

*The
Gospel*
ON THE
Ground

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GLOSSARY

AGORA (GREEK)/FORUM (LATIN)

The *agora* of ancient Greece and the *forum* of the Romans both translate to mean the “place of assembly.”¹ They functioned as a marketplace of both ideas and goods. Usually rectangular or square and covering sometimes several acres of land, a city might have one or up to several of these operating in different capacities. In today’s terms, we might refer to it as the “city square,” “mall,” or “shopping center” because political, commercial, and religious transactions took place there. If you were a business owner, you would ideally have a shop on location from which to sell your products. If you were a politician, you would engage in the conversations and motivations of the day, placating constituents, delivering campaign promises, and rendering judgments. If you were a priest or priestess (think to Roman and Greek gods), a temple to your specific deity would ideally be located within the *agora* or *forum* to allow you to serve the masses.

Paul and Silas were drug here, which functioned as the heart of the city, by the citizens of Philippi in order to stand trial before the Roman magistrate (Acts 16:19). In the *agora*, Paul engaged the Athenians, discussing philosophy and religion (Acts 17:17). Paul was tried at the *bema* located within the *agora*, in Corinth (Acts 18:12).

Think about where we spend our time shopping—whether at the grocery store, strip mall, or online retailers—to gain a better understanding of the important intersection within daily life the *agora*, or *forum*, held for the ancients. Combine this with the political and religious seat of power in the day—these centers served as the podiums for anyone with the ability to speak loudly and convincingly.

AGORANOMOS (GREEK)/AEDILE (LATIN)

The recognized leader(s) of the place of assembly (see *agora*) and the city itself, the *agoranomos/aedile* maintained order within the public space.² Serving as the modern-day equivalent to mayor or city council member, the *agoranomos/aedile* confirmed the quality and weights for merchants and patrons. They ensured public buildings were functional and safe, while also coordinating public events such as gladiatorial games.

ANTIOCH

Just as many cities today share the same name (there are twenty-eight cities named Franklin in the United States!), so it was in the ancient world.³ While over fifteen different Antiochs existed, two figure in the Bible quite prominently: Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14-52) and Antioch on the Orontes (Acts 11:19-30), where followers of Jesus were first called Christians.⁴

Antioch on the Orontes held great significance in the Roman Empire and served as the seat for the governing magistrate of Syria. As the third-largest city in the Empire (behind only Rome and Alexandria), Antioch was an important transportation hub, used by God to spread the gospel of Jesus throughout the world.⁵

BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Literally translated from the Hebrew as a “son/daughter of a commandment,” the *bar* or *bat mitzvah* opened the way to adulthood for teenagers.⁶ The Bible never explicitly talks about this age or a celebration surrounding it, but we find Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve conversing with the Jewish leaders of His day (Luke 2:41-52). Although not attested to until the Middle Ages, this celebration confers on the young person (thirteen years old for boys, twelve years old for girls) the responsibility of obeying the commands set forth in the Torah. In today’s terms, we’d call it the age of accountability.

BEIT KNESSET

Translated in English as “synagogue” from the Greek *synagoge*, this Hebrew term means “house of assembly.”⁷ For the Jew, the *beit kneset* represented a miniature temple of sorts where they would gather often to learn, discuss, and wrestle with the Old Testament.

According to Luke 4:16, Jesus went every Saturday to the *beit kneset*. Dozens of them have been found in the Galilee from the first century, so it requires little imagination to picture Jesus and His disciples traveling throughout the region teaching. In fact, the *beit kneset* functioned throughout the Roman Empire as a place where the Jewish people met. When he traveled, Paul’s *modus operandi* was to first visit the town’s synagogue.

BEIT/BETH MIDRASH

Translated as a “house of learning,” the *beit midrash* served as a secondary school of sorts for (almost exclusively male) highly gifted young people.⁸ At this level of education, a student would begin applying the Bible to everyday situations in order to grow in wisdom (Luke 2:52).

BETH SEFER/BEIT SEFER

From the Hebrew words *beit* meaning “house” or “school” and *sefer* meaning “book,” the *beit sefer* operated as the schoolhouse for young children—both boys and girls.⁹ Archaeology attests to this schoolhouse being connected to the synagogue. According to the first-century historian Josephus: “But for our people, if any body do but ask any one of them about our laws, he will more readily tell them all, than he will tell his own name. And this in consequence of our having learned them immediately, as soon as ever we became sensible of anything; and of our having them, as it were, engraved on our souls.”¹⁰

Josephus obviously believed education to be not only important but also vital to the Jewish community of the first century. The *beit sefer* provided the space and opportunity to prioritize learning and community.

BĒMA

Meaning “judgment seat” or “raised platform,” the term *bema* occurs several times in the New Testament, from Jesus’s trial with Pilate (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13) to Paul’s trial in Corinth (Acts 18:12,16,17), as well as several others (Acts 7:5; 12:21; 25:6).¹¹ It would have been considered the courthouse of their day.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

As we approach the Bible with a new Middle Eastern lens, it’s important to understand some significant differences between our culture today and the cultures of the first-century world. Though our cultural heritage and worldviews are valid, we in the twenty-first century approach the Bible in three vastly different ways than people two thousand years ago would have approached the Scripture.

First, we live in an innocent/guilt culture. This carries significance in the way we process sin and how we implement justice. (We all know the drill: “Innocent until proven guilty,” and “Let your conscience be your guide.”) What happens, however, when justice cannot be found? To what point do we trust our consciences when we’ve seared them to such a degree that we no longer feel guilty when we do something wrong?

In the Middle East, they view the world differently, functioning on an honor/shame continuum. Because everything centers on the family in their culture—religion, rituals, and politics—every member of that family carries the responsibility of bringing honor to his or her relatives. Shame is a reproach, and it comes in many forms. For example, cheating another family in a business transaction, being barren, and maintaining inappropriate relationships all bring shame on the rest of the family. On the other hand, fulfilling one’s role as a daughter or son, wife or husband, priest or ruler brings honor. As a member of a family unit, everything one does either brings honor or shame. In regard to sin and justice, all of it was connected to honor and shame.

This leads us to our second significant cultural difference. We emphasize the individual, but Middle Easterners two thousand years ago were all about the community. Notice how crucial this is to our understanding of the cultural difference we just discussed—innocence/guilt and honor/shame. In an individualistic culture like ours, sin is a private matter, lodged inside of us, and, therefore, sin is somewhat relative. If it’s relative, what you might consider a sin for you, I might not consider a sin for me; my weaknesses and strengths are different than yours. In a communal culture, however, everyone understands what is expected, and few things are done in secret. Even David, when he took in Bathsheba, was warned by his servants of who she was—someone else’s wife! When living in community, sin is worn on the sleeve. Everyone knows what is happening, and a person’s actions bring either shame or honor to his or her community.

Last, ancient (and present) Middle Eastern culture is highly hospitable, and I’m not just talking about having people over for some afternoon tea on the front porch. Hospitality was and is considered one of the greatest virtues one can express. If strangers come up to your house or are simply walking nearby, you must invite them in. And when you do invite them in, your guests receive nothing but

your absolute best! If you've been planning a special birthday party for a child, those visitors get the party. If you've been saving for that new car, a large percentage of those savings go to the guests in the form of food and entertainment. In certain nomadic cultures today, a family is required by custom and tradition to offer you their best food and drink for three days. It does not matter if you are Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, or Taoist. If you pass by or seek shelter in their dwelling, they will care for you as an honored guest.

DIDACHE

Initially produced at the turn of the first century AD, the Didache functioned as a discipleship manual according to Athanasius (c. AD 297–373), offering the early church some practical steps for living out their faith. Only sixteen chapters in length, it was most likely developed over several decades, accounting for the differences in writing style and subject matter. Although it never reached the level of canon, it does provide a helpful window into the world of the early church.¹²

EPHESUS

Serving as the “other great luminary of Asia” (Pliny, *Natural History*, V. 31), Ephesus enjoyed its status as a leading city. From its ideal location along a harbor to serving as host of a magnificent wonder of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis at Ephesus displayed remarkable wealth as the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire.¹³

It was in this city that Paul remained the longest on his missionary journeys, staying approximately three years. With evidence of a large Jewish population during the first century, it makes sense that Paul's friends Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos here (Acts 18:26) and that Paul would gather about twelve former disciples of John the Baptist under his wing as well (Acts 19:1-7).

As one of the seven churches specifically mentioned in Revelation, it is little wonder that Ephesus held a special place in the early church. As the very first *neokoros* (that of Domitian), however, Ephesians also favored the Imperial Cult.¹⁴ With the convergence of these three religions (Artemis, Christianity, and the Imperial Cult), the church in Ephesus had to be reminded often to remain grounded in right belief (orthodoxy) and right practice (orthopraxy), resisting false teachers and false apostles

(Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim. 1:3; Rev. 2:2) while staying true to their first love (Rev. 2:4).

EUSEBIUS (C. AD 260–340)

A fourth-century historian, Eusebius provides an account of the church through the first three hundred years, known as the *Ecclesiastical History*. Although some of his writing has been proven incorrect by other written sources and archaeology, his work nonetheless provides an important vantage point to glimpse the early church.¹⁵

FIRST-CENTURY EMPERORS

As the Roman republic transitioned to an empire, twelve leaders made their mark on history to varying degrees:

JULIUS CAESAR (RULED FROM 49–44 BC)

Though not technically an emperor, Julius Caesar paved the way for the Roman republic to transition to an empire. His assassination on the Ides (15) of March signaled a turning point for the republic and created the space for his adopted son, Gaius Octavius (Augustus), to fill the leadership void.¹⁶

AUGUSTUS (RULED FROM 27 BC–AD 14)

Originally part of the Second Triumvirate, Augustus defeated his fellow dictators to become *princeps civitatis*, “first citizen,” cementing his place of leadership in the new Roman Empire. The Bible mentions him by name (Luke 2:1), and he was the first to be called *divi filius* or “son of the divine (god).” He died saying, “Behold, I found Rome of clay, and leave her to you of marble” according to Suetonius.¹⁷

TIBERIUS (RULED FROM AD 14–37)

The stepson of Augustus, Tiberius hesitantly took on the role of emperor. In fact, he preferred a private and lavish lifestyle on the Isle of Capri, leaving his praetorian prefect, Sejanus, in charge until his return to the city of Rome in AD 31. He is mentioned by name in the Bible (Luke 3:1), and John refers to the Sea of Galilee as the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1). According to Suetonius, Roman citizens celebrated his (possibly murderous) death like that of a criminal saying, “To the Tiber with Tiberius.”¹⁸

CALIGULA (RULED FROM AD 37–41)

Desiring to be known as a living god and to endear himself to the military and people, Caligula spent enormous amounts of money, nearly sending the empire into bankruptcy. Contemporaries and later writers accused him of numerous murders, affairs, and scandals. He even threatened to erect a statue of himself in the Jerusalem temple. So bad was his reign that after his assassination, the senate struck his memory from the official historical records.¹⁹

CLAUDIUS (RULED FROM AD 41–54)

Suffering from physical maladies, Claudius deftly avoided being assassinated and instead assumed the role of emperor. The uncle of Caligula, Claudius established a fairly stable rule after the wiles of Caligula. His desire for religious reform brought about the expulsion of the Jews from Rome, probably around AD 49 or 50; Acts 18:2 refers to this specific event. He was most likely murdered by his wife, Agrippina, so that her son, Nero, could take the throne.²⁰

NERO (RULED FROM AD 54–68)

As the last emperor in the Julio-Claudian dynasty and a self-proclaimed artist, Nero was hated by both Christians and Romans alike. Serving as the emperor during the great AD 64 fire of Rome, Nero found Christians to be the easiest scapegoat. With his massive palace built on the ashes of villas in the heart of Rome, Nero lit his gardens at night with the bodies of Christians on poles. This “you-light-Rome-on-fire-we-light-you-on-fire” kind of “justice” helps us understand why Christians counted Nero as one of the most despised leaders of Rome. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, the reference to Caesar’s household (4:22) is in regards to Nero, as is Paul’s mention of “governing authorities” in Romans 13. Nero committed suicide in AD 68, leaving the republic in disarray.²¹

GALBA (RULED FROM AD 68–69, SEVEN MONTHS)

Though he served the Julio-Claudian dynasty throughout his political career, Galba was not related. His reign was short-lived and marked by intrigue. He was assassinated after only seven months of rule.²²

OTHO (RULED IN AD 69, THREE MONTHS)

Inheriting a civil war, Otho reigned as emperor for only three months before he committed suicide following a decisive defeat at the hands of Vitellius.²³

VITELLIUS (RULED IN AD 69, EIGHT MONTHS)

In his attempt to appease lower-class Romans, Vitellius strove to resemble Nero, who remained popular with the poor after his death. Realizing he could not withstand the armies of Vespasian, Vitellius tried to surrender, but his forces encouraged him to continue fighting. He died at the hands of Vespasian supporters.²⁴

VESPASIAN (RULED FROM AD 69–79)

Called up from the Jewish revolt, Vespasian gained control over the Roman Empire and established a new dynasty. Intent on earning the goodwill of the people, he had the Golden Palace of Nero destroyed and erected the Flavian Amphitheater in its place; it's known today as the Colosseum (after the colossal statue of Nero located nearby). His financial reforms helped stabilize the Empire, and he dedicated many funds to the building of public structures. He died of natural causes, succeeded by his biological sons, Titus and Domitian.²⁵

TITUS (RULED FROM AD 79–81)

Though his reign was short, Titus helped navigate two devastating disasters: the eruption of Mount Vesuvius (fall of AD 79) and a large fire in Rome (AD 80). Titus is probably best known for his victory over the Jews and Jerusalem in AD 70 when he was only thirty years old; the Senate gave him a victory arch to commemorate that event. It still stands today in the Roman Forum. He died of a fever at age forty-one.²⁶

DOMITIAN (RULED FROM AD 81–96)

Despised for his authoritarian rule, Domitian, the youngest son of Vespasian, reinvented branding and propaganda, creating a blatant autocracy over the republic. He diminished the Senate's power while extending his own. In retaliation, the Senate condemned his memory after his assassination in AD 96. Domitian worked hard to reinstate many of the moral practices set up by Augustus (like making adultery an offense worthy of exile) and considered himself the final authority on public morality. In the midst of reviving the Roman religion and the imperial cult, the fourth century religious historian, Eusebius, maintains that Domitian instigated a widespread persecution of Christians, and many scholars date the book of Revelation to his reign.²⁷

HAYER (PL. HAVERIM)

Literally meaning “friend” or “companion,” *haver* in the first century was the name for a study partner and fellow disciple, someone you could ask hard questions of and expect hard questions from in return. *Haverim* pushed each other, sometimes to the brink, in order to get to the truth. Calling someone your *haver* also implied that he or she followed Torah in a similar fashion as you, maybe even following the same rabbi. You would spend the majority of your days with these *haverim* discussing what was most important in your life and the lives of those around you.²⁸

IMPERIAL CULT

Celebrated much more outside of Italy and toward the East, the imperial cult brought divinity to the past (and present) emperors. This tool of religiously honoring the emperors created the propaganda needed to maintain order among subjugated people groups while at the same time promoting the comforting image of the emperor as a father. The Romans established imperial temples throughout the empire, encouraging cities to compete for the title of *neokoros* (temple warden).²⁹

CHILD-EXPOSURE

Used as a form of population control, infant exposure created an avenue for parents to rid themselves of an unwanted newborn, especially girls. In both Grecian and Roman societies, mythology pointed to many unwanted children who rose above infanticide to grow into thriving citizens. Parents unable to have children and slave traders, along with the Jews and Christians who considered the practice barbaric, gathered these unwanted infants and raised them as their own or sold them into the slave trade.³⁰

JOSEPHUS (~AD 30-100)

As a Jew living in the first century AD, Josephus provided one of the most important and valuable eyewitness accounts of life in and around the time of Jesus.³¹ He concluded his major writings by AD 100, so he wrote as one who lived through some of the more tumultuous years of Jewish history, namely the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66–73).³² Born into a wealthy priestly family, Josephus told us that he studied the major Jewish sects of his day at a young age, settling on Pharisaic Judaism as the best. As one of the major military generals of Galilee during that first revolt, Josephus surrendered to Vespasian, became his adopted son, and moved

to Rome, enjoying the favor of the Roman Flavian emperors. His works include *Jewish Wars*, *Antiquities of the Jews*, *Against Apion*, and *The Life of Flavius Josephus*.

L'CHAIM

A traditional Hebrew toast similar to “Cheers” in English, *L'chaim* simply means “to life!”³³

MALCHUT HA'SHAMAYIM

In Hebrew, *malchut hashamayim* translates to “the kingdom of heaven.”³⁴ It's associated with God's will. Jews in the first century aimed to join God in His kingdom work wherever it took place. We see it explicitly in the Lord's Prayer when Jesus said, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Central to the teachings of John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul, *malchut hashamayim* concerned itself more with the present reality rather than a future hope. Jews wanted God's kingdom to arrive in this present world, changing it for the better. We see Jesus proclaiming this concept from the very beginning of His ministry: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 3:2).

MARTYR

Meaning “witness,” the name martyr became associated with those willing to sacrifice their lives in bearing witness to following Jesus.³⁵ Numerous martyrs' stories have been told, serving to inspire those still living to not fear what humans may do because of faith in Jesus.

MISHNAH

When God gave His Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai, Jews believe He also gave a second set of laws called Mishnah meaning, “that which is repeated” or “to repeat.”³⁶ The written Torah (or Mikra) was considered far greater in importance, while the oral Torah (or Mishnah) expanded and explained what was meant in the written Torah.³⁷ The Mishnah itself explained how it came into existence: “Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly” (Pirkei Avot 1:1).³⁸ From the Great Assembly, that tradition of interpretation carried on through the sages of the first centuries BC and AD, many of whom are called rabbis, meaning “my great ones.”³⁹

By the beginning of the third century AD, it became necessary to write the traditions that had been handed down orally to that point, a project spearheaded by a man known as Yehudah HaNasi, or in English, Judah the Prince.⁴⁰ This written document offers a small window into Judaism from as early as 300 BC to as late as approximately AD 200. It is divided into six main sections and seven to twelve subsections, starting with the longest and ending with the shortest.⁴¹ Interestingly, the early church organized Paul's letters in the same way in the Bible, from longest to shortest.

MISHPAT

Translated most often as “justice” from the Hebrew, *mishpat* serves a special function in the economy of God.⁴² Since God advocates for the poor and the oppressed, especially widows and orphans, He expects His followers to do the same. At its core, *mishpat* isn't so much concerned with innocence and guilt as much as honor and shame. To bring justice to the world, God exalts the humble by raising their honor and covering their shame.

Tied closely to another word, *tzedakah*, *mishpat* deals with punishment for wrongdoing, but it is also concerned about equal rights for all—rich and poor, female and male, foreigner and native born.⁴³ We see a good example of *mishpat* in Numbers 27:1-11 where we read about a tribal land dispute involving a man named Zelophehad who had five daughters and no sons. The daughters were excluded from any inheritance strictly because of their gender. But once their case came before Moses, God granted their request and gave them land. This is how *mishpat* works: God raised the daughters' honor by treating them equally—even in a patriarchal society. Ultimately, *mishpat* concerns giving everyone what is due them, whether that is protection, provision, or punishment.

MITZVAH

Simply translated as “commandment,” Jews understand that God provided 613 *mitzva'ot* (plural of *mitzvah*) in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible.⁴⁴ Modern Judaism sees following these commandments as an opportunity and pleasure instead of a burden. When they follow the commandments, they are living into the kingdom of God, allowing His will to guide their thoughts and actions, to the benefit of not only themselves but also their community.

NEOKOROS

Neokoros means “temple sweeper or warden.”⁴⁵ Cities, especially in present-day Turkey, competed against one another to hold the honor of worshipping the named emperor in their respective city as part of the imperial cult. The city that held the deified emperor’s temple not only held bragging rights against the other cities that competed but also garnered the wealth provided by the imperial family and pilgrims seeking to worship the emperor. In AD 89 or 90, Ephesus became the first city to hold the title of *neokoros*, and the foundations of this temple, known as the temple of the Sebastoi (Venerable Ones), remain to this day.⁴⁶

PARASHA (PL. PARASHOT)

Because Torah held the primary place within all of Scripture, after the exile Jews decided to have all five books read aloud throughout the course of a year. In order to accomplish this, they divided the Torah into fifty-four *parashot*, or sections, allowing for one section of a book to be read at the same time every year. Thus, every week a new section of Scripture was studied all week and read aloud in the synagogue for Sabbath.⁴⁷

Literary evidence for this practice occurs not only in the Dead Sea Scrolls but also in the New Testament. In Luke 4, Jesus followed up the Torah reading with a passage from Isaiah, and in Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council mentioned how the Torah was being read in the synagogues every single week.

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA (C. 20 BC–C. AD 50)

A Jewish historian from the first centuries BC and AD, Philo gives us a glimpse of the life of a diaspora Jew from the period of Jesus. Blending the Bible with Greek philosophy, Philo attempted to navigate and synthesize the culture in which he found himself with the history of his people.⁴⁸

PLINY THE YOUNGER (AD 61–C. 113)

The nephew of Pliny the Elder (author of *Natural History*), Pliny the Younger is best known for his letters, in which he wrote about the eruption of Mount Vesuvius and questioned the emperor (Trajan) about how to deal with accused Christians. Written in the late first and early second centuries, Pliny’s letters have proven to be a valuable window into Roman aristocratic life.⁴⁹

RABBI

From the Hebrew meaning “exalted” and “master,” the term *rabbi* became associated with individuals who rose above the general populace in knowledge, wisdom, and teaching ability. A first-century term that became more formalized after AD 70, rabbis lived and taught the way of God, inviting others into their specific ways of interpreting the Bible. Followers known as *talmidim* watched and listened to their teachers closely in hopes of one day being like them.⁵⁰

SANHEDRIN

Sanhedrin is a Greek word meaning “seated together.”⁵¹ The Sanhedrin was composed of three courts of twenty-three members, each with the addition of the president and vice president. Most likely comprised of both Pharisees and Sadducees, these seventy-one members were seated in a semicircle as they heard and judged the cases of the people.⁵² Though historical sources disagree with one another on the function and sphere in which these leaders judged, scholars agree that they held massive influence over the lives of first-century Jews, especially in the Roman province of Judea where they met on the temple grounds in a room known as the Chamber of Hewn Stone.⁵³

SEPTUAGINT

The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Greek-speaking Jews used the Septuagint (often abbreviated “LXX”) as their main text. The early Christians used this translation primarily, which accounts for why Paul quotes it so often. The history of how the Jewish people came to have this translation is shrouded in myth and mystery, but scholars date the translation to the third to second century BC when a ruler named Ptolemy II invited seventy-two Jewish scholars to Egypt. The story goes that upon arrival, these seventy-two Jewish leaders were placed in seventy-two rooms in which they were individually asked to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in order that future Greek-speaking generations wouldn’t lose the Word of God. Hence, the Latin word for “seventy,” *Septuagint*.⁵⁴

SENECA THE YOUNGER (C. 4 BC-AD 65)

Known for his philosophical works in the first century AD, Seneca served as a tutor for Nero. He committed suicide at the behest of his student-then-emperor. He is sometimes thought to have been a follower of Jesus because

his philosophy lines up closely with the early church's theology. His older brother, Gallio, served as judge in Corinth between Paul and the Jews (Acts 18:12-17).⁵⁵

SUETONIUS (C. AD 69-C. 122)

A second century AD historian, Suetonius is especially famous for his work *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, in which he expounded on the twelve leaders of the Roman world from Julius Caesar to Domitian. Scholars question the accuracy of much of his writing, knowing that he served a new family of emperors who had to establish themselves against the Julian/Claudian and Flavian dynasties. Nevertheless, his contribution to the knowledge and background of the first emperors has proven very valuable.⁵⁶

SOCIAL STRUCTURE (ROMAN EMPIRE)

Though complicated, the social hierarchy of the Roman Empire maintained a certain level of order. Rising through the ranks was uncommon, but several historical examples exist of people who advanced from the plebeian class to the patrician class. The social structure relied heavily on the patron/client model, where a patron sponsored a client in numerous endeavors.⁵⁷ In return, clients pledged fidelity to their patron. This relationship created a complicated dynamic that was woven through the entire Roman world.

EMPERORS (PRINCEPS)

Considered the highest/first citizen of the country and leader of the Empire, the emperor held supreme authority.⁵⁸ Examples of emperors mentioned in the Bible include:

- Augustus (Luke 2:1)
- Tiberius (Luke 3:1)
- Claudius (Acts 11:28; 18:2)
- Nero (though not specifically named, Acts 25:11; Romans 13:1-5; Philippians 1:13; 4:22)
- Domitian (though not specifically named, Revelation)

PATRICIANS

The aristocracy of the empire, patricians carried large amounts of property and tremendous wealth.⁵⁹ They were divided into two camps: senators and equestrians. Examples of patricians mentioned in the Bible include:

SENATORS

- Quirinius (Luke 2:2)
- Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:4-12)
- Gallio (Acts 18:12-17)

EQUESTRIANS

- Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27; Mark 15; Luke 3:1; 13:1; 23; John 18–19; Acts 3:13; 4:27; 13:28; 1 Tim. 6:13)
- Felix (Acts 23:24; 23:26; 24)
- Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26; 24:22)
- Porcius Festus (Acts 24:27; 25–26)

PLEBEIANS

Plebeians were lower class or common citizens whose occupation, instead of wealth, defined them. Freedmen and freedwomen (liberated slaves) were part of this class.⁶⁰

NON-CITIZENS

The poor, as well as captured people groups and slaves, filled this role.

Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship only a couple of times (Acts 16:37-38; 22:25-29). In doing so, he surprised the governmental leadership. This implies that many Jews within the Roman Empire were not citizens.

TACITUS (C. 56-C. 120AD)

Another late first and early second century AD historian, Tacitus provided readers a glimpse into the lives of the emperors. Arguably, Tacitus's most significant contribution was his reference to Christians, Christ, and Pontius Pilate, one of the earliest such references outside of the Bible.⁶¹

TALMID

From the Hebrew verb meaning “learn,” *talmid* translates to the idea of a “disciple” or “student.” Unlike our modern-day understanding of the student-teacher relationship, a *talmid* wanted more than anything to be just like his rabbi or teacher.⁶² In fact, the relationship often paralleled that of a father and son, so important and strong was the bond to one another. Knowing this level of intimate relationship helps us understand the familial beauty of John leaning his head against Jesus in John 13:25 and the devastating pain that would have come from Judas’s betrayal of Jesus in Matthew 26:21-25 and Peter’s denial of Jesus in Luke 22:54-62.

TALMUD (JERUSALEM AND BABYLONIAN)

After the Mishnah was written down at the beginning of the third century AD, over the next few hundred years, scribes and teachers contributed further commentaries on the written text.⁶³ That collection of work came to be known as the Gemara. As two large centers of learning developed within Judaism, one in Galilee and one in Babylon, these two academies put together the Mishnah and Gemara into one work known as the Talmud.⁶⁴ The school in Galilee (in the city of Tiberias, specifically) was known as the Jerusalem Talmud, while the school in Babylon became known as the Babylonian Talmud, and they named their versions of the Talmud accordingly. Composed in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, respectively, the Babylonian Talmud became the more authoritative work.⁶⁵

Perhaps the simplest way to think of these Jewish works is to understand that the Torah is central and most important in all matters of life. The Mishnah functions somewhat as a commentary on the Torah, and the Talmud serves as a commentary on the Mishnah. If a person were to venture off into a school (*yeshiva*) today, he or she would discover that not only are students studying and memorizing the Torah, but they are also studying and memorizing the Talmud.

There is a story about a recent scholar in Jerusalem who one day showed up with the entire Babylonian Talmud in hand. (Understand, this would be like carrying all the volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*® around with you.) Upon entering the classroom, he found one of his prize students and said, “I have committed this to memory. You now go and do the same.”

TAMID

In Hebrew, *tamid* means “continually” and refers to the two sacrifices the Jewish people made in the temple every day, at approximately 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Commanded in Exodus 29:38-42 and Numbers 28:3-8, notice in particular how the Gospel writers referred to these two times of day often in their work. (See Matt. 20:3,5; 27:45,46; Mark 15:25,33,34; Luke 23:44; Acts 2:15; 3:1; 10:3,30.)⁶⁶

TANAKH (HEBREW BIBLE)

What Christians call the Old Testament, Jews call Tanakh or Mikra, meaning “that which is called out/read.”⁶⁷ Just as we Christians have subdivided the Old Testament into categories (for example, the Law, History, Poetry, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets), so too have the Jews. The letters T, N, and K come from the first letters of each of those three sections of Scripture for the Jew: Torah (Instruction or Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings).

The weight of authority given to these sections, however, is another matter. For the Jew, nothing is more important than Torah. The Torah is the first place they go when deriving authority from Scripture. The books of Torah include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, what scholars today call the Pentateuch, meaning “five books.”⁶⁸ Though traditionally translated as “law,” the word *Torah* implies instruction more than law. The Jewish people carry the idea that the commandments offer freedom more than oppression. The commandments serve as parameters that allow a person to function well in a family, tribe, and nation.

The second section, the Prophets, functions almost like a commentary on Torah, offering interpretations and examples of what to do and what not to do within the system of laws God has set up. The books of the Hebrew Bible within this section include: Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.⁶⁹

The third section, the Writings, is considered the least authoritative, but it is still considered God's Word and part of the Bible. The books include: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 & 2 Chronicles.⁷⁰

The books of the Hebrew Bible, though reckoned differently than ours and in a different order, offer the same content. In the Hebrew Bible, the books fall relatively in the order in which they were written. This leads us to a fascinating theological insight: The entirety of the Hebrew Bible begins and ends in a similar place. Tanakh starts with Genesis and finishes with Chronicles, theologically driving an exiled people back to Jerusalem and its environs—in essence, to a new Eden. Thus, what begins in Genesis in a garden (the garden of Eden) ends in Chronicles with a desire and call to return to a new “Eden,” the land of Israel with Jerusalem as its epicenter.

Our order of books within the Old Testament also points to a new reality. God speaks, and physical existence comes to be; God’s Word is made flesh. By ending our Old Testament with Malachi, we look with anticipation—not to a place, but to a person. Thus, we see how God’s Word was made flesh not only in the creation of the universe but also in the bringing forth of the Son—Jesus—who was and is the perfect manifestation of God. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

TIKKUN OLAM

Tikkun olam means “repairing of a world.” Practitioners of *tikkun olam* strive to make the world a better place, advocating for justice for the oppressed, and in doing so, they join the work of God and His kingdom. Found within the Mishnah, this term was used by the rabbis to amend specific judgments and laws that disenfranchised weaker parties in court, especially female divorcees and slaves. Today, Jews associate it with *tzedakah*, and they view practitioners of *tikkun olam* as co-creators with God. Or, to put it in the words of Paul, people join God in reconciling the world to Himself (Col. 1:19-20).⁷¹

TZEDAKAH

Tzedakah means “righteousness” and so much more. Placed within the realm of relationships, *tzedakah* serves to make things right, and it does so through generosity. Another translation of the Hebrew word could easily be “mercy.” In fact, in the first-century world, giving to the poor was an act of righteousness. (See Matt. 6:1-4.) By not sharing with others, one violates the very justice, will, and command of God. This practice reveals that *tzedakah* is not optional in God’s economy.⁷²

When *tzedakah* is coupled with *mishpat*, as is done dozens of times in the Old Testament, we can see the character of God Himself. We first see these words together in Genesis 18:19 when God says of Abraham: “For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.” As evidenced in this passage, the way of the Lord is practicing both *mishpat* and *tzedakah* together, a generous lifting up.

YESHIVA

Today, *yeshiva* is a formal term referring to an established educational system that focuses on studying the Torah and the Talmud. In the first century, however, the emphasis on the term lay in how a teacher interpreted a specific passage of Scripture or theological concept and whether that teaching was valid. How would a community determine validity? *Yeshiva*.

Yeshiva occurred constantly as students would debate questions or comments from a teacher. They were “sitting in” the concept, so to speak, arguing and debating among themselves whether or not what the teacher communicated should be implemented into daily life and how it could be done. Learning occurred in a multi-dimensional way, as arguments among peers and teachers were raised and discussed. In this line of thinking, the better a community knows the Bible, the more profound the insights as other passages and teachers’ interpretations are brought to bear on the topic.⁷³

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