

An Old Testament Glossary

Abaddon. One of the OT's words for the place where dead people are, like **Sheol**. The ordinary word is similar to a Hebrew word meaning "perish," which may well not be a coincidence. Indeed, the verb can suggest "destroy," and people might make a link with the fact that death does mean that our bodies decay. But the texts do not make anything of this. The word is simply a name.

aide. A supernatural agent through whom God may appear and work in the world. Standard English translations refer to them as "angels," but this is inclined to suggest ethereal figures with wings, wearing diaphanous white dresses. Aides are human-like figures; hence it possible to give them hospitality without realizing this is who they are (Hebrews 13). And they have no wings; hence their need of a stairway or ramp between heaven and earth (Genesis 28). They appear in order to act or speak on God's behalf, and so fully represent God that they can speak as if they *are* God (Genesis 22). They thus bring the reality of God's presence, action, and voice, without bringing such a real presence that it would electrocute mere mortals or shatter their hearing

altar. A structure for offering a sacrifice (the word comes from the word for sacrifice), made of earth or stone. An altar might be relatively small, like a table, and the person making the offering would stand in front of it. Or it might be higher and larger, like a platform, and the person making the offering would climb onto it.

Amorites. A term for one of the original ethnic groups in **Canaan**, though also used to refer to the people of that country as a whole. Genesis 15.16 and 21 illustrates the two uses of the word in close proximity. Indeed, outside the OT "Amorites" refers to a people living over a much wider area of **Mesopotamia**. "Amorites" is thus a little like the word "America," which commonly refers to the U.S.A. but can denote a much broader area of the continent of which the U.S.A. is part.

ancestral heads are the heads of the (very) extended families within the twelve clans of Israel, a family unit rather larger than the household.

apocalypse. A visionary work that describes things we could not otherwise know—things about heaven and/or hell and/or creation and/or the End—which the visionary says have been specially revealed to him or her.

apocalyptic denotes forms of **eschatology** that stress the radical difference between this age and the coming age, the radical nature of the action of God that will bring in the new age, and an associated emphasis on disaster rather than any renewal aspect to what God will do. It can also imply the use of vivid imagery and symbolism, particularly to communicate the nature of this coming calamity. But it's a word used in confusing ways, and is best avoided.

Apocrypha. The contents of the main Christian OT are the same as those of the Jewish Scriptures, though there they come in a different order, as the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. Their precise bounds as Scripture came to be accepted some time in the years before or after Christ. For centuries, most Christian churches used a broader collection of Jewish writings, including books such as Maccabees and Ecclesiasticus, which for Jews were not part of the Bible. These other books came to be called the "Apocrypha," the books that were "hidden away" - which came to imply "spurious." They are now often known as the "Deutero-Canonical Writings," which is more cumbersome but less pejorative; it simply

indicates that these books have less authority than the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. The precise list of them varies between different churches.

Aram, Aramaeans. Aramaic. In the period to which Genesis refers, the Aramaeans were a people living in Syria and northern Mesopotamia. Aram later became the name for a more defined political entity in Syria, **Ephraim's** big north-eastern neighbor; English translations then often refer to it as Syria. The Aramaic language, a sister-language of Hebrew somewhat in the way Spanish is a sister language of Portuguese or Italian, became the international language of the Middle East. Parts of Ezra, Jeremiah, and Daniel are in Aramaic, and it was the everyday language of Palestine in Jesus' day.

ark. See **chest**.

Asherah. The word is used both to signify the name of a deity and the name of an aid to worship (the two meanings come close together in 1 Kings 14 - 15). In Canaanite religion and elsewhere, strictly Asherah was a particular goddess, but the name came to be used in the plural as a general term for a goddess. As a word for an aid to worship, it denotes something that can be "erected," "planted," and "burned," which suggests a tree-like column or pillar that represented and suggested the presence of the deity.

assistants. These are the *nethinim*, people who played a support role in the temple. Etymologically their name implies they are people who were "given," dedicated to the service of God, or given to the priests and Levites as their assistants in fulfilling menial tasks. The Gibeonites (Joshua 9:27) are not called *nethinim*, but the role ascribed to them as water carriers and wood cutters for the sanctuary conveys an idea of these assistants' work. The assistants came to be treated as among the Levites.

Assyria. The first great Middle-Eastern superpower, the Assyrians spread their empire westwards into Syria-Palestine in the eighth century, the time of Amos and Isaiah. They first made **Ephraim** part of their empire, then when Ephraim kept trying to assert independence, they invaded Ephraim, destroyed its capital at Samaria, transported its people, and settled people from other parts of their empire in their place. They also invaded **Judah** and devastated much of the country, but did not take Jerusalem. Prophets such as Amos and Isaiah describe how Yahweh was thus using Assyria as a means of disciplining Israel.

authority. People such as Eli, Samuel, Samuel's sons, and the kings "exercise authority" over Israel and for Israel. The Hebrew word for someone who exercises such authority, *shopet*, is traditionally translated *judge*, but such leadership is wider than this. In the book called Judges, these leaders are people who have no official position like the later kings, but who arise and exercise initiative in a way that brings the people **deliverance** from the trouble they get into. It is a king's job to exercise authority in accordance with **faithfulness** to God and people.

awe. Hebrew uses the same words for being afraid of someone fearful and for respecting someone whom it's appropriate to revere. Occasionally it's hard to be sure which sort of attitude is designated by the word. I have used awe where the context implies the second sort of attitude, which also implies submission and obedience. In the wisdom books, awe is seen as a key aspect of a relationship with God, of crucial importance to understanding God and life. Awe for God has been described as the OT expression for spirituality.

Baal. See **Master**

Babylon. A minor power in the context of Israel's early history, in the time of Jeremiah they took over the position of superpower from **Assyria** and kept that for nearly a century until

conquered by Persia. Prophets such as Jeremiah describe how Yahweh was using them as a means of disciplining Judah. Their creation stories, law codes, and more philosophical writings help us understand aspects of the OT's equivalent writings, while their astrological religion also forms background to aspects of polemic in the prophets.

Canaan, Canaanites. As the biblical terms for the land of Israel as a whole and for its indigenous peoples, "Canaanites" is not so much the name for a particular ethnic group as a shorthand term for all the peoples native to the land. See also **Amorites**.

cherubs. These are not baby angelic figures (as that word may suggest in modern usage) but awe-inspiring winged creatures that transport Yahweh, who sits on a throne above them. There were statues of them in the temple standing guard over the covenant **chest**; they thus pointed to the presence of Yahweh there, enthroned invisibly above them.

chest. The "covenant chest" is a box a bit more than a yard long, a bit more than half a yard wide and high. The King James Bible refers to it as an "ark," but the word means a box, though it is only occasionally used to refer to chests used for other purposes. It is the *covenant* chest because it contains the stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, key expectations God laid down in connection with establishing the Sinai covenant. It is regularly kept in the sanctuary, but there is a sense in which it symbolizes God's presence (given that Israel has no images to do so), and in that capacity the Israelites sometimes carry it with them. It is sometimes referred to as the **declaration chest**, with the same meaning: the tablets "declare" God's covenant expectations.

chiasm: a form of writing in which the first and last elements (e.g. the lines of a poem or the episodes in a story) form a pair, the second and the last but one form and pair, and so on—i.e. an ABCBA or ABCCBA or ABCDCBA etc pattern

commitment. The word corresponds to the Hebrew word *hesed*, which translations render by means of expressions such as steadfast love or loving kindness or goodness. It is the OT equivalent to the special word for love in the NT, the word *agapē*. The OT uses this word to refer to an extraordinary act whereby someone pledges himself or herself to someone else in some act of generosity, allegiance, or grace when there is no prior relationship between them and therefore no reason why they should do so. Thus in Joshua 2, Rahab appropriately speaks of her protection of the Israelite spies as an act of commitment. It can also refer to a similar extraordinary act that takes place when there is a relationship between people, but one party has let the other party down and therefore has no right to expect any faithfulness from the other party. If the party that has been let down continues being faithful, they are showing this kind of commitment. In their response to Rahab, the Israelite spies declare that they will relate to her in this way.

covenant. The Hebrew word *berit* covers covenants, treaties, and contracts, but these are all ways in which people make a formal commitment about something, and I have used the word *covenant* for all three. Where you have a legal system that people can appeal to, contracts assume a system for resolving disputes and administering justice that can be utilized if people do not keep their commitment. In contrast, a covenantal relationship does not presuppose an enforceable legal framework of that kind, but a covenant does involve some formal procedure that confirms the seriousness of the solemn commitment one party makes to another. Thus the OT often speaks of *sealing* a covenant, literally of *cutting* it (the background lies in the kind of formal procedure described in Genesis 15 and Jeremiah 34:18-20, though such an actual procedure would hardly be required every time someone made a covenantal commitment). People make covenants sometimes *to* other people and sometimes *with* other people; the one implies something more one-sided, the other something more mutual.

cry, cry out. In describing the Israelites' response when they are oppressed by enemies, Judges uses the word that the OT uses to describe Abel's blood crying out to God, the outcry of the people of Sodom under their oppression, the Israelites' crying out in Egypt, and the outcry of people who are unfairly treated within Israel in later centuries. It denotes an urgent cry that presses God for **deliverance**, a cry that God can be relied on to hear even when people deserve to be having the experience that is assailing them.

day of the Lord. The oldest occurrence of the expression "the Day of the Lord," "Yahweh's Day," comes in Amos 5, which indicates that people saw it as a time when Yahweh would bring great blessing on them. Amos declares that the opposite is the case. Henceforth the expression always has sinister connotations. Yahweh's Day is a day when Yahweh acts in decisive fashion. It doesn't happen just once; there are various occasions that the OT describes as Yahweh's Day, such as Jerusalem's fall in 587 and Babylon's fall in 539. In Isaiah, Sennacherib's devastation of Judah was such an embodiment of Yahweh's Day (22:5).

decision. See **authority**.

declaration chest. The King James Bible refers to this chest as an "ark," but the word means a box, though it is only occasionally used to refer to chests used for other purposes. In the King James Bible it is "the ark of the covenant," but the phrase does not use the ordinary word for "covenant" but a word that means a solemn declaration. So the "ark of the covenant" is the "declaration chest." It was a bit more than a yard long, a bit more than half a yard wide and high. The link with covenant is that the "declaration" concerns the kind of expectations God has "declared" to Israel in connection with the covenant, specifically the ten commandments with their key significance for Israel's covenant relationship with God.

deliver, deliverer, deliverance. In the OT, modern translations often use the words *save*, *savior*, and *salvation*, but this gives a misleading impression. In Christian usage, these words commonly refer to our personal relationship with God and to the enjoyment of heaven. The OT does speak of our personal relationship with God, but it does not use this group of words in that connection. They refer rather to God's practical intervention to get Israel or the individual out of a mess of some kind, such as false accusations by individuals within the community or invasion by enemies.

devote, devotion. Devoting something to God means giving it over to God irrevocably. Translations use words such as "annihilated" or "destroyed," and that is often the implication, but it does not convey the word's distinctive point. You could devote land, or an animal such as donkey, and in effect Hannah will devote Samuel; the donkey or the human being then belongs to God and is committed to God's service. In effect the Israelites devoted many Canaanites to God's service in this way; they became people who chopped wood and drew water for the **altar**, its offerings, and the rites of the sanctuary. Devoting people to God by killing them as a kind of sacrifice was a practice known from other peoples, which Israel takes over on its own initiative, but which God validates. Israel knows this is how war works in its world and it assumes it is to operate the same way, and God goes along with that.

disciples of the Prophets. Literally, these are the 'sons of the prophets.' First and Second Kings mentions communities of such prophets in various places in Ephraim in the time of Elijah and Elisha. They lived together and apparently made their services available to people who needed guidance from God on some matter. They would be dependent on donations from people who sought their help in this way; the stories indicate that this made them vulnerable to poverty.

Edom, Edomites. Edom is Judah's southeastern neighbor, occupying an area to the southeast of the Dead Sea. As Israel traces its ancestry back to Jacob, it traces Edom's ancestry back to

Jacob's brother Esau. The OT critiques Edom in particular for its inclination to take advantage of Judah's vulnerability and its support of the Babylonians when they captured Jerusalem. Subsequently the Edomites occupied considerable parts of southern Judah.

effigies. The Hebrew word for these is *teraphim*. First Samuel 15:33 presupposes a link between the *teraphim* and divination, which involves techniques (like those of astrology) for trying to discover things about the future so that we can make sensible decisions or safeguard against trouble that might come. One form of divination involves consulting the dead. The effigies would be images of family members who had passed (a little like family photographs), whom people would seek to consult on the assumption that they might now know things that their relatives who were still alive could not know. Israel was not supposed to be involved in such procedures because it was expected to rely more directly on God for guidance.

Egypt, Egyptians. The major regional power to the south of Canaan and the country where Jacob's family had found refuge, where they ended up as serfs, and from which the Israelites then needed to escape. In Moses' time Egypt controlled Canaan; in subsequent centuries it was sometimes a threat to Israel, sometimes a potential ally.

El. The word El is used both as a noun meaning "God" or "god" and also as if it is a name parallel to names such as Yahweh. In this it is actually similar to the English word "God." In Canaanite religion El is the name of the senior god among all the gods. It can then be compounded with another word so as to suggest a particular angle on who God is. For instance, for Melchizedek, God is El Elyon, which means High God. For Hagar, God is El Roi, "God of my seeing/looking," which could imply "The God who sees me/looks at me/looks out for me" or "the God whom I have seen/looked out for." For Abraham, God is El Shadday. The fact that Melchizedek the Jebusite and Hagar the Egyptian also use this sort of name for God points to this being a way of speaking of God that Israel and its ancestors can share with other peoples.

ephod. In some passages the OT implies that an ephod is a kind of vest worn by a priest, but in some passages it at least incorporated something that contained the **Urim and Thummim**.

Ephraim. After the reign of David and Solomon, the nation of Israel split into two. Most of the twelve Israelite clans set up an independent state in the north, separate from Judah and Jerusalem and from the line of David. Because this was the bigger of the two states, politically it kept the name Israel, which is confusing because Israel is still the name of the people as a whole as the people of God. In the prophets, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether "Israel" refers to the people of God as a whole or just to the northern state. But sometimes the state is referred to by the name of Ephraim as one of its dominant clans, so I use this term to refer to that northern state, to try to reduce the confusion.

eschatology/the eschaton. These words are used in a variety of ways to refer to what happens to individuals after death, to Israel's ultimate destiny, to the end of history, and to the future of the cosmos. The words are worth avoiding because they sound like technical terms but they have different meanings for different people. Say "the End," which doesn't sound like a technical term and is clearly capable of different meanings.

evil. The OT uses this word in a similar fashion to the way English uses the word *bad* - it can refer both to the bad things that people do and the bad things that happen to us, both to morally bad actions and to bad experiences. Sometimes prophets use the word with both connotations in the same context, pointing towards the fact that bad things often happen because people do bad things - though Jeremiah knows that this is not invariably so. Like other prophets, he can thus speak of God doing evil in the sense of bringing calamity to people.

exegesis: the attempt to understand something in its own terms and to express that understanding. Interpretation minus hermeneutics.

exile. At the end of the seventh century **Babylon** became the major power in Judah's world but Judah was inclined to rebel against its authority. As part of a successful campaign to get Judah to submit properly to its authority, in 597 and in 587 BC the Babylonians transported many people from Jerusalem to Babylon. They made a special point of transporting people in leadership positions, such as members of the royal family and the court, priests, and prophets (Ezekiel was one of them). These people were thus compelled to live in Babylonia for the next fifty years or so. Through the same period, people back in Judah were also under Babylonian authority. So they were not physically in exile but they were also living *in* the exile as period of time. A number of books in the OT indicate that one of the issues they are handling is the pressure this experience brings to people.

expiation. A key concern in Exodus and Leviticus is keeping the sanctuary pure. While God may be able to tolerate a small amount of impurity there (as we can tolerate a small amount of dirt), if the place people have made as a home for God becomes too much affected by things that are alien, then God can hardly carry on living there. So it is important to deal with impurity that comes on the sanctuary through the infringement of **taboos**. One way of conceiving this is to speak in terms of atonement (at-one-ment), which suggests the healing of a relationship. Another is to speak of propitiation, which suggests the mollifying of someone who was angry. In contrast, expiation relates to the thing that has caused the problem rather than to the person. It suggests the removal or wiping away of a stain. Of course the removal of the stain does mean that the threat to the relationship is gone and it is now possible for God to be in easy relationship with the people; in this sense expiation and at-one-ment are closely related. On the other hand, "propitiation" is a more questionable idea in connection Leviticus; while it does imply that God is offended by people and unwilling to associate with them, it does not speak of God being angry with them because of their offences.

faithfulness. In English Bibles this Hebrew word (*sedāqah*) is usually translated "righteousness," but it denotes a particular slant on what we might mean by righteousness. It means doing the right thing by the people with whom one is in a relationship, the members of one's community. Thus it is really closer to "faithfulness" than "righteousness."

faithless. A word for sin that suggests the opposite of **faithfulness**, an attitude to God and to other people that expresses a contempt for what right relationships deserve.

fall. A confusing word that imports a bag full of non-scriptural ideas into scripture - or at least ideas foreign to Genesis 3. Think out what you mean by the term and say that.

form criticism: study of the standard forms that speech and writing take in different cultures (e.g. children's stories or church announcements or prayers or jokes) that helps people from other cultures to understand them.

gatekeepers. Like the **assistants**, the gatekeepers have an important adjunct role in the temple. In general terms, their name implies that their responsibility was to make sure that people who should not come into the temple area do not do so. This might cover excluding people who would bring defilement into the sanctuary, but also people who might want to steal its resources such as animals, gold, and silver. They came to be treated as among the Levites.

give oneself. I use this expression in many passages to translate the Hebrew word traditionally translated “love,” because whereas the latter word in English easily suggests an emotion, the Hebrew word denotes an attitude and action at least as much as an emotion.

Greece. In 336 BC Greek forces under Alexander the Great took control of the Persian Empire, but after Alexander’s death in 333 his empire split up. The largest part, to the north and east of Palestine, was ruled by one of his generals, Seleucus, and his successors. Judah was under its control for much of the next two centuries, though it was at the extreme southwestern border of this empire and sometimes came under the control of the Ptolemaic Empire in Egypt (ruled by successors of another of Alexander’s officers).

haggadah: the Hebrew word for “(story)telling”, the key Jewish way of doing theology. Compare **halakah**.

hate. See **repudiate**.

halakah: the Hebrew word for “walking”, denoting instruction on behavior derived from scripture and tradition. Compare **haggadah**.

Hebrew. Oddly, whereas this word became the term for the language of the Jewish people, it seems not to be an ethnic term in the OT. Hebrews is not the same as **Israelites**. While Abraham can be designated a Hebrew (Genesis 14.13) and the Israelites might be termed Hebrews, they were not the only Hebrews. Other languages have related words, and all seem to be more sociological terms than ethnic ones, a little like the word “gypsy.” They suggest people who do not belong to a regular recognized political community. In the NT, the Hebrews are Hebrew-speaking **Jews** as opposed to Greek-speaking Jews. So it’s confusing to refer to OT Israelites as “Hebrews.” See the diagram “Israelites, Hebrews, Jews, Samaritans, Samaritans” at the end of this Glossary.

Heilsgeschichte: a German word meaning salvation history, the acts of God whereby God fulfilled his purpose to redeem the world.

hermeneutics: the theory behind the process whereby people in one culture (say, our own) come to understand and evaluate something from another culture. Interpretation minus exegesis.

high place. Traditional religion in villages and towns in Canaan would center on a place of worship at the highest point in the village, possibly elevated by a platform. Here members of the community would bring their offerings and pray, for instance in connection with the birth of children and with the harvest. When the population of a village or city became Israelite, the nature of this worship would be expected to change so that it was Yahweh who was worshiped there, but in practice it commonly continued to work by the traditions of the past. Either it would still involve the worship of deities other than Yahweh or it would involve Canaanite-style worship practices such as the use of images - or the sacrifice of children - even if people saw themselves as worshiping Yahweh. Some kings who are faithful to Yahweh let the high places continue to function without compromising their commitment to Yahweh, but in light of the abuse of the high places and the eventual development of a conviction that they should simply be abolished, 1 and 2 Kings feel ambivalent about them and manifest some unease about the way faithful kings allow them to continue in use.

historical criticism: study of the date of material in the Bible and the historical nature of events referred to in the Bible without assuming that what believers have always thought about who wrote them and what actually happened is necessarily right.

imago Dei: image of God. The use of the Latin expression points to the fact that it is more an idea from Christian doctrine than one that expresses the meaning of “image of God” in Genesis.

interpretation: exegesis plus hermeneutics.

intimacy: a favorite word in Christian parlance, but it is not clear what it means, especially as applied to us and God

Israel. Originally, Israel was the new name God gave Abraham’s grandson, Jacob. His twelve sons were then forefathers of the twelve clans that comprise the people Israel. In the time of Saul and David these twelve clans became more of a political entity. So Israel was both the people of God and a nation or state like other nations or states. After Solomon’s day, this state split into two separate states, **Ephraim** and

Judah. Because Ephraim was far the bigger, it often continued to be referred to as Israel. So if one is thinking of the people of God, Judah is part of Israel. If one is thinking politically, Judah is not part of Israel. Once Ephraim has gone out of existence, then for practical purposes Judah *is* Israel, as the people of God. See the diagram “Israelites, Hebrews, Jews, Samaritans, Samaritans” at the end of this Glossary.

Jew. The word is a shortened version of the word *yehudi*, which thus denotes a member of the clan or province of **Judah/Yehud**. As Judah/Yehud became the heart of Israel in the Second Temple period, *yehudim* or Jews became a term for all members of the people of Israel and became a regular term for members of a religious community rather than members of an ethnic group. But this usage mostly belongs to post-OT times and in the OT the word *yehudim* or “Jews” would exclude most Israelites. So it’s confusing to refer to OT Israelites as “Jews.” See the diagram “Israelites, Hebrews, Jews, Samaritans, Samaritans” at the end of this Glossary.

Judah. One of the twelve sons of Jacob, then the clan that traces its ancestry to him, then the dominant clan in the southern of the two states after the time of Solomon. Later, as a Persian province or colony, it was known in Aramaic as Yehud. Later still, the Roman province known as Judea also included much of the area of **Ephraim/Samaria**. In the context of the OT, it’s thus less confusing to refer to Judah and to Judahites, not Judeans. See the diagram “Israelites, Hebrews, Jews, Samaritans, Samaritans” at the end of this Glossary.

Kaldeans. Kaldea was an area southeast of Babylon from which the kings who ruled Babylonia came in the time Babylonia ruled Judah. Thus the OT refers to the Babylonians as the Kaldeans.

leader. The book of Judges is named after the leaders whose stories appear in the book. The traditional term is “judge,” so that they are people who also give their name to the period of time between Joshua and Saul, the “Judges Period.” But these “judges” do not usually operate in connection with sorting out legal cases, and “leaders” gives more the right idea concerning their role. They are people who have no official position like the later kings, but who arise and exercise initiative in a way that brings the clans **deliverance** from the trouble the clans get into.

legend: a word sometimes used to denote a story that may ultimately have a historical reference but that has become elaborated over time, sometimes used to denote a purely fictional story (e.g., to explain the origin of something).

Levites. Within the clan of Levi, the descendants of Aaron are the priests, the people who have specific responsibilities in connection with offering the community’s sacrifices and

helping individuals to offer their sacrifices by performing some aspects of the offering such as the sprinkling of the animal's blood. The other Levites fulfill a support and administrative role in the temple and are also involved in teaching the people and in other aspects of leading worship.

literary criticism: used to be used as a synonym of source criticism (see below) but now more often used for the application to the Bible of the kind of approaches to understanding that are used on poems, novels, etc, outside the Bible.

love. See **give oneself**.

man of God. In English usage "man of God" (or "woman of God") suggests someone of deep prayer life and clear moral commitment. The equivalent Hebrew expression has different significance. It suggests someone with extraordinary and rather frightening power and insight. A man of God knows things you might not want him to know and can do things you might not want him to do, though he also knows and does things that constitute good news. He knows and does such things not because of his deep spirituality (though he may be a deeply spiritual person) but because God takes hold of him and gives him the capacity to know and do them, simply because God decides to do so. He is a man who represents God in quite a strong sense. God makes him someone who stands for God in the world and who indicates this fact by the capacities he exercises.

Masoretes. The Jewish scholars who studied and preserved the tradition (*masora*) about the OT text during the Middle Ages. Whereas the written Hebrew alphabet comprises only consonants, the Masoretes perfected and standardized a system of dots and dashes to indicate how the tradition understood the vowel sounds. They also standardized and preserved a division of the text into chapters and paragraphs (a different system from the one in English Bibles), a division into verses (English Bibles nearly always have the same system), and a system of signs that indicated the relationships between the words in sentences. The climax of this work was the production of a standard version of the OT, the Masoretic Text, which is still the text that appears in Hebrew Bibles.

Master, Masters. The word *baal* is an ordinary Hebrew word for a master or lord or owner, but the word is also used to describe a Canaanite god. It is thus parallel to the word Lord as used to describe Yahweh. Further, in effect "Master" can be a proper name, like "Lord." To make the difference clear, the OT generally uses Master for a foreign god and Lord for the real God, Yahweh. Like other ancient peoples, the Canaanites acknowledged a number of gods, and strictly the Master was simply one of them, though he was one of the most prominent. In addition, a title such as "The Master of Peor" suggests that the Master was believed to be manifest and known in different ways and different places. The OT also uses the plural *Masters* to refer to Canaanite gods in general.

Medes, Medo-Persia, Persia, Persians. Media lies between Mesopotamia and Persia. In the 550s Cyrus the Great gained control of the Media and also of Persia, and turned Medo-Persia into the third Middle-Eastern superpower. Cyrus took control of the **Babylonian** empire in 539 BC, which opened up the possibility of **Judahites** returning from Babylon after the **exile**. Judah and surrounding peoples such as Samaria, Ammon, and Ashdod were then Persian provinces or colonies. The Persians stayed in power for two centuries until defeated by **Greece**.

Mesopotamia. Etymologically, the country "between the rivers," the Tigris and Euphrates, though in practice it refers to the area they run through. The area is largely equivalent to modern Iraq. **Babylon** and Babylonia lie in its south, Ur in its far south, **Assyria** and Nineveh in its north, Elam and Persia to its east.

messiah. A Hebrew word meaning “an anointed person.” In the OT the word (more strictly *meshiah*) refers to a priest or a monarch as someone whose head has had oil poured or smeared on it as a mark of entering their office, like a coronation. It later came to be associated with God’s spirit coming on a person, but this significance does not attach to anointing priests and monarchs. In post-OT times the word came to designate the ultimate king (or priest) whom God would send one day, “the Messiah,” and the OT also talks about God sending an ultimate king (e.g., Jer 23:5-6), but it does not apply the word messiah to this coming king

midrash: retelling a Biblical story by reading between the lines in such a way as to answer the questions and address the needs of later readers.

Mishnah. A collection of rabbinic traditions from late Second Temple Judaism (and thus from a period substantially overlapping with NT times). The collection was put into writing about 200 AD and forms the first part of the **Talmud**.

myth: a word used in a variety of ways, to refer to a purely fictional story, or a purely fictional story that expresses a theological point, or a historical event that has come to have vital importance for the self-understanding of a people.

name. The name of someone stands for the person. The OT talks of the temple as a place where God’s name dwells. It’s one of the ways it handles the paradox involved in speaking of the temple as a place where God lives. It knows this is a nonsense: how could a building contain the God who could not be contained by the entire heavens, no matter how far you could travel across them? Yet Israel knows that God does in some sense dwell in the temple. They know they can talk with God when they go there; they are aware that they can talk with God anywhere, but there is a special guarantee of this in the temple. They know they can make offerings there and that God will receive them (supposing they are made in good faith). One way they try to square the circle in speaking of the presence of God in the temple is therefore to speak of God’s name being present there, because the name sums up the person. Uttering the name of someone you know brings home his or her reality to you; it’s almost as if the person is there. When you say someone’s name, there is a sense in which you conjure up the person. When people murmur “Jesus, Jesus” in their prayer, it brings home the reality of Jesus’ presence. Likewise, when Israel proclaimed the name Yahweh in worship, it brought home the reality of Yahweh’s presence.

Nethinim. See **assistants**.

numbers. The account of the numbers of people involved in battles (especially in Chronicles) suggests figures that are far too high to be in keeping with the populations of countries in OT times. There are several ways of explaining this fact. Possibly the words that indicate the numbers have been changed accidentally, as some other words in the text have been accidentally changed. Possibly the numbers are deliberately inflated for the sake of hyperbole; big numbers convey an impression of the magnitude of an event. Possibly words have changed their meaning. The word for “thousand” can also mean “family” and possibly some passages that refer to families have been taken to refer to thousands. Different explanations may apply in different passages.

parallelism. Lines in the psalms (and in much OT poetry) are usually self-contained and divide into two halves, with about three important words in each half. Parallelism refers to the way the second half of a line usually restates or augments or completes or clarifies or contrasts with the first half. It wouldn’t be surprising if this practice linked with people singing the psalms antiphonally, perhaps with the leader singing the first half and the congregation

responding with the second half. See the introduction to this commentary for further explanation.

peace. The Hebrew word *shalom* can suggest peace after there has been conflict, but it often points to a richer notion, of fullness of life. The KJV sometimes translates it “welfare” and modern translations use words such as “well-being” or “prosperity.” It suggests that everything is going well for you.

Perizzites. One of the groups in Canaan whom the Israelites displaced or came to control and assimilate, they show up in several places in the OT, and the word may be not so much an ethnic term as a sociological one (like **Hebrews**). The name resembles the word for an unfortified “settlement” so it might denote people who lived in such settlements rather than in cities, a bit like the English word “villagers.”

Persia. The third Middle Eastern superpower. Under the leadership of Cyrus the Great, they took control of the Babylonian empire in 539 BC. Isaiah 40 - 55 sees Yahweh’s hand in raising up Cyrus as the means of restoring **Judah** after the **exile**. Judah and surrounding peoples such as Samaria, Ammon, and Ashdod were Persian provinces or colonies. The Persians stayed in power for two centuries until defeated by **Greece**.

Philistia, Philistines. The Philistines were people who came from across the Mediterranean to settle in Canaan at the same time as the Israelites were establishing themselves in Canaan, so that the two peoples formed an accidental pincer-movement on the existent inhabitants of the country and became each other’s rivals for control of the area.

Phoenicia, Phoenicians. Phoenicia is the area on the Mediterranean coast to the northeast of Israel, centering on the area of modern Lebanon but including part of modern Syria and part of ancient and modern Israel. It was not so much a state as a collection of city states, among which were Tyre and Sidon. While these city states could be at war with one another, they were aware of a common ethnicity and a common religion, which they also shared (along with their language) with the Canaanites. In other words, the Phoenicians were Canaanites who lived further north than Canaan itself. Their distinguishing feature was that they were a great trading people.

purification, purify, purification offering. A major concern of the Torah is dealing with the **taboo** that can come on people and places through the affect of something that is alien to who God is, such as contact with death. There is nothing wrong with being involved in burying someone, but you have to give the taint of death time to dissipate or have it removed before coming into God’s presence. A purification rite can bring that about.

Reed Sea is literally “sea of rushes”; the word is the one that came in Exodus 2 where Miriam left Moses in the reeds by the Nile. It might be one of the northern arms of what we call the Red Sea, either side of Sinai, or it might be an area of marshy lakes within Sinai.

remains, remnant. The Prophets warn that Yahweh’s chastisement will mean Israel (and other peoples) being cut down so that only small remains or a remnant will survive. But at least some remains of Israel will survive - so the idea of “remains” can become a sign of hope. It can also become a challenge - the few that remain are challenged to become faithful remains, a faithful remnant.

repudiation is the opposite of **giving oneself**. Traditionally the word is translated “hate,” but like the word for “love,” it denotes a term for an attitude that expresses itself in action and not so much an emotion.

restore. A restorer is a person who is in a position to take action on behalf of someone within his extended family who is in need in order to restore the situation to what it should be. The word overlaps with expressions such as next-of-kin, guardian, and redeemer. "Next-of-kin" indicates the family context that "restorer" presupposes. "Guardian" indicates that the restorer is in a position to be concerned for the person's protection and defense. "Redeemer" indicates having resources that the restorer is prepared to expend on the person's behalf. The OT uses the term to refer to God's relationship with Israel as well as to the action of a human person in relation to another, so it implies that Israel belongs to God's family and that God acts on its behalf in the way a restorer does.

sackcloth. Sack does not suggest something uncomfortable; it refers to the humble cloth from which ordinary people's garments were made. It stands in contrast to impressive clothes or the kind of clothes in which important people would appear in public.

salvation. See **deliver.**

Samaria, Samaritans, Samaritans. The city of Samaria was the capital of **Ephraim**; it fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Many people were then transported there by the Assyrians. Samaria later became the name of the Babylonian and Persian province in the area, and for a while its governor had authority over Judah. In the Second Temple period the Judahites were thus ethnically, politically, and religiously suspicious of the Samaritans. But many of the Samaritans were actually more conservative than the Judahites; as their Scriptures they accepted only the Torah. See the diagram "Israelites, Hebrews, Jews, Samaritans, Samaritans" at the end of this Glossary.

Second Temple. The first temple was Solomon's, devastated by the Babylonians in 587 BC; the second temple was the one rebuilt seventy years later (see Ezra 5 - 6). It was vastly remodeled and expanded by Herod in Jesus' time but destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. The Second Temple period is thus the period from the late sixth century to NT times, the period when Judah was ruled by Persia, then Greece, then Rome.

secondary wife. Translations use the word *concubine* to describe people such as Abimelek's mother and the Levite's wife, but the term used of them does not suggest that they were not properly married. Being a secondary wife rather means that a woman has a different status from other wives. It perhaps implies that her son had less or no inheritance rights. It may be that a wealthy or powerful man could have several wives with full rights and several secondary wives, or just one of each, or just the former, or even just a secondary wife.

Seleucids. See **Greece.**

Septuagint. The oldest Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures, made in the centuries just before Christ. It was made for Jewish use but it facilitated the spread of the Scriptures among Gentiles. It also includes books written in or translated into Greek that are not in the Jewish Scriptures but are in the Apocrypha.

Shadday. El Shadday (or simply Shadday) is a name for God that the OT especially associates with the time when the name **Yahweh** would not have been known and with people who would not have known that name. Thus it comes in Genesis and it is used in connection with non-Israelites such as Balaam and Job. We do not know the meaning of the name. There are similar-looking words that mean destruction and breast and - in a sister language of Hebrew - mountain, so it could originally have meant destructive God or nourishing God or mountain-like God, but we have little evidence that people made any of those connections in the OT. The Greek translation of the OT often rendered it "Almighty," and this also became the convention in English translations. But the significance of the word is rather that it signifies

that we are talking about the true God but talking about this God in a way that people who do not know the name Yahweh could use. See also **El**.

Sheol. The most frequent of the Hebrew names for the place where we go when we die (see also Abaddon, and the comments on Job. In the NT it is called Hades. It is not a place of punishment or suffering but simply a resting place for everyone, a kind of non-physical analogue to the tomb as the resting place for our bodies.

Sitz im Leben: a German expression that literally denotes “life-setting,” the social context in which a story or law or prophecy or whatever was uttered and used.

soul. “Soul” in the English Bible usually represents Hebrew *nephesh* or Greek *psuche*. It can denote the inner person distinguishable and separable from the body but not independent of it; or the inner being of the whole person, their heart or deeply felt emotions; or the whole person comprising physical body plus divine breath; or the life of the person (“her soul was departing”). It does not mean the real person for which the body is a dispensable outward shell.

source criticism: study that looks behind the books in the Bible to see what sources they might have been compiled from.

spirit. The Hebrew word for spirit is also the word for breath and for wind, and the OT sometimes implies a link between these. Spirit suggests dynamic power; God’s spirit suggests God’s dynamic power. The wind in its forcefulness with its capacity to fell mighty trees is an embodiment of the powerful spirit of God. Breath is essential to life; where there is no breath, there is no life. And life comes from God. So human breath and even animal breath is an offshoot of God’s breath.

Sukkot. The word means Shelters and refers to the festival in September/October that marks the end of the harvest and also commemorates the way the Israelites had to live in makeshift shelters on the way from **Egypt** to **Canaan**.

taboo. I use the word *taboo* to render the Hebrew word often translated *impure* or *unclean*, because the Hebrew word suggests a positive quality rather than the absence of purity. There are certain things that are mysterious, extraordinary, perplexing, and a bit worrying. Among these are menstruation and childbirth, because they suggest both death and life. These are opposites, and God is the God of life and not of death, yet menstruation (with its association of blood and life) and giving birth (which is both life-giving and very dangerous) bring them into close connection. So contact with them makes people taboo; they cannot go into God’s presence until they are **purified**.

Talmud. A voluminous compilation of the oral teaching and opinions of rabbis, put together in about 500 AD.

Teraphim. See **effigies**.

text. The basic Hebrew text of the OT lying behind English translations goes back to Jewish scholars called the **Masoretes** who did their work in the millennium beginning in NT times. Their name comes from the Hebrew word for “tradition,” and they made it their responsibility to preserve the tradition of what the text of the OT said and how it should be read. Despite all the care and commitment of their work, it would not be surprising if for one reason or another they sometimes preserved not the original tradition but a form of the text that had got slightly changed over time. One indication of this is that sometimes there are oddities in the text that make one think, “Can that really be right?” For reasons we don’t

know, 1 and 2 Samuel raise that question particularly frequently. For instance, in the Masorettes' text Hannah takes three bulls to sacrifice at Shiloh in 1 Samuel 1:24, which sounds rather a lot, but in the next verse she sacrifices only one bull. Among the Qumran Scrolls, manuscripts found by the Dead Sea in the middle of the last century, there is a manuscript of these two books that has Hannah taking only one bull, which makes better sense. Another version of the OT text appears in a translation of the OT into Greek, called the **Septuagint**, which was made at about the same time as the Qumran scrolls were being copied; it too sometimes seems to make better sense. It might be that the Qumran and Greek texts have "corrected" the original version because (like us) they didn't think it made sense. Or it might be that they have the original version. There is example after example in 1 and 2 Samuel of differences of this kind between the Masorettes' Hebrew text and the Qumran and/or Greek texts.

textual criticism: study designed to get back to the original Hebrew and Greek text of the Bible.

Torah. The Hebrew word for the first five books of the Bible. They are often referred to as the "Law," but this title gives a misleading impression. Genesis itself is nothing like "law," and even Exodus to Deuteronomy are not "legalistic" books. The word "torah" itself means "teaching," which gives a clearer impression of the nature of the Torah. Often the Torah gives us more than one account of an event (such as God's commission of Moses), so that when the early church told the story of Jesus in different ways in different contexts and according to the insights of the different Gospel writers, it was following the precedent whereby Israel told its stories more than once in different contexts. Whereas Samuel-Kings and Chronicles keep the versions separate, as would happen with the Gospels, in the Torah the versions were combined.

trespass. A term to describe sin or wrongdoing. It suggests the idea that in varying ways people owe it to one another to respect the rights that the other person has. So married people owe each other faithfulness, and unfaithfulness involves failure to respect that right. Unfaithfulness to Yahweh by serving other gods has similar implications; it fails to respect Yahweh's right to allegiance and trust. Devoting to God the plunder from a war means that someone who appropriates some of the plunder fails to respect God's right to it (1 Chronicles 2:7). For a king to act as if he was a priest involves similar failure (2 Chronicles 26:16).

Urim and Thummim. The OT never describes the nature of these, but they were somehow means of God's guiding Israel. It seems they were something like two rocks that had marks on them signifying yes and no. You could ask God a question and if you got two yes's or two no's, God's answer was clear; if you got a mixed message, that meant God was not answering.

well-being. See **Peace**.

Yah. Either an earlier version of the name of God, of which **Yahweh** is then an elaboration (cf. the story in Exodus 3), or an abbreviation of the longer name.

Yahweh. In most English Bibles, the word "LORD" often comes in all capitals like that, as does also sometimes the word "GOD" in similar format. These actually represent the name of God, Yahweh. In later OT times, Israelites stopped using the name Yahweh and started to refer to Yahweh as "the Lord." There may be two reasons. They wanted other people to recognize that Yahweh was the one true God, but this strange foreign-sounding name could give the impression that Yahweh was just Israel's tribal god. A term such as "the Lord" was one anyone could recognize. In addition, they did not want to fall foul of the warning in the Ten Commandments about misusing Yahweh's name. Translations into other languages then followed suit and substituted an expression such as "the Lord" for the name Yahweh. The

down sides are that this obscures the fact that God wanted to be known by name, that often the text refers to Yahweh and not some other (so-called) god or lord, and that the practice gives the impression that God is much more “lordly” and patriarchal than actually God is. (The form “Jehovah” is not a real word but a mixture of the consonants of Yahweh and the vowels of that word for “Lord,” to remind people in reading scripture that they should say “the Lord” not the actual name.)

Yahweh Armies. This title for God usually appears in English Bibles as “the LORD of Hosts,” but it is a more puzzling expression than that implies. The word for LORD is actually the name of God, **Yahweh**, and the word for Hosts is the regular Hebrew word for armies; it is the word that appears on the back of an Israeli military truck. So more literally the expression means “Yahweh [of] Armies,” which is just as odd in Hebrew as “Goldingay of Armies” would be. Yet in general terms its likely implication is clear; it suggests that Yahweh is the embodiment of or controller of all war-making power, in heaven or on earth.

Yahweh’s Day. See “day of the Lord.”

Zion. The word is an alternative name for the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is more a political name; other peoples would refer to the city as “Jerusalem.” Zion is more a religious name, a designation of the city that focuses on its being the place where Yahweh dwells and is worshiped.

Israelites, Hebrews, Jews, Samaritans, Samaritans: An Overview

