the seventh month on the Day of Trumpets). A theory has been proposed by some scholars that Israel indeed did hold a New Year's festival in the seventh month during which they celebrated the enthronement of Yahweh by annually reenacting a cultic drama featuring the king in David's dynasty. This theory owes considerably, however, to the assumption that Israel drew heavily from the surrounding pagan cultures, which also celebrated the new year in a similar fashion in honor of their patron deities. The evidence for such a "seventh-month" new year in ancient Israel is largely circumstantial. Still, the fact remains that Rosh ha-Shanah is now celebrated in the seventh month rather than the first for reasons unknown. Scholars are divided on how this change came about.¹³⁷

One other artifact should be mentioned, this one an archaeological find to be dated in about the 10th century BC. This artifact, called "the Gezer calendar," describes the agricultural seasons of the year. It is one of the earliest examples of Hebrew writing in existence. In ancient Hebrew script, it reads:

His two months are [olive] harvest - [Sept. -Nov.]
His two months are planting [grain] - [Nov. -Jan.]
His two months are late planting - [Jan. -Mar.]
His month is hoeing up of flax - [Mar.-Apr.]
His month is harvest of barley - [Apr. -May]
His month is harvest and feasting - [May-June]
His two months are vine-tending - [June-Aug.]
His month is summer fruit - [Aug. -Sept.]

¹³⁷ Some say that Israel celebrated two New Year's days; others say that one date reflects Israel's practice before the exile, the other after. For a review of the evidence for and against a seventh month new year celebration, see D. Block, *JSBE* (1986) 111.529-532; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Religion Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) 502-506.

The Jewish Calendar and Seasonal Cycle¹³⁸

| <u>Hebrew seasons</u> | <u>Festivals</u> | <u>Western calendar</u> |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <u>1st Month (Nisan)</u> | | <u>March / April</u> |
| Flax Harvest | <i>Passover</i> | |
| Spring Rains | <i>Unleavened Bread</i> | |
| Barley Harvest | <i>First fruits</i> | |
| <u>2nd Month (Iyyar)</u> | | <u>April / May</u> |
| Dry Season Begins | | |
| <u>3rd Month (Sivan)</u> | | <u>May / June</u> |
| Early figs Ripen | <i>Feast of Weeks (Shauvot)</i> | |
| <u>4th Month (Tammuz)</u> | | <u>June / July</u> |
| Grape Harvest | | |
| <u>5th Month (Ab)</u> | | <u>July / August</u> |
| Early Olive Harvest | | |
| Summer Heat | | |
| <u>6th Month (Elul)</u> | | <u>August / September</u> |
| Dates | | |
| Summer Figs | | |
| <u>7th Month (Tishri)</u> | | <u>September / October</u> |
| First Rains | <i>Rosh Ha-shanah</i> | |
| | <i>Yom Kippur</i> | |

¹³⁸ J. Rousseau and R. Arav, *Jesus & His World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1995) 9.

*Feast of Booths (Succoth)*8th Month (Marchesvan)October / November

Late Olive Harvest

Plowing

Winter Figs

9th Month (Chislev)November / December

Sowing

*Hanukkah*10th Month (Tebeth)December / January

Rains and Snow

11th Month (Shebat)January / February

Almond Blossom

12th Month (Adar)February / March

Citrus Fruit Harvest

*Purim***Festivals of Rest and Renewal**

In the giving of the Law, God commanded that certain times be set aside for rest. Three specified times were the weekly Sabbath Day, the Sabbatical Year, and the Year of Jubilee. These times were to be faithfully observed for the purpose of worship, rest and renewal.

The Sabbath

The word *sabbath* comes from the Hebrew *shabat* which means “to cease” or “to stop.”¹³⁹ Though Sabbath observation was established as law after the Israelites had left Egypt (Ex.20:10), its roots go back much further. The first allusion to Sabbath is

¹³⁹ Some scholars attempt to trace the etymology of the word and the origin of the custom to the Babylonians or the Canaanites rather than to the exodus. For a discussion of the evidence surrounding these issues, see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 2.476-479.

in Genesis 2:2-3, when God rested from his creative labor and set aside the seventh day as holy to commemorate his rest. It is difficult to say what form the observation of the Sabbath took before God established it as law in the Ten Commandments. Nevertheless, the Israelites understood the Sabbath as a day of rest (Ex. 16:29).

The giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai was a significant milestone in the development of the Sabbath, since it marked the establishment of covenant between God and his people. The observation of Sabbath was both a condition and a sign of that covenant (Ex. 20:10; 31:13). After the experience at Mt. Sinai the Sabbath became an integral part of Jewish culture. The Sabbath regulations directed the Israelites to pay respect to God by offering him a portion of their time and to respect their fellow creatures by providing rest and refreshment for slaves and beasts of burden (Ex. 23:12). Among the specific prohibitions tied to the Sabbath were the kindling of fire for cooking (Ex. 35:3), the gathering of firewood (Nu. 15:32ff), and the carrying of burdens (Je. 17:19-27).

The Old Testament presents the Sabbath as significant for several reasons. First, the Sabbath was oriented toward worship. It was to be kept holy by the Israelites, commemorating God's rest after his labor of creation and paralleling their rest from their labor on the other days of the week. Later, as synagogue worship developed, the Sabbath was observed with a sacred assembly. Second, the Sabbath was a sign of Israel's identity as God's covenant people. It was to be celebrated as a sign between God and the Israelites so that they would always remember the God who made them holy (Ex. 31:13-18). Finally, the Sabbath was intended to be a reminder of God's hand in leading the Israelites out of Egypt and giving them rest from their slavery (Dt.5:15).

The most significant aspect of the Sabbath was to remember God. He had given form to the world, created humankind, chosen a people for himself, rescued them out of slavery, and entered into covenant with them. The careful observation of the Sabbath was intended to provide a regular time of quiet wherein the Israelites could remember God's providence and their total dependence upon him. This central significance of the Sabbath is clear in the symbolism of the Sabbath ritual, performed by the priests in the temple. The replacement of the holy bread or the bread of the Presence¹⁴⁰ was at the center of this ritual. The holy bread was placed on a table in the Holy Place, where it was to be before God at all times (Ex. 25:30) and replenished every Sabbath. By replenishing the bread every Sabbath, the priests, on behalf of the Israelites, owned the presence of God as their bread and their life. The seven lamp candelabra, also in the Holy Place, was rekindled to symbolize that God was their light-giver. Between the candelabra and the table of holy bread, incense was burned

¹⁴⁰ Lit., "bread of the face"

on the golden altar to symbolize that life and light are joined together, and they come to humans through fellowship with God and prayer. When the priests ate the holy bread from the previous week, it symbolized Israel's complete dependence on God.¹⁴¹ Both the activity and the inactivity of the Sabbath were intended to provide a regular time for rest and reflection which would enhance the relationship between God and his people and renew their physical strength through spiritual renewal.

The Sabbatical Year

In conjunction with the Sabbath, the Sabbatical Year or "Year of Solemn Rest" (Lv. 25:5) was instituted by God (Ex. 23:10-11). The Law provided that every seventh year after the entrance of Israel into Canaan the land would be allowed to rest and lie fallow. The storage and sale of crops was forbidden during this year (Lv. 25:1-7). Whatever grew without tending the land was to be available for the poor. Alongside this, no debts were to be collected during this year. In fact, in Deuteronomy the command was that all debts owed by fellow Israelites were to be cancelled so that poverty would not take root among them (Dt. 15:1-11).¹⁴² Similarly, those Israelites who had sold themselves as indentured servants were only to remain as such for six years and then were to be set free with generous provision in the seventh year. Another important command was that the law was to be read in the hearing of all Israel every Sabbath Year during the Feast of Tabernacles, underscoring that the Sabbath was not to be a time of idleness but of meditation and spiritual renewal.

Ultimately, like the Sabbath, the commandments of the Sabbath Year were intended to recall the covenant between God and his people and to remind the Israelites of the significance of that covenant. The land was not to be subject to the human desire for profit but to God's law, and his decree was that the land be given time to replenish (Lv. 25:23). The Israelites would be renewed along with the land as they turned from their labor to spiritual reflection and compassion toward the disenfranchised. Likewise, the social structure would be renewed and social equality restored as debts were postponed or cancelled and as the poor were able to gather food and improve their situations.

The Jubilee

The Hebrew for "The Year of Jubilee" (*sh^enat hayyobel*) literally means "the year of the ram's horn," which refers to the sounding of the ram's horn (*shophar*) to

¹⁴¹ The ceremony and significance of the temple ritual performed each Sabbath is explained in greater detail by A. Edersheim, *The Temple: its Ministry and Services* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 181-187.

¹⁴² For this reason, the Sabbatical Year was also called "The Year of Release" (Dt. 15:9).

announce its arrival. The Year of Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement (Lv. 25:8-9). At the end of seven Sabbaths of years, totaling 49 years, the 50th year was to be consecrated and liberty proclaimed throughout the land. As with the Sabbatical Year, during the Year of Jubilee all debts were to be forgiven, and freedom was to be restored to any Israelite who had sold himself as a slave. In addition, all land was to be returned to the family to which it had been assigned when the Israelites first possessed the land. Since the Year of Jubilee followed immediately after the seventh Sabbatical Year, there would be two consecutive years in which the land would lie fallow and no crops would be produced. God assured the Israelites that if they would obey his instructions, he would bless them with a large enough harvest in the sixth year that they would be well supplied during the Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee.

Like the Sabbath and the Sabbatical year, the Year of Jubilee was also intended to focus the hearts of the Israelites on God. By returning the land to its original heirs, they reminded themselves that the land belonged to God, they were aliens in the land, and they were God's tenants (Lv. 25:23-24). By setting the slaves free they were to remind themselves that they all belonged to God, not to each other, and that God, by his power, had freed them all from slavery in Egypt (Lv. 25:54-55). Likewise, by returning the social structure to its original starting place every fifty years, the Israelites were to remind themselves that they were to abide by God's social values which placed human dignity and the value of community over profit and personal gain.

Israel and Sabbath Rest

The command that Israel remember the Sabbath was intended to benefit them by offering rest, by providing time for the nutrients in the soil to be replenished, by restoring social equality, and by establishing their humanness through worship and fellowship with their Creator. In keeping the Sabbath commands, the Israelites would have been a living testimony to the benefits of human obedience to Yahweh, thereby proclaiming him as the one true God. God considered these objectives to be of such importance that he made the consequences of disobedience very clear. In Leviticus 26, God lists those consequences as distress, drought, attacks by wild animals, plagues, famine, captivity and dispersion.

Despite these warnings, the people of Israel failed to keep God's Sabbath commands. The prophet Amos indicted the Israelites for their exploitation of the poor and their impatience with the restraints on personal profit which the Sabbath imposed (Am. 8:4-6). Though they observed the Sabbath day, it became an opportunity for

self-righteousness rather than worship.¹⁴³ As for the Sabbatical Year, the Israelites were carried into exile for seventy years to give the land the Sabbath rest which they had neglected for about five hundred years (2 Chr. 36:20-21).¹⁴⁴ There is no record that the Year of Jubilee was ever observed by the nation of Israel.¹⁴⁵

Israel's response to the Sabbath commands is an indictment of the whole human race. By their actions, they displayed the rebellious nature of all of humanity. Rest, spiritual renewal and social restoration were ignored for the sake of profit. All humans have chosen to forsake God and go their own way, withholding mercy, refusing to forgive, capitalizing on the misfortune of others, claiming for themselves what belongs to God, and neglecting their very humanity by refusing fellowship with their Creator.

The Sabbath and Christ

Though the Sabbath law was given long before the advent of Christ, his redemptive work both illumines the historical meaning of the Sabbath and points beyond it to the hope of final rest and restoration. His redemption secures forgiveness for our spiritual debts and anticipates the eternal Jubilee when liberty will be restored.

Edersheim captures the past and future significance of the Sabbath as it relates to Christ in his summation:

[The significance of the Sabbath was] that the earth, and all that is upon it, belongeth to the Lord; that the eyes of all wait upon him, that he may 'give them their meat in due season' (Ps. 104:27); that the land of Israel was His special possession; that man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth from the mouth of the Lord; and that He giveth us our daily bread so that it is vain to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows (Ps. 127:2). Beyond it all, it pointed to the fact of sin and redemption: the whole creation which 'groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,' waiting for and expecting that blessed Sabbath, when creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom. 8:21-22). Thus, as the Sabbath itself the Sabbatical Year pointed forward to the 'rest which remaineth to the people of God,' when,

¹⁴³ By the time of Christ, the Rabbis had placed so many regulations on the Sabbath that it became work to even function on the Sabbath, making it a yoke that none were able to bear, cf. Edersheim, 193.

¹⁴⁴ Upon return from exile, Nehemiah led the people in regular observance of the Sabbath Year (Ne. 10:31), which continued at least into the intertestamental period as indicated in 1 Maccabees 6:49, 53: "...for it was a sabbatical year granted to the land," cf., R. de Vaux, 1.174.

¹⁴⁵ R. de Vaux, 1.175-6.

*contest and labor completed, they sing, 'on the other side of the flood,' the song of Moses and of the Lamb: 'Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest.'*¹⁴⁶

The Pilgrim Feasts

Each year, all Israelite males were required to attend the three *haggim* or pilgrim festivals of Unleavened Bread, Weeks and Booths (Dt. 16:16; cf. Ex. 23:14, 17; 34:23). Of course, before the centralization of worship at Mt. Zion in the time of David and Solomon, the site of these celebrations were associated with the old Tent of Meeting. Afterwards, however, the Deuteronomic code was quite specific that the celebrations be held “at the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name” (Dt. 16:5-6, 11, 15-16; cf. 12:4-28). When Solomon dedicated the temple, Yahweh chose Mt. Zion as his resting place (2 Chr. 5:13--6:11; 7:1-3, 12; cf. Ps. 78:68-69; 68:15-18; 9:11; 48:1-14; 87:1-2; 99:1-3). The pilgrimage to Mt. Zion, then, became the ideal hope of every Israelite (Ps. 84:1-7, 10). The psalms labeled “Songs of Ascents” (Ps. 120-134) were associated with these pilgrimages to Jerusalem and holy Mt. Zion (cf. Is. 30:29).¹⁴⁷

These three feasts were communal in nature, assembling the Israelites from the various tribes to worship, celebrate and bring offerings to the Yahweh (Dt. 16:16b-17; Ex. 23:15b; 34:20b). If the Songs of Ascents are any indication, the pilgrim festivals were times to intercede for peace (Ps. 120, 122, 129), to thank God for his providential care (Ps. 121, 124, 125), to plead for God’s mercy (Ps. 123, 126, 130), to rejoice in prosperous family life (Ps. 127, 128), to fellowship with the whole community of faith (Ps. 133), and to celebrate Yahweh’s presence among them (Ps. 132, 134, 135). The general references to the great feasts depict them as exuberant celebrations with music and singing (Is. 30:29; cf. Am. 8:10; Na. 1:15; Ps. 118:27) as well as family festivity and generous sharing (Dt. 12:5-7, 11-12, 18; 14:22-27). Finally, the three pilgrim festivals corresponded with the three great agricultural periods, unleavened bread with the barley harvest, weeks with wheat harvest, and Booths with the completion of all harvest, including grain, grapes and figs.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Edersheim, 193-4.

¹⁴⁷ In the second temple period, the Mishnah says that the fifteen steps up from the Court of the Women to the Court of the Israelites corresponded to the Songs of Ascents, and the Levites sang them upon these steps, cf. D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72 [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL:IVP, 1973) 43.

¹⁴⁸ E. Isaacs and I. Payne, *ISBE* (1982) 11.294.

Passover and Unleavened Bread

The first great pilgrim festival was a week-long celebration of the exodus from Egypt, beginning with the Passover followed by the week of unleavened bread (Lv. 23:4-8). If the month of the exodus was to commence the new Hebrew calendar (Ex. 12:1-2), the first festival of the year began at twilight on the fourteenth of that month (Ex. 12:6-14; Nu. 9:1-14) and extended through the twenty-first (Ex. 12:15-20; Nu. 28:16-25; cf. 2 Chr. 35:1-19). The first and final days of the week of unleavened bread were also Sabbaths. During the week on “the day after the Sabbath,” the priest was to wave a sheaf of the first reaping of the barley harvest accompanied by appropriate offerings (Lv. 23:9-14)¹⁴⁹

The term *pesah* (= Passover) comes from the idea that God would “pass over” the Israelites during the Egyptian plague of death, sparing their firstborn sons (Ex. 12:12-13, 23, 27)¹⁵⁰ The Passover festival was practiced by slaughtering a yearling lamb which was then roasted and served with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. Every successive generation of Israelites was to observe the Passover (Ex. 12:14, 24, 42, 47). The feast was a celebration of freedom. It recalled God’s redemptive miracle when he judged Egypt so that his people could be liberated from four centuries of slavery. At Passover and unleavened bread, the father of each family was to explain to his children the meaning of this divine act of freedom (Ex. 12:26-27; 13:3-10, 14). Because the two feasts were so closely associated, in time the whole eight days came to be called by the name Passover.

From the practice of ritual questions, such as, “What does this ceremony mean to you?” (Ex. 12:26; 13:14), the Passover celebration increasingly became a *Haggadah* (= explaining, telling). Today, the term *Haggadah* refers to the book that explains the meaning of the Passover meal. In these ritual explanations, various aspects of the traditional Passover are set forth. The unleavened bread (*matza*), for instance, reminds the celebrants that when the Israelites left Egypt, there was no time to wait for the yeast to rise. The bitter herbs (*maror*) are a memory of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. Since the Middle Ages, the youngest family member asks the most fundamental question, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” The entire meal and its explanations answer this question.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ It is unclear whether the Sabbath cited was the weekly Sabbath (always on Saturday) or the sabbatical first day of unleavened bread (which could be any weekday). The Sadducees took it in the former sense, so in this reckoning, first-fruits was always to be waved on Sunday. ‘Normative Judaism’ has taken it in the latter sense, thus assuming the ritual to be on the sixteenth, cf. R. Gordon, “Leviticus,” *IBC*, ed. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Marshall Pickering, 1979) 207-208.

¹⁵⁰ The expression may also carry the meaning “to defend” or “to protect” (Is. 3 1:5).

¹⁵¹ Rabbi L. Klenicki, ed., *The Passover Celebration* (The Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith and The Liturgy Training Program of the Archdiocese of Chicago).

The Christian meaning of Passover begins in Jesus' Passover meal with the twelve apostles on the night of his betrayal (Mt. 26:18//Mk. 14:14-16//Lk. 22:7-16). During this meal, at the offering of the third of the traditional four cups of wine (the third cup being the "cup of redemption" linked to Ex. 6:6), Jesus broke bread and shared wine as symbols of his body and blood which were to be offered for the forgiveness of sins (Mt. 26:26-29//Mk. 14:22-25//Lk. 22:17-20; 1 Co. 11:23-26). By what appears to be a different reckoning used in John's Gospel,¹⁵² Jesus died at about 3:00 PM on Passover, the very time when the Passover lambs would have been slaughtered. This coincidence suggests that Jesus is the true Passover Lamb, and John makes this parallel even more suggestive by pointing out that Jesus legs were not broken (Jn. 19:31-37). Passover lambs were not to have any broken limbs (cf. Ex. 12:46). If the Sadducean calendar is followed, then the first thing that confronted the priest on Sunday morning, when he entered the Holy Place to wave the barley sheaf before Yahweh, was a ripped curtain, shredded from top to bottom when Jesus died (Mt. 27:50-51//Mk. 15:37-38//Lk. 23:44-46).

What is implicit in John is explicit in Paul, who says, "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed" (1 Co. 5:7). Furthermore, Paul identifies the removal of leaven with the cleansing of malice and wickedness from our lives, so that, in a Christian sense, we continue to "keep the festival...with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Co. 5:7-8). Peter agrees, when he describes Christ as a paschal Lamb "without blemish" (1 Pe. 1:18-19; cf. Ex. 12:5). Just as the Passover lamb was chosen several days early, so Christ was chosen before the foundation of the world (Ex. 12:3; 1 Pe. 1:20). The waving of the first-fruits before Yahweh is used in several Christian senses. First and most important, it points to Christ, the first-fruits of resurrection life (1 Co. 15:20, 23). It also points to the messianic gift of the Spirit, which is the first-fruits, or first benefit, of Christ's resurrection from the dead (Ro. 8:23). It can refer to the first Christian converts in a particular area (Ro. 16:5), or more broadly, to the whole body of Christians as those redeemed from a fallen world (Ja. 1:18; Rv. 14:4).

Finally, the imagery of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" is drawn from the Passover Lamb (Rv. 5:6, 8-14; 13:8). In a striking exodus motif, it is heaven's Passover Lamb who opens the seals of judgment, paralleling the plagues of Egypt (Rv. 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 16; 14:9-10). The saints who are victorious in the end will be those who have "washed their robes and made them white in the Lamb's blood" (Rv. 7:9-17; cf. 12:11; 14:1,4; 15:3). The final great conflict will not be between

¹⁵² A well-known difference between John and the synoptic gospels is that John puts the death of Jesus on Passover (13:1; 18:28; 19:14, 31), while the synoptics put the last supper on Passover. There may have been more than one liturgical calendar in effect, or there may have been other factors which explain this discrepancy, cf. C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1987) 175-178.

Pharaoh's armies and the Israelites, but between the beast's armies and the faithful followers of the Lamb (Rv. 17:12-14). In the end, the people of God will complete their exodus from a world given over to evil. Their destination will not be the old Jerusalem on Mt. Zion, but the New Jerusalem in heaven where the Lamb is the light (Rv. 19:6-9; 21:9-14, 22-23; 22:1-5). There, the celebration of the true Passover Lamb will be a heavenly festival forever and ever!

Weeks (Pentecost)

The second of the *haggim*, the feast of weeks,¹⁵³ was reckoned seven weeks after the Day of First-fruits during Passover week (Dt. 16:9-10).¹⁵⁴ It celebrated the conclusion of the grain harvest with the ritual presentation to Yahweh of two loaves of leavened, salted bread made from the cereal of the new grain along with other specified sacrifices (Lv. 23:15-21; cf. Je. 5:24). If the Passover was the beginning of the barley harvest, the Feast of Weeks consummated the wheat harvest with a day of assembly and great rejoicing (Dt. 16:11-12). On at least one occasion, the Feast of Weeks also seems to have served as a time for covenant renewal (2 Chr. 15:9-15).

Pentecost gains significance for Christians because it was the day upon which the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples after Jesus' ascension to the Father (Lk. 24:49; Ac. 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-4). There is no explicit theological connection made by Luke between the Feast of Weeks and the descent of the Spirit, but the fact that the feast day and the spiritual event coincided must have been significant, for as Luke points out, the descent of the Spirit occurred only when Pentecost had begun (Ac. 2:1). It seems likely that the harvest theme of the Feast of Weeks was implicitly connected with the "harvest" mission of the church, which now would be carried into all the world through the empowerment of the Spirit (Ac. 1:8). It may be noteworthy that Paul later uses the term Pentecost without explaining it in addressing a Gentile congregation, a fact that in turn suggests his readers were familiar with the Jewish festival and its implied Christian significance (Ac. 16:8).

Booths (Tabernacles)

The third of the *haggim* was the festival of booths¹⁵⁵ in the seventh month (Lv. 23:34-36). Like Passover, this festival lasted for a week with Sabbaths on the first day and the eighth day. The Festival of Booths marked the end of the harvest season,

¹⁵³ The Greek term Pentecost (= fiftieth) derives from this reckoning. Other names for this feast were "Day of Firstfruits" (Nu. 28:26) and "Feast of Harvest" (Ex. 23:16a).

¹⁵⁴ For the Jewish debates on the reckoning of the dates, see. J. Rylaarsdam, *IDB* (1962) III.827.

¹⁵⁵ In Hebrew, the feast is *Sukkoth* (= booths, huts), alternatively called the Feast of Ingathering (Ex. 23:16b; 34:22b). Roland de Vaux is quite correct in pointing out that none of the translations "Booths," "Tabernacles," "Tents," or "Huts" is entirely adequate, cf. 2.495.

not only of the grain harvest, but also the harvest from the trees and vines (Dt. 16:13). During the festival week, the celebrants were to camp out in *sukkoth* (= booths) made of interlacing branches to commemorate the sojourn in the desert (Ex. 23:39-43; cf. Ne. 8:14-17; Ho. 12:9). The festival was intended as a joyful thanksgiving for all God's bounty, not unlike the modern ideal of Thanksgiving Day (Dt. 16:14-15).¹⁵⁶ It was the most important and well-attended of the three *haggim*, so much so, that in Ezekiel it is simply called "the feast" (Eze. 45:25; cf. 1g. 21:19; 1 Sa. 1:3).¹⁵⁷ Solomon dedicated the first temple during the festival (1 Kg. 8:2, 65). The prophet Zechariah predicted that the festival would be honored by all the nations of the world during the messianic age (Zec. 14:16; cf. Is. 2:2-4; 56:6-8). The post-exilic community celebrated Booths with the reading of the Torah by Ezra (Ne. 8), so that "from the time of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this" (Ne. 8:17). Though some of the people began to weep at hearing the law, their leaders instructed them to refrain from mourning, for the feast was meant for rejoicing (Ne. 8:9-12).

In time, the feast became the occasion for Jews in the eastern Diaspora to visit Jerusalem for worship.¹⁵⁸ Palms bound together into a sort of festal plume were waved as symbols of joy accompanied by the daily singing of the Great Hallel (Ps. 113-118). By the time of Jesus, a procession of priests went to the Pool of Siloam to bring up a container of water, which was to be kept for the whole week. This water was carried by the priests around the great altar each day of the feast, and on the seventh day, it was carried around seven times, after which it was poured out as a thanksgiving before God.¹⁵⁹

The only explicit New Testament comment on the festival was given by Jesus on the eighth day, when he announced, "If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."¹⁶⁰ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from him" (In. 7:37-39).¹⁶¹ Most commentators assume that this invitation

¹⁵⁶ Joy was expressed in dancing, for this was the festival when at the Tent of Meeting in the days of the judges, the "daughters of Shiloh" went out to dance and were taken as wives by the Benjamites (Jg. 21:13-23).

¹⁵⁷ Josephus called *sukkoth* the "most holy and eminent feast," *Antiquities*, VIII.iv.1.

¹⁵⁸ R. Harrison, *JSBE* (1979) 1.535.

¹⁵⁹ J. Rylaarsdam, *IDB* (1962) 1.456.

¹⁶⁰ Peter's comment at the transfiguration that the group should construct three booths for Moses, Elijah and Jesus implies that he wanted to institutionalize the moment, but there is nothing in the texts to suggest that this happened at or even near the date of the festival of booths (cf. Mt. 17:4//Mk. 9:5//Lk. 9:33). In any case, both Mark and Luke point out that Peter did not know what he was saying. True, some commentators have suggested that the festival is a typological symbol of the millennial kingdom, based on Zechariah 14:16, but while such an interpretation is logical, it is not offered by any New Testament writer.

¹⁶¹ The careful reader will notice, of course, that there is no single passage in the Old Testament that says that streams of living water will flow from within the believer. It appears that Jesus brought together passages that speak of the gift of the Spirit and referred to the Spirit's blessing through the symbolism of flowing water. Both the Spirit

was prompted by the ritual libation made by the priests at the great altar of the temple. At the moment of solemn libation, Jesus cried out that he was the source of living water.¹⁶² If the festival of booths marked the celebration of life and bounty, then Jesus, the bearer and giver of the Spirit, was the spiritual fulfillment of true life and true bounty.

Covenant Renewal

The idea of covenant was woven throughout the woof and warp of ancient Near Eastern life. A covenant is a solemn promise made binding by an oath. By the time Israel was coming out of Egypt, the Hittites, who built a vast empire in Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine in the Late Bronze Age (ca.1400-1200 BC), had left an indelible impression on their vassal cultures in what scholars call the Hittite suzerainty treaty, examples of which are well-known. Other than blood ties, the covenant was perhaps the single most important social relationship between ancient Near Eastern peoples, and it controlled both domestic and political life.¹⁶³

Yahweh and the Covenantal Tradition

That God used the institution of ancient Near Eastern covenants by which to establish his own relationship with the people of faith is everywhere attested in the Old Testament. Sinai is the mountain of the covenant, first mentioned in connection with the burning bush (Ex. 3:1). From the mountain, Yahweh defined the purpose for Israel's existence (Ex. 19:3-8) and determined to speak to his people directly (Ex. 19:9-15). In power and majesty Yahweh descended to the top of Sinai and spoke to Moses face to face (Ex. 19:16--20:21).

The covenant ratification at Sinai was carried out in the form and spirit of ancient Near Eastern patterns. Moses acted as a mediator of the covenant between Yahweh and the people (24:1-2). He read the stipulations, after which the congregation of Israel, similar to a bride at a wedding, repeated the vow in unison, "Everything Yahweh has said we will do" (24:3). Later in Israel, this covenant ratification would be understood in the sense of a marriage between Yahweh and Israel (cf. Is. 54:6-7; Je. 3:1; Eze. 16:8; Ho. 2:7--3:1; Mal. 2:11).

From the time of the Sinai experience, the remainder of the Old Testament is governed by the idea that Yahweh and Israel were bound together in covenant by solemn oath. Virtually every aspect of Israel's future flows out of the fundamental

and the water are eschatological symbols, cf. G. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 88-93.

¹⁶² R Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 326-327.

¹⁶³ G. Mendenhall, "Covenant," *IDB* (1962) 1.714-715.

institution of covenant. Yahweh is a covenant God, and Israel is a covenant people.

The Sinai covenant between Yahweh and Israel was to continue for succeeding generations. The law was intended to regulate the entire lives of the people of Israel, particularly after the conquest of Canaan. The generation which received Torah at Sinai passed it along to their children, and second generation Israelites, some forty years later, were instructed to pass the tradition to their children and grandchildren (Dt. 4:9-10, 40; 5:29; 6:1-2, 6-9; 29:29).

Covenant Breaking and Covenant Renewal

While Israel was still at the foot of Sinai, the nation broke covenant by creating the golden calf (Ex. 32), a covenant violation which was graphically symbolized by Moses when he shattered the stone tablets (Ex. 32:19). Because of the broken covenant, a new issue of the tablets was necessary (Ex. 34:1-4), accompanied by a prayer for forgiveness (Ex. 34:8-9), the renewal of the covenant (Ex. 34:10, 27-28), and a repetition of the core stipulations (cf. Ex. 34:11-26 and parallels in Ex. 20-23). It is here that the idea of covenant renewal has its birth.

Forty years later, when Israel had reached the transjordan, this concept of renewal resurfaced. None of the old warriors remained except Joshua and Caleb (Nu. 26:1-4, 63-65). The rehearsal of the covenant in Deuteronomy culminated in covenant renewal in which the new generation was exhorted to accept the covenant, much as their parents had done (Dt. 29:1-15).

Consequences for covenant violation were not left to imagination. If the nation was faithful to the covenant, Yahweh promised fertility, peace, and general favor (Lv. 26:3-13; Dt. 11:13-15; 28:1-14; 30:15-16). If, on the other hand, the nation broke covenant they could expect disease, drought, invasion, devastation and exile (Lv. 26:14-39; Dt. 11:16-17; 28:15-68; 30:17-18). Longevity in the land was entirely dependent upon covenant faithfulness (Dt. 4:25-28; 8:19-20; 28:36-37, 64-68).

If the covenant had been violated, however, the opportunity for covenant renewal would still be held forth (Dt. 4:29-31). Even if the nation had been driven into exile because of its unfaithfulness, Yahweh promised to restore the nation and its land if its people turned to him in repentance (Dt. 30:1-10).

A special covenant renewal ceremony was mandated for the nation after the people had crossed the Jordan. A covenant altar was to be set up in the Shechem Pass between the mountains Ebal and Gerizim in central Canaan, and there the twelve clans were to renew the covenant (Dt. 27:1-8). In this ceremony, the tribes were to be

divided upon the slopes of the two mountains, and in antiphony, as the Levites called out to them the blessings and curses of the covenant, they were to respond with a corporate “Amen” (Dt. 27:14-26).

The profound impact of the covenant and covenant renewal may be traced throughout the historical books of the Old Testament. At the crossing of Jordan, a cairn of twelve stones was set up at Gilgal as a “sign” of covenant fulfillment. The God who had “brought them out” by dividing the Red Sea had now fulfilled his covenant promise by “bringing them in” when he divided the Jordan (Jos. 4:1-9, 19-24). Here, all the soldiers were circumcised, according to the ancient covenant stipulations (cf. Ge. 17:11, 13), an act which was an expression of covenant renewal (Jos. 5:2-9). When at last the Israelites were firmly in control of central Canaan, Joshua conducted the covenant renewal ceremony in the Shechem Pass on the slopes of Ebal and Gerizim, as commanded by God (Jos. 8:30-35; cf. Dt. 11:26-30; 27). At the close of the Book of Joshua, after all the tribal allotments had been completed, Joshua once more assembled the nation at Shechem, the site of the earlier blessings and cursings ceremony. Here, he again renewed the covenant (Jos. 24:1-27).

Throughout the monarchy, the covenant relationship between the people and Yahweh is central. Solomon’s great prayer at the dedication of the temple is filled with covenant phraseology (1 Kg. 8).¹⁶⁴ In the south, there was periodic respite under the reforms of Judah’s better kings. Asa led Judah in covenant renewal (2 Chr. 15:9-15) as did Jehoiada in behalf of Joash, the boy king (2 Chr. 23:16-21). Two of Judah’s kings received maximum commendation. Hezekiah was like “no one, either before him or after him” in his loyalty to Yahweh and the covenant (2 Kg. 18:3-8; 2 Chr. 29). Josiah, Hezekiah’s great grandson, “walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left” (2 Kg. 22:2). As was said of Hezekiah, the narrator asserts, “Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to Yahweh as he did -- with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses” (2 Kg. 23:25). Of major significance during his kingship was the discovery of the “Book of the Covenant” in the temple.¹⁶⁵ This discovery spurred Josiah toward a reform and a

¹⁶⁴ Notice the parallels in Solomon’s prayer with covenantal stipulations and the cursings accompanying covenant failure:

| <i>Circumstance</i> | <i>Solomon</i> | <i>Torah</i> |
|----------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Oath of Innocence | 1 Kg. 8:31-32 | Ex.22:7-12; Nu.5:11-31 |
| Invasion by an Enemy | 1 Kg. 8:33-34 | Dt.28:25 |
| Drought | 1 Kg. 8:35-36 | Dt.28:21-24 |
| Exile | 1 Kg. 8:46-51 | Dt. 28:36-37, 64-68 |

¹⁶⁵ The exact content of this document is not described in the text, but it is generally accepted that it included the core of the Book of Deuteronomy, if not more, cf. M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988) 294.

renewal of the covenant in Judah (2 Kg. 23:1-3), which in turn postponed the tragic judgment of exile until after Josiah's death (2 Kg. 22:18-20; cf. 23:26-27).

After the exile, Ezra assembled the returned exiles during the Feast of Booths for a complete reading and explanation of the Torah (Ne. 8-9). In leading the post-exilic community in covenant renewal, all the leaders of the people, both religious and political, fixed their seals to a written document, pledging themselves and their families to covenant faithfulness (Ne. 10).

Christian Implications

The periodic covenant renewal ceremonies in ancient Israel have two profound implications for Christians. First, the need is apparent for the people of God to renew their vows of faith from time to time. Such periods of renewal may be occasional and local, led by the spiritual leaders of particular congregations, or they may be more widely observed in the traditional structures of the Christian year, such as, Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Pentecost and so forth.

Second, the celebration of the Eucharist is, by its very nature, a covenant renewal in light of the new covenant. It is a reenactment of the Last Supper and a participation in the body and blood of Jesus Christ (1 Co. 10:16-17). As a renewal ceremony, it should be accompanied by self-examination and consecration (1 Co. 11:27-34) in the context of celebrating the new covenant established once and for all in the death of Jesus (1 Co. 11:23-26). The meal which Christians share is a covenant meal accompanied by covenant actions and covenant words.

Purim

The Jews celebrate Purim on the 14th and 15th of Adar, which is the twelfth month on the Hebrew calendar. Purim, also known as the "Feast of Lots," commemorates the overturning of Haman's plot to massacre all the Jews in Persia, a story recorded in the book of Esther.¹⁶⁶ The festival is named "purim" (lit., "lots"¹⁶⁷) in reference to the lots which Haman cast to divine which day he would set for the massacre (Esther 3:7; 9:24).

¹⁶⁶ Not all scholars agree that the festival of Purim actually originates from the events recorded in the book of Esther, or that those events even occurred. It has been suggested that the feast originated in Babylonia or Persia and was adopted by the Jews while in exile. The story of Esther, then, is thought to have been superimposed on the pagan holiday in order to justify its adoption into Jewish tradition. Most evangelicals accept the historicity of the story of Esther. For a more thorough discussion of these opposing views, see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2.515-516 and R. Harrison *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969) 1090-1098.

¹⁶⁷ The terms *pur* and *purim* are Hebrew transliterations of the Akkadian *puru*, which is used to refer to the casting of lots, D. Aune, "Lots," *ISBE* (1986) 111.172-3.

The Story of Esther

The story takes place in Persia during the time of Xerxes (the biblical Ahasuerus), who reigned from 486-465 BC. Many Jews had returned from exile to Palestine by this time, but there were many who had chosen to remain in Persia. Mordecai, a Benjamite, and Esther, his cousin, were among those who chose to stay. Esther had been brought to the royal court as part of the king's harem, after queen Vashti was deposed for insolence. She found favor with the king and remained at the palace.

After Esther had been taken to the royal court, the king honored Haman, the Agagite, to a position of power and honor second only to himself, but while all the officials at the king's gate knelt before Haman, Mordecai refused to kneel or to pay him honor.¹⁶⁸ The enraged Haman plotted to have all of the Jews massacred. He cast lots to divine the day on which the gods would give him favor as he carried out his plan.¹⁶⁹ The day was set for the 13th of Adar, and Haman convinced the king to issue a decree that all the Jews in Persia should be destroyed on that day.¹⁷⁰ When Mordecai heard of this plot, he begged Esther to go before the king and plead the case of the Jews. Haman's plot began to falter when the king read in his annals that Mordecai had saved his life by uncovering an assassination plot. He had Mordecai dressed in the king's robe and commanded Haman to lead him through the streets on the king's horse proclaiming, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!" Esther, also, risked her life by going before the king uninvited to plead the case of her people. She exposed Haman's plot to kill the Jews because of his hatred for Mordecai. The king was furious and had Haman hanged on the very gallows that he had built for Mordecai. However, the decree that had been issued, sanctioning the massacre of the Jews, could not be changed, even by the king himself according to Persian law (cf. Da. 6:8, 15). The king turned to Mordecai for a solution to this dilemma. On Mordecai's advice, a second edict was issued to offset the first. It gave the Jews the right to join together and defend themselves against anyone that might raise a hand against them on the 13th of Adar.

When the appointed day arrived, what was intended to be the day on which the Jews were to be massacred became the day on which they secured relief from all of their enemies in Persia, killing 75,000 in all, including Haman's ten sons. After these events, Mordecai sent a letter to all of the Jews throughout Persia, requesting that

¹⁶⁸ Scripture gives no reason why Mordecai refused to give honor to Haman, but it has been suggested that he was prevented from doing so by national pride, cf. C. Moore, *Esther [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 36-37.

¹⁶⁹ Casting lots as a means of divination was popular in the ancient Near East. Even the Israelite high priest carried lots in the pocket of his ephod, which were used to obtain a "yes" or a "no" answer in such sacral functions as the selection of goats for the Day of Atonement, cf. Aune, 173.

¹⁷⁰ The decree was issued on the 13th day of Nisan (the first month), one day before the beginning of Passover.

they observe the 14th and 15th of Adar as days of feasting and joy to remember the time when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning was turned into celebration (Esther 9:20-22).

The Celebration

The ritual, which became connected to the feast of Purim, begins with a day of solemn fasting on the 13th. This is to commemorate the three days of fasting that preceded Esther's unannounced appearance before the king to plead the case of her people (Esther 4:15-17). In the evening, everyone attends synagogue to listen to the reading of the book of Esther. During the story, the people shout, shake rattles and stomp their feet when Haman's name is read, while the names of Esther and Mordecai receive blessings.

On the morning of the 14th, everyone attends synagogue again, this time bringing presents for the poor and for friends. The rest of the 14th and the 15th are spent in celebration and feasting.¹⁷¹

The Significance of Purim

Though Yahweh is not mentioned in the book of Esther, his presence, working behind the scenes, is obvious. The implication is that God orchestrated the circumstances so that Esther would be in the palace in a position of favor with the king. She became an advocate for her people in their time of need. Also in the providence of God, the king read of Mordecai's act of loyalty and chose to honor him the very day before Haman's plot was exposed. For this reason Purim has come to represent the many times God rescued the Jews from the hands of those who were bent on destroying them.

Yom Kippur (Day of Covering Over or Day of Atonement)

In addition to the *haggim*, to which all male Israelites were commanded to go each year, there were two other annual festivals, the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. The Feast of Trumpets, which celebrated the new moon of the seventh month, is described only briefly (see discussion under "The Lunar Year,"). The Day of Atonement, on the other hand, is described in detail.

Though not one of the *haggim*, Yom Kippur was the feast day above all others which emphasized national propitiation, forgiveness and reconciliation with God. While categorized with other "feasts" (Lv. 23:26-32; Nu. 29:7-11), it was hardly a celebration, such as, Passover or Booths. Rather, it was a solemn, sabbatical fast and a day of national repentance. Whereas the pilgrim feasts emphasized the family and

¹⁷¹ E. Mack, "Purim", *ISBE* (1986) III.1056.

the individual, the Day of Atonement emphasized the people of Israel collectively. Their national sins against God were confessed on the tenth day of Tishri, the seventh month (nine days after Trumpets and five days before Booths). At the construction of the Tent of Meeting God gave full stipulations for the ritual (Ex. 30:9-10; Lv. 16). Yom Kippur was the only day of the year that the high priest was permitted to pass the inner curtain into the Most Holy Place.

The Ritual

The ritual of Yom Kippur is first summarized in two major parts, one part for the priest and the other for the people (Lv. 16:2-10). Four things were required of the high priest. He must bathe, dress himself in holy linen garments, select a young bull for a sin offering, and select a ram for a burnt offering. Three things were required for the congregation as well. The priest selected two goats, one for a sin offering and the other for Azazel,¹⁷² and a ram for a burnt offering.

After properly bathing and clothing himself, the high priest started the ritual by making atonement for himself and the priestly family. He slaughtered the bull for his own sins and burned incense in the Most Holy Place so that the smoke concealed the ark. He sprinkled the bull's blood on the lid of the ark and in front of it (Lv. 16:11-14). Then, he took one of the goats for the people and repeated the same process, thus making atonement for the national sin of the whole community (Lv. 16:15-17). He also smeared and sprinkled some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood upon the horns of the great altar in front of the Tent of Meeting (Lv. 16:18-19).

After these rituals of atonement, the high priest took the remaining goat and placed both hands on its head, confessing over it the wickedness and rebellion of the whole nation, after which the goat was taken into the desert and driven away (Lv. 16:20-22). Finally, the high priest went back into the Tent of Meeting to change into his normal clothes, being careful to bathe once again. The ritual concluded with the offering of the two rams as a holocaust, one for himself and one for the people (Lv. 16:23-25).

The Christian Meaning of Yom Kippur

Frans Delitzsch, the German scholar of the last century, appropriately called

¹⁷² The Hebrew text simply reads *la'aza'zel* (= for azazel), a word which appears four times, but only in this chapter in the Hebrew Bible. There are three major translations/interpretations of the phrase. The common English translation, "the scapegoat," derives from the LXX. In 16:8, the LXX renders the expression "the one carrying away evil," while in 16:26 it has "the goat for dismissal." As such, the sins of the nation were symbolically transferred over to the goat, who was then driven away. The rabbis, on the other hand, understood Azazel to be a place in the desert, perhaps a rugged cliff over which the goat would be driven to its death. In the intertestamental Pseudepigrapha, Azazel is the name of an archdemon, possibly even the devil himself. As such, the goat represents an evil spirit stripped of his powers, cf. T. Gaster, *IDB* (1962) 1.325-326; R. Harris et al., *TWOT* (1980) 657-658.

Yom Kippur “the Good Friday of the Old Testament.” Certainly the idea of atonement is important in light of the cross of Christ. Paul, for instance, says that God presented his Son as a sacrifice of atonement (Ro. 3:25), while John says that Jesus was “the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 In. 2:2; cf. 4:10).¹⁷³ It is the Book of Hebrews, however, which fully develops the atonement theme around Yom Kippur.

After explaining that Jesus is the faithful high priest over God’s household, the writer of Hebrews asserts that Christ made atonement for the sins of the people (He. 2:17). The Most Holy Place in the ancient Tent of Meeting has its counterpart in heaven, where Jesus entered to offer his own blood (He. 4:14; 6:19-20; 8:1-2; 9:11-12, 23-24). Just as the people waited outside the ancient sanctuary for the emergence of the priest, a sign that the ritual of atonement was complete (Lv. 16:17), so those who have been made holy by Christ’s blood await his appearing at the end of the age when he comes for them (He. 9:28).

There are differences, however. The ancient high priests of Aaron’s line were themselves sinners, and their rituals were less than perfect. Consequently, the rituals of Yom Kippur necessarily were made again and again (He. 5:1-3; 9:7-10; 10:1-4, 11). Jesus, on the other hand, was holy, blameless, pure and set apart from sinners, so he did not need to offer blood for his own sins (He. 4:15). Instead, he offered his blood only for the sins of the people, and this one offering is effective forever (He. 7:26-28; 9:25-28; 10:12-13). Unlike the Aaronic priests who lived and died, Jesus lives forever as an eternal high priest (He. 7:23-25). Furthermore, not only has he entered into the Most Holy Place of heaven itself, he invites his sanctified, baptized people to pass also behind the inner curtain into the very presence of God (He. 10:19-22; cf. 4:16).¹⁷⁴

In the end, Yom Kippur is indeed the Christian Good Friday. Christ is the high priest as well as the offering. Just as the corpses of the sacrifices were burned outside the camp of Israel (cf. Lv. 16:27-28), so the body of Jesus was hung on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem (He. 13:11-13). The Most Holy Place is heaven, where Jesus entered with his own blood to cover the sins of the whole world forever. From this heavenly sanctuary, Christ will appear in the end of time for his sanctified people to bestow on them eternal salvation.

¹⁷³ It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the scholarly controversy over the translation of the Greek word *hilaskomai* (= to propitiate, to expiate) used in these passages, but the reader should see L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 144-213.

¹⁷⁴ This theological truth had a physical sign at the death of Jesus, when the inner curtain was ripped from the top to the bottom (cf. Mt. 27:51//Mk. 15:38//Lk. 23:45).

Fasts for the Death of the Nation

Among the days observed in Israel's liturgical calendar but not regulated by the Torah are the fasts related to the death of the nation. The fasts were instituted by the Jewish people while in Babylonian captivity, and they are briefly mentioned in the post-exilic prophets.

In all, the Jews in Babylonian captivity kept four different fasts as memorials of the tragedy that befell their nation. These fasts occurred on the anniversaries of particular events. Babylon's invasion of Judah culminated with the attack on the capital.¹⁷⁵ The final siege against Jerusalem, which lasted two years, began on the tenth day of the tenth month in 588 BC (2 Kg. 25:1-2//Je. 52:4-5; 39:1). Nebuchadnezzar surrounded the city with the Babylonian army, cutting off all outside resources. The siege machines and battering rams finally breached the walls on the ninth day of the fourth month in 586 BC (2 Kg. 25:3-4//Je. 52:6-7; 39:2). Once the invaders were inside the city, all was lost. The Babylonians imposed martial law on the city (Je. 39:3). On the seventh day of the fifth month the Babylonian army looted the temple and torched it, along with much of the rest of the city (2 Kg. 25:8-9//Je. 52:12-13; 39:8; 2 Chr. 36:18-19). In place of Judah's last king, Zedekiah, the Babylonians set up a provisional governor, a prominent Jewish nobleman named Gedaliah (2 Kg. 25:22-24//Je. 40:7-10). Thus, even though the nation had gone into exile, a remnant remained in the land to be governed by one of their fellow Jews.

Gedaliah granted asylum to the guerrilla fighters who had escaped to the outlying regions (Je. 40:11-12). However, though he was able to rally the survivors temporarily, another Israelite prince, Ishmael, was not pleased. Possibly he perceived Gedaliah as a collaborator, or perhaps he was simply jealous. In any case, at the prompting of Baalis, an Ammonite king, Ishmael plotted to assassinate Gedaliah, and though one of Gedaliah's officers heard of the plot and warned Gedaliah, Gedaliah would not believe it (Je. 40:13-16). Sure enough, in the seventh month¹⁷⁶ with a vigilante force of ten, Ishmael killed Gedaliah during a dinner and massacred his attendants (Je. 41:1-3; 2 Kg. 25:25). This murder was the last vestige of any political or religious center for Judah.

In Babylon, four fast days were instituted among the exiles to remember the critical events in the death of the nation.¹⁷⁷ The fasts were held each year in the fourth

¹⁷⁵ The progress of this invasion has a remarkable verification in the Lachish Letters, a collection of ostraca from Lachish, a fortress in the Judean defense system to the south of Jerusalem. Jeremiah recorded that the last two Judean cities to hold out besides Jerusalem were Azekah and Lachish (Je. 34:7), and the ostraca letters confirm that Azekah had succumbed and Lachish would follow, cf. D. Ussishkin, *BAR* (Nov-Dec 1979) 16-38.

¹⁷⁶ The length of Gedaliah's governorship is not known, but presumably it lasted only a short time, perhaps as little as two months or perhaps as long as a year.

¹⁷⁷ Fasting in ancient Israel was usually for a single day until sunset (cf. Jg. 20:26; 1 Sa. 7:6). Typical elements in

month (to remember the breaching of the walls), the fifth month (to remember the burning of the temple and city), the seventh month (to remember the assassination of Gedaliah) and the tenth month (to remember the beginning of the siege). By the time the exiles returned from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem, they were still observing these fasts. With the temple rebuilding project half over, the question naturally arose as to whether such fasts should still be kept, since the temple was now under reconstruction (Zec. 7:1-3). In the end, the Lord's answer was that they should continue to be observed in all four months, but because of the rebuilding of the city and the temple, the character of the fasts would change to festivals (Zec. 8:18-19). The Ninth of Ab, the fast of the fifth month recalling the destruction of the temple, became the premier fast in later Judaism.¹⁷⁸

For Christians, the exile of Israel has its counterpart in Christ's cry of abandonment on the cross. In a variety of ways, the gospel writers suggest that Jesus relived the experience of ancient Israel. His infancy in Egypt, his desert sojourn of forty days, his passing through the waters, and his abandonment by God while on the cross all have their ancient parallels. Yet, where Israel, God's ancient servant, failed in her covenant faithfulness, Jesus, God's holy Son, was faithful even in his vicarious suffering. His exile on the cross would climax in resurrection, and just as the ancient people of Israel had anticipated:

After two days, he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us (Ho. 6:2).

Hanukkah

Hanukkah is an eight day festival the Jewish people celebrate beginning on the 25th day of Chislev (Dec. 14th). The festival commemorates the reconsecration of the Temple in Jerusalem in 164 BC, after it had been desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes. The historical events which prompted the institution of Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights or the Feast of Dedication, are recounted in the intertestamental book of 1 Maccabees.

The Maccabean Revolt

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his vast empire was divided

fasting included abstinence from food, water and wine (1 Sa. 7:6 Da. 10:3; Jonah 3:5, 7-8), while clothing was torn or exchanged for sackcloth (Is. 58:1-5; 11. 2:12-13). People sat on the ground and threw dust and ashes on their heads, and there was weeping (2 Sa. 12:16; 1 Mac. 3:47). The hair was left unkept and the body was not bathed, cf. I. Rylaardsdam, *IDB* (1962) 2.261. While the Bible does not offer any information about the origin for fasting, biblical references indicate that it was practiced as an expression of grief, dire emergency, repentance or calamity, cf. H. Guthrie, *IDB* (1962) 2.242. Only in intertestamental Judaism did fasting become a means of earning merit with God.

¹⁷⁸ Why the fast was held on the ninth when the burning of the temple was on the seventh is unclear, cf. C. and E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8 [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987) 434.

among his generals. By 275 BC, three Dynasties had been established which controlled different regions of the original empire. The Antigonids controlled Macedonia, the Ptolemies ruled Egypt, and the Seleucids had control of Syria. These three dynasties were in constant conflict as they vied for power and dominance in the empire. One such conflict was the battle of Paneas (198 BC) in which the Seleucid King, Antiochus the Great, wrested control of Palestine from the Ptolemies.¹⁷⁹

Antiochus the Great (223-187 BC) adhered to a policy of openness toward religion¹⁸⁰ which allowed the Jews in Palestine to continue to practice their temple rites freely. After the death of Antiochus the Great and the assassination of his first successor, Seleucus IV, Antiochus IV took the throne.¹⁸¹ By the time Antiochus IV came to power, the Seleucid kingdom was weak, short of money and falling under the looming shadow of the growing Roman Empire. In order to improve the kingdom's financial situation, the Jerusalem Temple had been looted and its funds seized during the reign of Seleucus.¹⁸² Antiochus continued the practice of raising money for the royal treasury by selling positions of power and influence to the highest bidder while confiscating the wealth of his vassal states.

In conjunction with his efforts to raise money, Antiochus attempted to strengthen his kingdom by an aggressive policy of hellenization. Drawing from the glory of the ancient Greeks and Alexander the Great, he entitled himself Antiochus Epiphanes, meaning "god manifest." He ended his father's policy of religious freedom and made an all-out effort to standardize the culture and religious practices within his kingdom. In Jerusalem, he plundered the temple and desecrated it. He erected a pagan altar and an image of himself as the earthly manifestation of Zeus on the altar of burnt offerings in the temple court.¹⁸³ He forced the Jews to offer sacrifices of swine's flesh on this altar under threat of death. Furthermore, he forbade all Jewish sacrifices. The Sabbath and feast days were no longer to be observed; the rite of circumcision was to cease.¹⁸⁴ These actions began a period of severe persecution during which many Jews lost their lives (1 Macc. 1:54-64).

One of those who fled Jerusalem during this time of persecution was the

¹⁷⁹ B. Metzger, ed., *The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1957) 221-223.

¹⁸⁰ Both the Babylonian and the Persian Empires set the precedent of allowing their vassals freedom of religious expression as a means of maintaining peace and ensuring the general satisfaction of their subjugated peoples.

¹⁸¹ The throne originally went to Seleucus IV, who was the brother of Antiochus IV. Seleucus was assassinated by Heliodorus in 175 BC. Antiochus, who had been a hostage in Rome during this time, returned to Syria the same year that his brother was assassinated. He ousted Heliodorus and reclaimed the throne, cf. H. Hoehner, "Maccabees," *ISBE* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 3.197.

¹⁸² D. Russell *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960) 26.

¹⁸³ Many scholars see Antiochus Epiphanes as a partial fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy concerning "the abomination which causes desolation" (Dan. 11:21-45), cf. Russell, 39.

¹⁸⁴ Russell, 28.

Jewish Priest Mattathias, a member of the Hasmonean family. He and his five sons settled in Modem, a small city about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem. 1 Maccabees 2:15 tells us that the king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy also went to Modem to force the people there to offer pagan sacrifice. Mattathias refused to offer sacrifice, calling his countrymen to remember the covenant their forefathers had made with God. When a fellow Jew disregarded his advice and stepped forward to offer the pagan sacrifice, Mattathias killed him along with the king's official who had been sent to enforce the command. As a result, Mattathias, his sons, and many others fled into hiding in the Judean wilderness, from which they launched a campaign of guerilla resistance against the Seleucid occupation. They were joined by the Hasideans, who were an orthodox sect intent on restoring the Temple and reinstating the sacrifices.

After Mattathias died, his son Judas, who had taken the name Maccabee, meaning "hammer," continued the resistance movement. The movement gained strength and momentum quickly. It sparked direct confrontation with the Syrian army. After several smaller victories, Judas Maccabee and his army of 10,000 eventually prevailed over an army of 65,000, driving the Seleucids out of Palestine and liberating Jerusalem.

When Judas and his men re-entered Jerusalem, they found the temple overgrown with weeds. The sanctuary was desolate, the altar to Zeus still sat in the inner court and the gates had been burned. Judas chose a number of priests who cleansed the sanctuary, rebuilt the altar of burnt offerings, rehung the curtains to the Most Holy Place, and refurnished the sanctuary with its lampstand, altar of incense and table (1 Macc. 4:36-5 1). On the 25th of Chislev, exactly three years after Antiochus Epiphanes had desecrated it, the priests rededicated the temple, offering sacrifices and celebrating for eight days. This began a period of relative independence¹⁸⁵ which lasted until the Romans seized Palestine in 63 BC.

The Celebration of Hanukkah

Hanukkah is celebrated with eight days of feasting. Lights are placed outside each house. Inside, a candle on the menorah is lit each day until all eight candles are burning. This is to commemorate a miracle recorded in the Talmud. When the priests Judas appointed were cleansing the sanctuary and restoring the Temple, one day's

¹⁸⁵ Antiochus Epiphanes continued to send armies to Palestine in an attempt to regain control of the region but was never completely successful. The descendants of Mattathias established the Hasmonean dynasty, which ruled Palestine until 63 BC. This period was characterized by internal strife between Orthodox Jews, who were committed to religious purity, and the Hasmonean house, which devoted itself to political ends. The Hasmonean house quickly became corrupt, taking over the high priesthood as well as the kingship. The religious zeal, which had sparked the rebellion of 166 BC, waned. cf., Russell, 32-35.

supply of oil burned for eight days in the seven branched candelabra of the Holy Place until fresh oil could be brought.¹⁸⁶ Traditionally, the Hallel (Psalms 113-118) also is sung to commemorate Judas' army singing hymns during battle and in victory.

Hanukkah is a time to remember God's deliverance of his people. It is also a time to reflect on one's religious commitment, remembering the dilemma facing the Jews of 167 BC, in which they had to choose between breaking covenant with God or dying.

¹⁸⁶ J. Neusner, *Chanukah* (Grolier Electronic Pub. Inc., 1995). Other sources connect the significance of the lighting of lights to the miracle of fire recorded in 2 Macc. 1:18-23, cf., R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Religious Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) 2.512.