SYNAGOGUE WORSHIP
Its Origins

Ships and Shipping in the New Testament World

David’s Last Hymn
HAVE YOU EVER known someone with a seemingly flawless memory? I had a seminary professor with that kind of memory. If someone asked a question, he would reply, “You’ll find that in the Bettenson’s book, Documents of The Christian Church, about half-way down page 149.” Some of us went to the library early in the semester to check his accuracy. The amazing thing—he was ALWAYS right! Most of us do not have flawless memories. Absorption through repetition can help us remember. Tying the new information to what we already know can help us remember. Sometimes we depend on triggers to help us remember facts and information.

Knowing Bible history is no different. Some things we have to set down as foundational. Dates can be this way. Some basic dates we should just “nail down” include:

- **1446 BC** The exodus
- **1010–970** David reigned
- **722** Israel fell to the Assyrians
- **586** Judah fell to the Babylonians
- **539** Jews returned from exile
- **AD 70** Jerusalem fell to the Romans

Once you have these dates nailed down, what do you add? Forty years. The Israelites entered the promised land forty years after the exodus. Saul reigned about forty years before David—and Solomon, for almost forty years after David.

Another help is that a lot of details are alphabetical, moving left to right, top to bottom, and first to last. For instance, on a map, you get to the Euphrates River before you do the Tigris River. When the United Kingdom divided, Israel was in the north and Judah in the south. Assyria conquered the north—Babylon, the south. Again, alphabetical order.

The great kingdoms of the holy land are almost in alphabetical order. The region was conquered by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and then the Romans.

Finally, three cities were in the Lycus Valley. The city’s water temperature starts with the same letter as its name: Colossae had cold water; Hierapolis, hot; and Laodicea, lukewarm.

These are little triggers that can help you remember. Oh how I wish someone had taught me these when I was in seminary!
THE DICTIONARY OF DAILY LIFE IN BIBLICAL & POST-BIBLICAL ANTIQUITY edited by the eminent historian Edwin M. Yamauchi and the evangelical Bible scholar Marvin R. Wilson is a unique treasure trove of much-needed information for any Bible student, teacher, or church or university library. Originally published 2014–2016 as four volumes, the 2017 single volume is easier to use.

Most Bible dictionaries focus on technicalities of biblical words, places, names, and concepts. In contrast, this dictionary provides 115 articles on a wide range of cultural and background topics that feature religious practices, social structures, laws, manners and customs, ancient technology, and cultural practices. Articles range from six pages (i.e., “Abortion” and “Camels”) to thirty-eight pages (i.e., “Metallurgy”).

Articles cover the period from 2000 BC to AD 600. Information on early Christian practice after the New Testament often reveals the early church’s application of biblical texts. Each article includes six subsections: 1) the Old Testament, 2) the New Testament, 3) the Near Eastern world, 4) the Greco-Roman world, 5) the Jewish world, and 6) the Christian world. A detailed bibliography for each article is an added bonus.


“Police & Prisons,” using sources from the ancient world, reveals the awful conditions of Roman prisoners. In the section on the Christian world, however, the author reveals through ancient sources how “The Christianization of the Empire brought discernible change [i.e., some better conditions] for prisoners” (p. 1414). This dictionary will have widespread use because it actively engages readers with ancient sources that reveal the daily lives of Bible people. I recommend it highly.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Session/Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Economic Hardships in Nehemiah’s Day</td>
<td>T. J. Betts</td>
<td>August 12 // Session 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Synagogue Worship: Its Origins</td>
<td>Kevin C. Peacock</td>
<td>August 19 // Session 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Swords in the Ancient Near East</td>
<td>Dorman Laird</td>
<td>June 3 // Session 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Ish-bosheth: The Importance of a Name</td>
<td>R. Kelvin Moore</td>
<td>June 10 // Session 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Jerusalem in the Time of David</td>
<td>David M. Wallace</td>
<td>June 24 // Session 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Nathan the Prophet</td>
<td>George H. Shaddix</td>
<td>July 8 // Session 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>EXPLORE THE BIBLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Time Line of Prophets and Prophetesses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>“The Spirit of God Was Hovering”</td>
<td>Joel F. Drinkard, Jr.</td>
<td>June 3 // Session 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>The Last of the Prophets: John the Baptist</td>
<td>Michael W. Olewski</td>
<td>June 24 // Session 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Baptism in the Early Church</td>
<td>Rex D. Butler</td>
<td>July 1 // Session 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>What Is a Statute?</td>
<td>Francis X. Kimmitt</td>
<td>July 15 // Special Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>QuickBites: Time Line for Nehemiah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>The Gates of the City</td>
<td>Bryan E. Beyer</td>
<td>July 29 // Session 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>328</td>
<td>Time Line of Prophets and Prophetesses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10  Rape, Murder, and Ancient Jewish Law
   by Robert D. Bergen
   July 15 // Session 7

71  Joab, A Man After His Own Heart
    by T. Van McClain
    July 29 // Session 9

13  Abel-beth-maacah: Its History and Significance
    by Eric A. Mitchell
    August 5 // Session 10

40  David's Last Hymn
    by Becky Lombard
    August 19 // Session 12

20  QuickBites: David's Mighty Men
    August 19 // Session 12

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

36  Resurrection in Jewish Thought
    by Lynn O. Traylor
    June 3 // Session 1

63  Ships and Shipping in the New Testament World
    by Gerald L. Stevens
    June 17 // Session 3

InSites (between pages 66–67)
Boats in the Biblical Period
June 17 // Session 3

80  Understanding God's Glory
    by Philip Nation
    July 1 // Session 5

22  The Day of the Lord
    by Hal Lane
    July 15 // Session 7

51  Contending for the Faith
    by Randall L. Adkisson
    July 22 // Session 8

29  Peter's Theology of Hope
    by Warren McWilliams
    July 29 // Session 9

44  The Lycus Valley
    by Roy E. Lucas, Jr.
    August 12 // Session 11

92  QuickBites: Churches of the Revelation
    August 12 // Session 11

94  Christianity at the End of the First Century
    by Gregory T. Pouncey
    August 26 // Session 13
BAPTISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH
ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST, at the conclusion of his sermon, Peter exhorted his audience: “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38, CSB). In the aftermath of this invitation, about three thousand new believers were baptized that day.

How did the apostles manage to baptize so many new Christians in such a short period of time? They most likely utilized the 150 mikvehs, or ritual baths in Jerusalem at that time. Jewish priests and worshipers would regularly immerse themselves in these pools for purification before offering sacrifices and fulfilling vows.¹

When the apostles baptized the converts, however, they infused the Jewish ritual with entirely new meanings. Instead of only purifications, which must be repeated, Christian baptism was a one-time ceremony, performed “in the name of Jesus Christ” and representing forgiveness of sins and reception of the Holy Spirit. Not only did the baptizer invoke the name of Jesus, but the new believer also called upon His name (Acts 2:36) and thus proclaimed the gospel.

Implied in these early baptisms was the idea Paul later clarified that the believer is united with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection:² “Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4, CSB).

Although every baptism recorded in Acts was conducted in the name of Jesus, within a few decades, the Trinitarian formula began to be invoked, following the pattern of Matthew 28:18-20. The Didache, a church manual composed at the end of the first century, instructed administrators to baptize three times in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Didache 7.1).

The Didache also listed three possible modes of baptism. The use of “living,” or running, water was preferred. The next best option was water, preferably cold, collected in a cistern. And finally, pouring was allowed in arid regions where water would be scarce (Didache 7.1-3). Clearly, however, immersion was the favored mode of baptism wherever possible.

In its early history, the church began teaching catechism to new believers. The Didache prefaced baptismal instructions with the Two Ways Tract. This tract instructed baptismal candidates to live the “Way of Life” and to reject the “Way of Death,” echoing Jesus’ warnings in Matthew 7:13-14.

Fasting also was an important preparation for baptism. According to the Didache, the candidate, the administrator, and able members of the congregation fasted for a day or two (Didache 7.4). At the turn of the first century, we find that New Testament baptism remained basically unchanged. In this early church manual, baptism retained its simplicity.

Fast-forward a century or so, and baptism transformed into an elaborate ritual full of symbolism. The Apostolic Tradition, an early third-century church manual attributed to Hippolytus of Rome, included a lengthy description of the baptismal process. Catechism now lasted up to three years, during which candidates learned God’s Word and became “active in well-doing” (Apostolic Tradition 20.1). During the final week, candidates submitted to exorcism daily. On Thursday, they bathed, and after fasting on Friday, they assembled on Saturday and knelt in prayer before...
the administrator, who laid his hands on them to complete their exorcism. According to Tertullian of Carthage, Easter or Pentecost added solemnity to the occasion, but any Sunday was acceptable (On Baptism 19.2-3).

On Sunday, the candidates prepared for baptism by removing their clothing. Yes, that’s right—naked baptism! My seminary students always wake up when I mention this in my lecture. As I explain to them, several factors allay our concerns about this seemingly unusual practice.

Nudity was not scandalous in a culture where public baths were common. Usually baptisteries were separate from the church, and not in the front of a sanctuary. Symbolically, new Christians emerged from the water of new birth in the same naked condition of their first birth. Furthermore, the newly baptized received a white linen robe, a picture of Paul’s admonition to put off the old self and put on the new (Col. 3:9-10). In the early church, baptism was a living illustration of the believer’s being raised in newness of life.

The church continued to practice triple immersion but added a baptismal creed in the form of three questions. The administrator asked: “Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty? Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?” After each question, the candidate responded, “I believe,” and was immersed (Apostolic Tradition 21:12-18). The questions instructed the new believers in correct orthodoxy and weeded out possible heretics.

At the conclusion of the baptismal service, the entire community prayed together and closed the prayer service with the kiss of peace, signs of filial love and of welcome into God’s family. The new members of the Christian community had their first Lord’s Supper, which included bread and three cups: one of wine; then a mixture of milk and honey, symbolizing entrance into the promised land; and, finally, a cup of water, which provided the inner person with the baptism (Apostolic Tradition 21.1-23:3).

Evangelicals may be surprised to read that infant baptism began early in the third century. Around 200, Tertullian first mentioned the practice, but he discouraged it (On Baptism 18) and preferred to postpone it until the age of accountability, which he identified as fourteen years old (On Baptism 18; On the Soul 38.1). Nonetheless, other third-century early church fathers, such as Origen of Alexandria and Cyprian...
From its inception, the church has observed Jesus’ command to baptize, but baptism’s rituals and meanings changed through Christianity’s first six centuries. For a century or so, baptism retained the simplicity of the New Testament practice. Eventually the ritual took on layers of symbolism, intended to illustrate new believers’ initiation into the Christian community. And regrettably, unbiblical practices of infant baptism and sprinkling replaced the clear biblical teaching of believer’s baptism by immersion.

7. Ibid., 167.

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RAPE, MURDER, AND ANCIENT JEWISH LAW

BY ROBERT D. BERGEN
TWO OF THE MOST HEINOUS CRIMES against persons are rape and murder; both destroy people’s lives and tear the fabric of society. Not surprisingly, the Law of Moses and other ancient western Asian law codes dealt extensively with both of these issues—sexual rights and the unauthorized taking of human life. Yet a careful study of the ancient legal guidelines regarding rape and murder clearly shows that differences exist between the contemporary western perspective and that of ancient Asia.

To understand laws in the Old Testament world regarding the crimes of rape and homicide, one must touch briefly on “big picture” matters, namely those of ancient western Asian social and legal theory. All the people groups in the Old Testament world of which we have any knowledge were patriarchal. That meant the adult, non-slave male members of the community provided leadership in all social institutions and had the weighty responsibilities of providing food, protection, and justice for all community members. Accordingly, the law’s function in these societies was primarily to support the free, adult male members of society in fulfilling these vital roles. The verbs expressing commands in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20; Deut. 5) reflect this emphasis on the role of the adult male. All of these imperative verbs are masculine, singular in form—that is, they are addressed to individual males. Though women, children, and slaves were given legal rights and protections, those rights were fewer in number and generally less well defined than those of free adult males.

Rape in Ancient Israelite Law

In order to make sense of the Old Testament view of rape, to clarify our own society’s definition of this crime is helpful. Within the United States, rape is defined as initiating sexual intercourse with a person who is either incapacitated, forcibly compelled, or underage. The exact circumstances of the crime determine the penalty; some states have a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Cultures in the Old Testament world certainly had laws defining sexual misconduct, but what constituted a sexual offense in ancient western Asia differs considerably from the modern American definition of rape. Within those cultures criminal sexual conduct focused on the violation of the sexual rights or honor of a free adult male. Unlike modern Euro-American law, no ancient Near Eastern law codes addressed sexual crimes with a consideration for a victim’s age, state of incapacitation, or mental capacity.

The worst possible sexual crimes in the ancient western Asian societies—transgressions that were always treated as capital offenses—involved engaging in sexual intercourse with another man’s wife or fiancée (Lev. 20:10-12; Deut. 22:22,25). Yet, violating another man’s wife or fiancée...
was not automatically considered rape; instead, it was treated as adultery unless a third party could provide evidence of the woman resisting, or if the attack occurred in the countryside (vv. 22-27). The distinction is important, since the penalty for adultery was death for both the adulterer and adulteress (Lev. 20:10).

Having forcible sexual intercourse with an unmarried, unengaged female was also not categorized as rape. Though it was certainly considered a serious mistreatment of the woman (2 Sam. 13:16), for legal purposes it was treated as both an economic crime against the girl’s father (Ex. 22:16,17; Deut. 22:28-29) and an act that diminished the family’s honor (see v. 17). Thus the offender was required to pay the father reparations and could be compelled to marry the woman, presumably to transfer to the offender the ongoing financial responsibilities associated with the woman.

### Murder in Ancient Israelite Law

Murder, the unauthorized taking of a human life, represents the ultimate denial of another’s rights. Not surprisingly, the Torah gives significantly more attention to the subject of murder than it does rape. Early on, it established a principle widely recognized in ancient Near Eastern civilizations: “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans his blood will be shed” (Gen. 9:6a, csb; see Ex. 21:12). Unlike other ancient law codes, however, the Law of Moses provides a theological basis for this law: “God made humans in his image” (Gen. 9:6b, csb). Old Testament scholar Roland DeVaux lists twelve different offenses for which killing the offender was authorized: adultery, abduction with the intent to sell the abducted person into slavery, bestiality, blasphemy, different forms of incest, grave sins against parents, idolatry, intentional homicide, profaning the Sabbath, prostitution by a priest’s daughter, sodomy, and sorcery. Killing another person for any other reason, except in enemy combat, was unauthorized.

### Legal Dimensions of the Incident

Within the context of ancient Near Eastern cultures, People would have viewed Amnon’s violation of his unmarried half-sister Tamar primarily as an offense against Tamar’s father, King David (see Tamar’s comment in 2 Sam. 13:13). Amnon’s greatest offense resulted from his subsequent unwillingness to marry Tamar (see v. 16). Rejecting one of his primary duties—taking responsibility for a woman who properly belonged under his care—created major problems for Tamar and Absalom’s family. It inflicted an irreparable loss of honor and prestige (see v. 19), ended Tamar’s chances for a prestigious marriage, and increased expenses for her family.

Amnon’s despicable actions created a dilemma for his father, David. On the one hand, the Torah authorized David to force Amnon to marry Tamar (Deut. 22:29). On the other hand, the Torah prohibited Amnon from marrying his half-sister (Lev. 18:9). David could not put his son to death for what he had done to Tamar, but he could have fined him fifty shekels of silver. Amnon, however, was Israel’s crown prince and undoubtedly quite wealthy; thus, the penalty would have been virtually meaningless. David’s response to this incident was understandably indecisive: “He was furious” (2 Sam. 13:21b, csb), but apparently did nothing.

David’s inaction led Tamar’s brother Absalom to take steps to resolve the situation himself. Though unauthorized to do so, he took over David’s role as his sister’s protector. Then, borrowing a page from a different part of the Torah, he followed the infamous example of Simeon and Levi, who violently took the life of the one who had deflowered their sister Dinah (Gen. 34:25-26). Interestingly, King David did not treat Absalom as a murderer (2 Sam. 13:39). In this he was probably attempting to follow the example of the patriarch Jacob, Simeon and Levi’s father, who also did not treat his sons as murderers (Gen. 34:30).

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PETER'S THEOLOGY OF HOPE
Simon Peter's Background

Many factors shaped Simon Peter’s interest in eschatology. His relation to Jesus was the primary factor. Peter recognized that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Jewish hope for a Messiah, even though he only gradually comprehended how Jesus would be a suffering Messiah. Peter heard Jesus proclaim His message about the kingdom of God, which would be fulfilled at the end of time. Peter had witnessed Jesus’ transfiguration, which was a foreshadowing of Jesus’ majesty (2 Pet. 1:16). Crucial to Peter’s eschatology was his belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. In his first letter, Peter mentioned that his readers’ “living hope” was based on Jesus’ resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3).

Peter saw the risen Christ several times before His ascension, and at one point Jesus said Peter would eventually become a martyr (John 21:18-19).

Simon Peter's Eschatology

Peter revealed his views on eschatology in the sermons he preached and in his two letters. In his sermons reported in the Book of Acts, for instance, Peter highlighted the importance of Jesus’ death and resurrection for the
According to the heretics, nothing really new or novel had happened since the death of the “ancestors” (2 Pet. 3:4). Although these ancestors might be the first generation of Christians—most of whom may have died—more likely the “ancestors” to which Peter referred were the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Peter reminded his readers that God had indeed dramatically intervened in history in the past. Peter’s prime example was the flood in the time of Noah. The cynics had conveniently overlooked this fact (vv. 5-6). Peter explained that in the future, God would use fire rather than flood to impact human history (v. 7).

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Peter used other arguments to...
respond to these scoffers. His replies are a case study in his earlier encouragement for his audience to be “ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). In 2 Peter 3, the apostle defended Christian belief in the certainty of Jesus’ eventual return.

Peter next explained that God did not count time the same way humans do. Drawing on Psalm 90:4, Peter insisted that one day and a thousand years are similar in God’s time table. The apparent “delay of the parousia” might not be a “delay” at all in God’s calendar!

Peter also pointed to the relevance of God’s character. God does not work on a human time table because He is “patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). God’s patience had been highlighted in a number of ways in the Old Testament. For example, God described Himself to Moses as “slow to anger” (Ex. 34:6). Paul reaffirmed God’s patience (Rom. 2:4). Peter saw a clear link between God’s patience and human salvation (2 Pet. 3:15).

Second Peter 3:10 includes several key emphases in Peter’s eschatology. For instance, Peter echoed Jesus’ teaching by using the analogy of a thief arriving in the middle of the night (Matt. 24:43). The term “day of the Lord” was a common Old Testament way of referring to a future action by God. That term could refer to an invasion of Israel by a foreign nation. Here Peter used it for events connected to Jesus’ return. Peter also touched on cosmic eschatology, or the impact of the end-time on all of the world (Greek, cosmos). The day of the Lord would be a “day of judgment” (2 Pet. 3:7) impacting heaven and earth. The “day of God” would reveal a transformation of the entire world (v. 12).

Besides the return of Jesus, divine judgment, and cosmic eschatology, Peter also briefly touched on the topics of death and life after death. He was aware that his own death was imminent (1:12-15). He was ready for his own “departure.”

**Eschatological Ethics**

Peter clearly saw the connection between correct beliefs about the future and correct actions. One scholar explained, “Eschatology and ethics are firmly wed in 2 Peter.” Since Jesus is definitely returning someday, Peter posed the issue of “what sort of people you should be” (3:11). Years ago I heard that waiting is not the same as loitering. Likewise, Peter expected his readers to be active in the Christian life as they waited for Jesus. In this letter Peter especially highlighted “holy conduct and godliness” (v. 11).

In his first epistle, Peter also discussed eschatological ethics (1 Pet. 4:7-19). In that letter his greater concern was the persecution his readers would face—rather than the threat of ridicule by cynics. They would encounter a “fiery ordeal” that would “test” them (v. 12). Peter covered a wide range of ethical behavior in 1 Peter. For example, he stressed the need for love. Christians should be “hospitable to one another” (v. 9). They should exercise their spiritual gifts wisely. They should rejoice even though they suffered (v. 13). Their suffering was not a punishment for sin but a testing of their faith.

One scholar stated, “Eschatology is invariably used to encourage believers to live in a godly way.” Indeed, as believers we should live in such a way that our daily activities indicate that we are ready for Jesus’ return. Reading Peter’s response to the critics of his day should motivate us to active service today.

We do not stand, as did the cartoon character, waiting for an event that never occurs. Instead we can have hope, indeed, assurance that, “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way as believers we should live in such a way that [Peter and the other disciples saw] him going into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

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2. All Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).
6. Ibid., 211.

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