

STUDY QUESTIONS (1)

1. When and where is the first time that God appears to Abram? What name does Stephen use for Yahweh? [Acts 7:2; Psalm 29:3, John 1:14,18; 1 Timothy 1:17]
2. Stephen sees the heaven's opened prior to his death. Who and what does he see? Where is Stephen's location? Is there another time (s) in the NT where it's said that the 'heaven's were opened'? What is the location and who is present? [Acts 7:55-56; Mark 1:9-11; John 1:51]
3. How is what Stephen sees the same or different from the heavenly throne room as seen by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and John? [Isaiah 6:1-3; Ezekiel 1-2; Daniel 7:9-14, Revelation 4-5, John 1:29-30, 35-36]
4. Describe what Moses and the seventy elders of Israel saw and experienced on Mt Sinai. [Exodus 24:9-11]

5. What happened to the seventy nations that descended from Noah in Genesis 10? Why has the 'whole earth' been dispersed 'over the face of all the earth'? Who dispersed them? [Genesis 11:6-9; Deuteronomy 32:8-9; Acts 17:24-29]

6. If you notice, Israel is *not* one of the 70 nations listed in the "Table of Nations" (Genesis 10). What is the reason Moses, Solomon, John, Paul, and Peter give for this? [Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 32:8-9; Amos 2:1; John 4:21-24, Acts 13:47; 1 Peter 2:9-10;]

7. Adonai elects Abram and Sarai (who, notably, is barren) out of Mesopotamia. They are to be willing partners in God's carrying out his original Edenic vision. What, in your own words, is God's Edenic Vision for mankind? [Genesis 1:28-30, 12:2-3;]

8. Yahweh initiates a series of covenants with his people. Beginning with Adam and ending with David, can you identify the covenants? What does Yahweh promise in each covenant? [Genesis 12; Exodus 19; 2 Samuel 7; Matthew 1:1]

9. Where was Abram's first stop in the land of Canaan? What other significant events occur in this location later in Israel's history? [Genesis 12:6; 33:17-20, 37;12-14; 50:25; Deuteronomy 27:4; Joshua 8:30-35, 24:1; 34:27, 32; 1 Chronicles 6:67; Judges 9:6, 53; 1 Kings 12:1, 25-33; 2 Kings 17;24-41; John 4:20]

10. Due to a drought, Abraham's descendants end up enslaved and terribly oppressed by Egypt. God hears their cries for help and elects Moses to partner with him in bringing about his original Edenic Vision via a people often referred to, collectively, as the "Son of God". What is the reason Yahweh intends to deliver 'his son' from the powers of Egypt? [Exodus 3, 4:22, 7:5, 8:1, 29:46; Leviticus 26:13; Deuteronomy 7:19, 20:1; Psalm 105:23-45; Hosea 11:1]

11. What do you think the plagues and God's salvation of Israel "out of the land of Egypt" meant to an Ancient Near Eastern person? Remember, Pharaoh was considered the 'son of Re' who was the divine creator god of Egypt [Exodus 4:23; 12:12; Numbers 33:3-4; Psalm 74:12-14; Isaiah 19:1; Ezekiel 29:3;].

12. Read Exodus 23:20-33. What is promised to Israel when they enter into Canaan? How is God's presence described? Several nations are mentioned in this passage - what is Israel's instruction regarding how to deal with them?

13. If you have time, read through the Deuteronomy 32 text with the ancient Israelite worldview in your head. What Does Moses want to make sure you understand about *El Hakkhavod*' (the same 'God of glory' that Stephen saw in Acts 7)? What are you to understand about the neighbor-nations and the 'sons of God' they worship? What are you to understand about *yourself* in light of your unique story to this point?

14. What question(s) do you have for next week's discussion?

ESTABLISHING CAREFUL READING STRATEGIES AND EXEGESIS

“What did this mean to *them*?” This is *always* the first question. No biblical book was written directly *to us* - we aren't the intended audience. No text was written at the time 'for the ages'. It's good to remind ourselves that the Bible was written *for us* but not *to us*. The proper context for interpreting the Bible is the context of the biblical writers - *the context that produced the Bible*.

“What does it mean for *us*?” This is always the secondary question. The goal is to correctly understand how a principle applied "*to them, there, then*" before applying it "*to us, here, and now*." Seeing the Bible through the ancient reader's worldview may require shedding the filters of our traditions and presumptions.

The biblical text was produced over 1200 years (between the second millennium BC and the first century AD) by men who lived in the ancient Near East (ANE) and Mediterranean. To understand how biblical writers thought we need to tap in to the intellectual output of *that* world.

This ANE context was the one in which God chose to reveal himself and his will. Our modern, scientific context and worldview is not their supernatural context and worldview. The way we view the cosmos is wildly different, for starters. As is the way we view physiology. The biblical texts are not video footage. Rather, they tell a story of God's identity, and the identity of his people. The biblical writers are less interested in telling us *how* God did something, but that he did it!

The Bible is a mosaic. The individual pieces of the text are essential, but the patterns aren't always clear up close. The *meaning* of the individual pieces is found in the perspective of the *completed* mosaic. Every passage plays a coherent part of the mosaic whole.

If it's weird, it's important. When there is something in Scripture which strikes us as weird, often it is because we have lost the background information that makes it sensible, or the biblical author assumes we already know what he's referencing.

Very few books of the Hebrew Bible were written by one author at one time. Most were compiled and edited during the Second Temple period. What is scripture (canon) to us is the *final, inspired* form of the book, not the *original* form of the book.

The Bible is inerrant. These texts are God-breathed, human-written words (2 Timothy 3:16). Interpretation, however, is not inerrant. We come to the text with a limited perspective, a different worldview, and much humility is required. "*What does the text say?*" vs. "*What can I say about the text?*"

When we want to know what the Bible is saying (exegesis), we ask questions like:

- What would these words and phrases have meant to the original speaker?
- What would they have meant to the original reader?
- What occasioned the text?
- What is the author's aim in recording them?
- What is the genre? How does that trigger my reading strategy?
- How has the author used similar words or phrases, or similar ideas, in the rest of his writing?
- What is the author drawing on from the past?
- What does it teach us about God and his plan?
- What does it teach us about the person and work of Jesus?

Exegesis begins with looking at the *flow of thought* in and around the text you're investigating. What ideas come before it? What ideas come after it? How does it connect them or relate to them? These ideas might be woven through *several* texts, not just the one you are reading!

The Bible is not a problem to be solved. The primary goal is to understand how we might live as loyal image-bearers of Christ and represent his kingdom rule, with the help of heaven, on earth.

SOURCES AND HELPS

"My greatest passion and privilege is to help people grasp the beautiful and compelling story of the ancient Scriptures and how they lead us to Jesus of Nazareth...." - Tim Mackie, **The Bible Project**

Tim Mackie Professor of Old Testament at Western Seminary. PhD in Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. www.thebibleproject.com

Ray Vander Laan Founder of *That the World May Know* ministries www.thatttheworldmayknow.com
M.Div at Westminster (Jewish studies). *Israel's Mission: A Kingdom of Priests in a Prodigal World.*

Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg: Ph.D. in Ancient Cultures. Israeli expert scholar in Early and Modern Church History. M.Div. degree in Christian Theology from the Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS). M.Phil. degree in Bible Interpretation. Teaches at the Israel Institute of Biblical studies. *The Jewish Gospel of John.*

"One of my greatest passions is building bridges of trust, respect and understanding between Christians and Jews, and overcoming centuries of difficult, but almost always joined history..." - Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg

Robin A. Parry: *The Biblical Cosmos: A Pilgrim's Guide to the Weird and Wonderful World of the Bible*

N. T. Wright: *Christ and the Cosmos: Kingdom and Creation in Gospel Perspective*

Christopher Wright: PhD in Old Testament ethics (Cambridge). *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament; The Mission of God: Unlocking the Grand Narrative of the Bible; Old Testament Ethics for the People of God;* plus other books and OT commentaries (Deuteronomy; Job, Jeremiah, Ezekiel etc.),

Tremper Longman: Distinguished scholar of Biblical studies (Westmont). PhD in Ancient Near Eastern Studies (Yale). M.Div (Westminster Theological Seminary). Professor @ Westminster for 18 years. Translated the New Living Translation. 20+ commentaries and books on the Old Testament. *Genesis; The Story of God Commentary; Science, Creation, and the Bible*

John Walton: OT Professor (Wheaton, IL); Video series: *Genesis Through Ancient Eyes* <http://biologos.org/blog/series/genesis-through-ancient-eyes>; *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (2006)

Michael Heiser: PhD in Hebrew Bible and Semitic studies. Academic Editor @ Logos Bible Software (a company that produces ancient text databases and other digital resources for study of the ancient world and biblical studies) *The Unseen Realm. Supernatural: What the Bible Teaches About the Unseen Realm and Why it Matters.* www.thenakedbiblepodcast.com

ABRAHAM TO DAVID

REVIEW: The effects of sin have reached a global scale by Genesis 11. Humanity is scattered in division, chaos, and confusion over the face of the earth, allotted to other lords. Humans - individually and societally - are corrupt and violent, rebelling against God's love and authority. It is God's promise at *this* point in history from which Israel took its' existence.

ELECTION: God elects Abraham from the Ur of Chaldeans and calls him to leave Haran (Syria) and go down to Canaan. Through this election, God will provide a solution to the problem posed in Genesis 1-11. Jesus, the Messiah, will come as a son of Abraham.

This choice of Abraham defined the the identity of the people of **ISRAEL**. They were a chosen people, yes, but chosen not for their numerical greatness or moral superiority, but only because God had loved and chosen Abram for his own redemptive purpose. From this point on, God is known (and chooses to be known) as "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He is a God of promise and fulfillment whose purpose ultimately embraced all nations.

REDEMPTION: A famine causes the descendants of Abraham to migrate to Egypt (Genesis 42-). There they end up as slaves; an oppressed ethnic minority in a hostile land. The book of Exodus vividly describes how the Hebrew people are exploited and then dramatically liberated by God, through Moses. In this great story of deliverance, God acquires a new name in accord with this fresh dimension of his character: "Yahweh" - the God who saves. He is the God who acts out of faithfulness to his promise in liberating justice for the oppressed. The exodus becomes the primary model of what redemption means in the Bible and gives substance to what an Israelite would have meant by calling God "Redeemer".

COVENANT: Three months after the exodus God enters a covenant with Israel as a nation at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exodus 19) Yahweh would be their God and they would be his people, in a relationship of sovereignty and blessing on one hand, and loyalty and obedience on the other. God, through Moses, gives them his instruction (law) *which it's important to note always comes after his grace and redemptive action.* God's salvation comes first, obedience to the law and covenant was to be a grateful response, and in order to enable them to be what God wanted them to be as his people in the midst of the nations.

INHERITANCE: The generation of the exodus, through their own unbelief, failure, and rebellion, dies in the wilderness. It was the next generation who took possession of the promised land, fulfilling the purpose of the exodus liberation.

CONQUEST: Under the leadership of Joshua, Israel gained control of the Promised Land, but there followed a lengthy process of settlement in which the twelve tribes struggled to possess fully the land allotted to them.

PERIOD OF THE JUDGES: During the centuries of the period of the judges there was disunity and internal strife, along with external pressures. There was also chronic disloyalty to Yahweh, although it was never lost altogether and sustained by the ministries and victories of “the judges” culminating in Samuel.

DEMAND FOR MONARCHY: The pressures eventually led to a demand for monarchy (1 Samuel 8-12) which Samuel interpreted as a rejection of God’s own rule over his people, especially since it was motivated by a desire to be like other nations when it was precisely the vocation of Israel to be different. God elevated the sinful desires of the people into a vehicle for his own purpose, and after the failure of Saul, David establishes the monarchy firmly and became its glorious model.

UNIFIED CONTROL UNDER DAVID: David at last gives Israel complete and united control over the whole of the land that had been promised to Abraham. David gave Israel “rest from their enemies about” and established secure borders for their nation.

There is a natural arc from Abraham to David. With David, the covenant to Abraham comes to measure of fulfillment. Abraham’s offspring had become a great nation. They had taken possession of the land promised to Abraham. They were living in a special relationship of blessing and protection under Yahweh.

Abraham to David

Genesis 12:1-7 (Acts 7:2-4), 15:1-5, 16:7-13, 18:1-5, 21:17, 22:10-18, 26:1-5, 23-25, 28:10-22, 31:11-13, 32:24-30, 35:6, 48:1-4; 14-16

Exodus 3:1-6 (Acts 7:30-35), 23:20-22

Leviticus 11:45, Numbers 22:33, Deuteronomy 4:35-38

Joshua 5:13-15; 24:17-18

Judges 2:1-4, 6:11-24; 13:20, I Samuel 3:1-21

Extra Credit: Can you add more?

What other significant events happen at Haran?

What other significant events happen in Shechem?

What other significant events happen in Bethel?

(Gen. 13:1-9, 28:19, 31:13, 35:1,)

What significant events happen in Hebron (Negev)?

(Gen. 13:10-18, Gen. 15:1-21; 17:1-27, 23: 1-20)

DAVID TO EXILE | DIVISION OF THE KINGDOMS

SOLOMON glorified and consolidated the united empire. He built the temple his father desired and planned and the temple becomes focal point of God's presence with his people for the next 500 years. Solomon also introduces Israel to foreign trade, foreign culture, foreign wealth, and foreign influences. But the golden age of Solomon's wealth and wisdom had a dark side, which was the increasing burden of the cost of the empire - a burden that fell on the ordinary population.

SAMUEL had warned about this (1 Sam 8:10-18) in which forced labor, taxation, conscription, confiscation would fall on the people in their desire for a king. All this was contrary to the authentic Israelite tradition of covenant equality and freedom (God's original edenic vision). It produced discontent among the people, especially the Northern tribes who seemed to suffer more than the royal tribe of Judah.

REHOBOAM (Solomon's son) refused the people's request and his elders' advice to lighten the load, and deliberately chose the way of oppression and exploitation as state policy. This resulted in **JEREBEAM** and the ten northern tribes seceding from the house of David, forming a rival kingdom, and taking the name of Israel. Rehoboam was left with the remnant, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and became the kingdom of Judah in 931BC.

NINTH-CENTURY BC - NORTHERN KINGDOM

The Northern Kingdom went through a period of instability with four kings in 25 years. King **OMRI** finally established a dynasty and build up political and military strength. King **AHAB** (Omri's son) married **JEZEBEL** who was chosen by Omri as a marriage alliance with powerful Phoenicia (a maritime trading nation to the north). Jezebel's influence was more than economic. She set about converting her adopted kingdom to the religion of her native TYRE. She imposed the cult of **BAAL** and systemically tried to extinguish the worship of Yahweh. Samaria becomes capital of the Northern Kingdom.

God called **ELIJAH** to be his prophet to the Northern kingdom in mid-ninth-century. He courageously brought revival and reconversion through the judgement of the drought and the fiery climax on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18). Eijah also addressed the anger of God against the social and economic evil that was threatening the material structure of Israel's faith. (ie Ahab and Jezebel's treatment of Naboth in I Kings 21). The prophet **ELISHA** followed Elijah, whose long ministry lasted throughout the rest of the ninth century.

NINTH-CENTURY BC - SOUTHERN KINGDOM

The ninth-century was a quieter and more stable affair in the Southern Kingdom(Judah) as there was already an established capital, court, bureaucracy, and dynasty. In the first 50 years, Judah was ruled by only two kings: King **ASA** and King **JEHOSAPHAT**. Both were strong leaders, godly, and preserved the faith of Yahweh. Jehosaphat also introduced major judicial reform.

ATHALIAH (Of the house of Omri or "Israel") married Jehosophat's son, **JEHORAM** (Judah), as a marriage alliance with the kingdom of Israel. She tried to capture the throne of David for the House of Israel after her husband's death. Her reign lasted only five years, and she was removed by a counter-revolution. David's kingly succession was restored by seven-year-old **JOASH**.

EIGHTH-CENTURY BC - THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

King **JEHU** overthrew Omri's dynasty in a bloody revolution. He was a fanatical Yahweist and his mission was to remove all traces of Baal, his prophets and worshippers, by fair means or foul - mostly foul. His bloody purge weakened the kingdom and lost him his allies.

JEROBOAM II (Jehu's great-grandson) restored Israel to a degree of political, military, and material prosperity not seen since Solomon. But prosperity was not enjoyed by all. Under the external extravagance lay a poverty gap and a world of exploitation, oppression, debt, bondage, and corruption of the markets and courts. Israel was a nation divided between rich and poor. God sent prophets to express his anger.

AMOS and **HOSEA** were the prophets to the northern kingdom in mid to late eighth-century. **AMOS** denounced social injustices and ardently defended the poor as "the righteous" (those with right on their side in the situation). He attacked the wealthy, luxury-loving class, especially in Samaria, as "the wicked".

Amos proclaimed that the thriving religious practices of the day (**BETHAL** and **DAN**) were not only *not* pleasing to God, but they stank in his nostrils. The rampant injustice and oppression in the nation was not only a complete betrayal of all their history as God's covenant people, and a reversal of God's edenic vision, but also turned their pretend worship into a mockery and abomination. Amos predicted the kingdom would be destroyed and people exiled which probably seemed laughable at the time during the the golden rule of Jeroboam.

Through his own bitter experience of marriage to a repeatedly unfaithful wife, the prophet **HOSEA** saw the internal spiritual reality of the people's condition. He observed the Baal worship; sexual perversion; ritual prostitution; and accused the people of being infested with "a spirit of prostitution". Hosea likely witnessed the destruction of Samaria and the exile of the Northern Kingdom.

ASSYRIA was a major world power by middle of 8th-century and was rapidly expanding westward to the Palestinian states. After several rebellions, Israel was attacked by Assyria in 725BC. Samaria (the capital of Israel) was seized, and finally fell in 721BC. The bulk of Israel's population was deported and scattered throughout the Assyrian empire while populations from other parts were brought into Israel's territories (imperial subjugation). This is the origins of the "mixed race" of the Samaritans.

ISRAEL CEASED TO EXIST. She becomes a province under the paw of Assyria.

EIGHTH-CENTURY BC - THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM

The Assyrian threat loomed large over Judah in the last part of 8th century. King **UZZIAH** and King **JOTHAM** were both good kings and Judah was reasonably stable for 50 years. But all was not well, as the people "...continued their corrupt practices.." (2 Chronicles 27:2) and engaged in the same social and economic evils as had Israel. The prophets **ISAIAH** and **MICAH** were sent by God to Judah during the reign of Jotham.

In an attempt to protect himself from invasions by Israel and Syria, King **AHAZ** appealed to Assyria for assistance, who happily came "to help" (735BC). They smashed Syria, Israel, Philistia, and then turned

to require a heavy tribute from Judah for the favor. AHAZ's action (directly opposed by Isaiah) was politically and religiously disastrous. Judah became virtually a vassal state of Assyria and was forced to absorb much of their religious practices as well.

King **HEZEKIAH** reversed that policy. He implemented religious reforms and a renewed bid for freedom from Assyria. His rebellion brought Assyrian invasions of devastating force, and he surrendered and paid up. But **JERUSALEM** herself was remarkably delivered, in fulfillment of a prophetic encouragement by Isaiah. The miraculous deliverance made the people assume that Jerusalem and its temple were indestructible. God would never, ever, allow it to be destroyed - or so they thought.

SEVENTH-CENTURY BC - SOUTHERN KINGDOM

King **MANASSAH** undid everything good that Hezekiah did. Manassah reigned in Judah for fifty years of unprecedented apostasy, religious decay, corruption, and a return to horrific Cananite religious practices (including child sacrifices) in worship of Baal. His rule was violently pagan (2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33) and no prophetic voice penetrated the darkness.

JOSIAH (Manassah's grandson) resisted Assyria and reformed Judah's religion. The reformation of Josiah lasted a decade, and included the discovery of the book of the law (probably **Deuteronomy**) during repairs of the temple. After his death, there were a series of weak and vacillating kings.

The young prophet **JEREMIAH** was called during Josiah's reign and they were about the same age. He saw that that Josiah's reformation hadn't purged the hearts of the people or the corruption of their hands. Jeremiah denounced the religious, moral, and social evils of Jerusalem's society from top to bottom.

When Jeremiah was young, he appealed movingly for **REPENTANCE**, believing God's threatened judgment could be averted. As his ministry wore on to middle age, God told him that the people had become so hardened in their rebellion that he should stop praying for them. From then on Jeremiah preached **CALAMITY** for his own generation at the hands of their enemies. People's disbelief turned to outrage when he preached the destruction of the temple. *They believed the temple was safe forever.* He suffered arrest, beatings, imprisonment for such an unpopular message.

BABYLON conquered Assyria and became the new world power. **NEBUCHADNEZZAR**, Babylon's commander, besieged Jerusalem in 588BC. Jerusalem was captured in 587BC and the exile began. Destruction of Jerusalem was devastating and total. Both the city and temple went up in smoke. The bulk of the population of Judah was carried off in captivity to Babylon.

The unthinkable had happened. The David monarchy had ended. God's people had been evicted from God's land, and his presence. They were in bondage, again, to the gods and lords of the other nations.

EXILE TO MESSIAH

The exile lasted fifty years (587-538 when some returned). The period between the destruction of the temple to completion of the rebuilding was 70 years. That the faith of Israel survived was largely due to the message of the prophets, particularly **JEREMIAH** (leading up to) and **EZEKIEL** (after the fall of Jerusalem). These prophets consistently interpreted the events as God's judgement as punishment for the evil ways of his people. From that perspective, it was a judgement that was logical but also LIMITED (there could be hope for the future).

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel foretold a return to the land and a restoration of relationship with God and his people. Jeremiah portrayed it in terms of a **NEW COVENANT** (Jeremiah 31:-34). Ezekiel had visions of nothing short of a national resurrection (Ezekiel 37) with REUNIFIED TRIBES living once again in God's land, surrounding God's temples and enjoying God's presence.

By the later years of the exile, many had abandoned hope. The Israelites accused Yahweh of forgetting them. (Isaiah 40:27; 49:14). Into this despair comes the message of **ISAIAH 40-55** addressing the exiles. At a time when another world power, **PERSIA**, was on the rise, these texts called the people to lift up their eyes and hearts once more to see their God on the move bringing liberation at last. Isaiah affirmed that Yahweh was still the sovereign LORD of all creation and all history, but also that he was about to act again on behalf of his oppressed people with a deliverance that will recall the original exodus but dwarf it in significance. The sudden rise of **CYRUS** would bring blessing on their heads. **BABYLON** would be destroyed and they would be released, free to return to Jerusalem, which the prophet said was already exulting in joy at the sight of God leading the captives home.

In the midst of all the history, **ISAIAH** perceived the true ministry and mission of Israel as the servant of God is to bring his blessing to all nations - a destiny they are failing! The mission will be accomplished through a **TRUE SERVANT** of Yahweh, whose mission of justice, teaching, suffering, death, and vindication will ultimately bring God's salvation *to the ends of the earth*. The particular story of Israel and the universal purposes of God are again linked together.

THE RESTORATION

Cyrus granted freedom to the captive peoples of the Babylonian empire to take up their gods and go home. The first return of the Jews home to Jerusalem was 538. They were a tiny community facing enormous problems. Judah and Jerusalem were in ruins. They experience intense opposition and obstruction from the **SAMARITANS**. Their early harvests were

disappointing. After a start, and the foundations laid, the temple was soon neglected. **HAGGAI and ZECHARIAH** were the prophets called to encourage the people during the time of the temple's construction. It was completed in 515BC.

Throughout this time Judah was not independent. She was still a small vassal state of the vast Persian empire which stretched from the shore of the Aegean sea to the borders of India and lasted two centuries. In the **FIFTH-CENTURY BC**, due to a loss of hope, there was a growing laxity in religious and moral life of the people. **MALACHI** (last of the OT prophets) was concerned about the slovenliness of the sacrifices, the spread of divorce, and the widespread failure of the people of God in practical life.

EZRA + NEHEMIAH overlapped during this time. EZRA taught the law and reordered the community around it, consolidated by a ceremony of covenant renewal. NEHEMIAH, as the officially appointed Persian governor, rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, giving physical safety and also unity and dignity.

INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD The canonical history of the OT comes to an end in the mid-fifth century, but the Jewish community went on (as does Matthew's genealogy). The Jews lived through two more changes of imperial power before Christ.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT conquered Persian empire. Judah came under Greek rule and this was the beginning of the HELLENISTIC (Greek) era. Greek language and culture spread through the whole Near East and Middle Eastern world. After the death of Alexander in 323BC, his empire was split among his generals. **PTOLEMY** established a dynasty in Egypt and for more or less of the 3rd-Century Palestine and the Jews were under the political control of the Ptolemies.

From 200 BC onward, control of Palestine passed into the hands of the **SELEUCID** kings of **SYRIA**, who ruled from **ANTIOCH** over the northern part of the old Alexandrian empire. The rule was aggressively Greek and Jews faced increasing pressure to conform religiously and culturally to Hellenism or face persecution. The supreme insult was when **ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES** set up a statue of Zeus, the supreme God, in the temple itself. (167BC). This sparked a major revolt. Jews under **JUDAS MACCABEUS** took up arms and won the struggle for independence in 164BC. For the next 100 years the Jews governed themselves under the **HASMONIAN** (priestly) dynasty. This lasted until Greece was replaced by **ROME**. IN 63BC

Roman legions under **POMPEY** entered Palestine and began the long period of Roman supremacy over the Jews.

During this time period there was an increased devotion to the **TORAH**. This became the supreme mark of *faithful* Jews. This developed into an almost fanatical cause, supported by a whole structure of theology, exposition, and application around the law itself. There were professional experts - **SCRIBES**. There were lay-movements devoted to wholehearted obedience to the law - **PHARISEES**. Be aware of the positive and worthy motives that lay behind the emphasis on keeping God's law. Had not the exile, the greatest catastrophe in their history, been the direct judgement of God on the failure of his people precisely to keep his law? Was that not also the message of the great prophets? Surely then they should learn the lesson of history and make every effort to live as God required? In that way they would *avoid a repeat*, but also *hasten the day* when God would finally deliver them from their enemies.

There was also an increase in **APOCALYPTIC MESSIANIC HOPE**. As persecution continued and the nation experienced martyrdoms and great suffering, it began to hope for a climactic intervention by God himself, as the prophets had foretold - like an **EXODUS** experience. God would establish his kingdom forever by destroying his (and Israel's) enemies. He would vindicate and uplift the righteous oppressed and end their suffering. In varied ways these hopes included the expectation of a coming figure who would bring about this intervention of God and lead the people.

These expectations were not all linked together or attached to one single figure. They included terms like messiah (anointed one), son of man, a new David, the return of Elijah, the Prophet, the branch etc. The coming of this figure would 1) herald the end of the present age, 2) bring the arrival of the kingdom of God, 3) complete the restoration of Israel, and 4) execute the judgement of the wicked. So imagine the excitement when John the Baptist arrives on the scene!

ANCIENT ISRAELITE COSMOLOGY

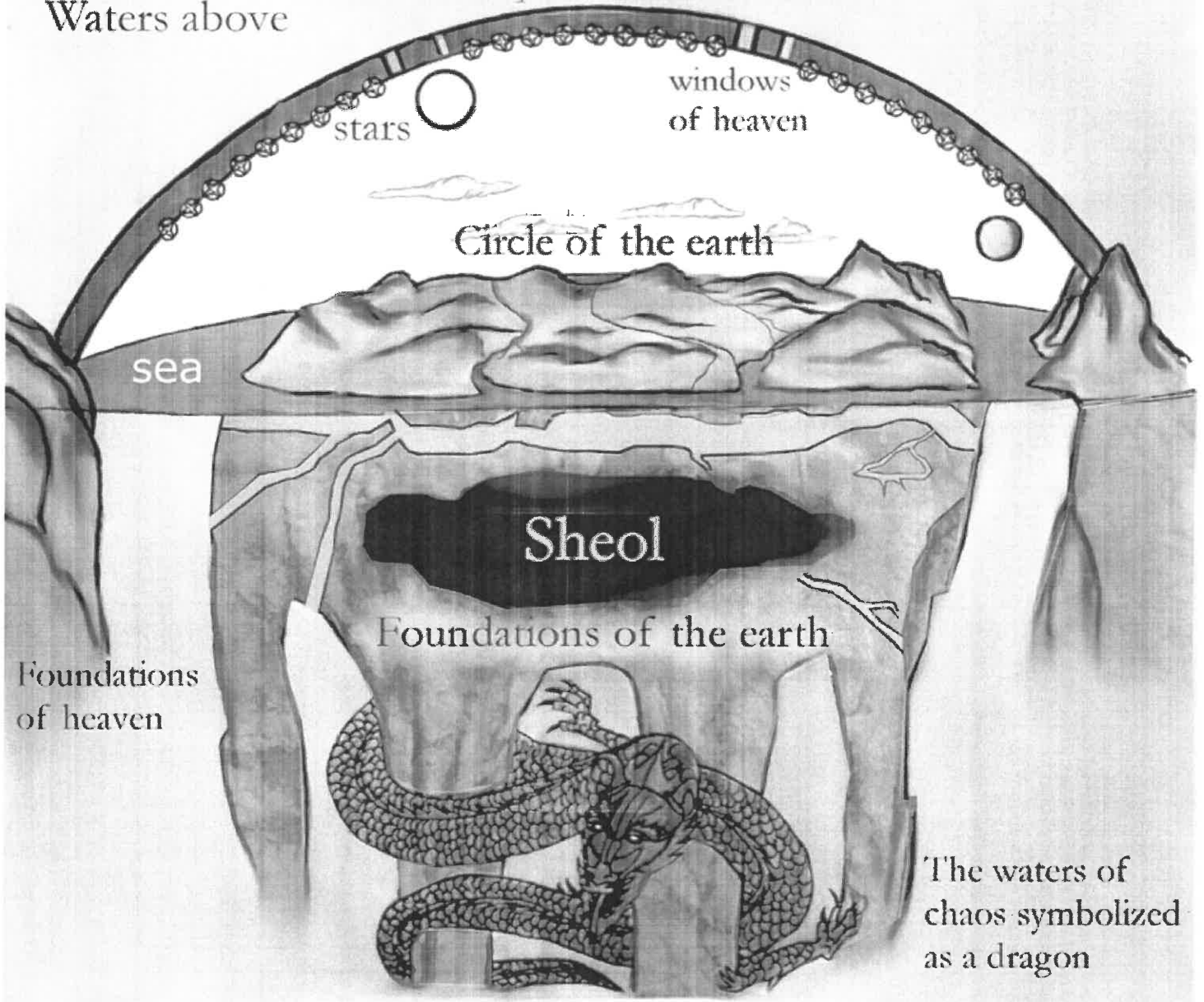


Realm of God



Raqia·firmament

Waters above



windows
of heaven

stars

Circle of the earth

sea

Sheol

Foundations of the earth

Foundations
of heaven

The waters of
chaos symbolized
as a dragon

THE FIRMAMENT

Gen 1:7-8; Job 37:18;
Ex 24:10; Ezk 1:22-26

WATERS ABOVE

Gen 1:7-8; Ps 148:4-6

REALM OF GOD

Ps 104:2-3; 29:10;
Job 22:12-14

WINDOWS OF HEAVEN

Gen 7:11; 8:2; Is 24:18

CIRCLE OF EARTH

Isa 40:22; Job 26:10;
Prov 8:27

FOUNDATIONS OF EARTH

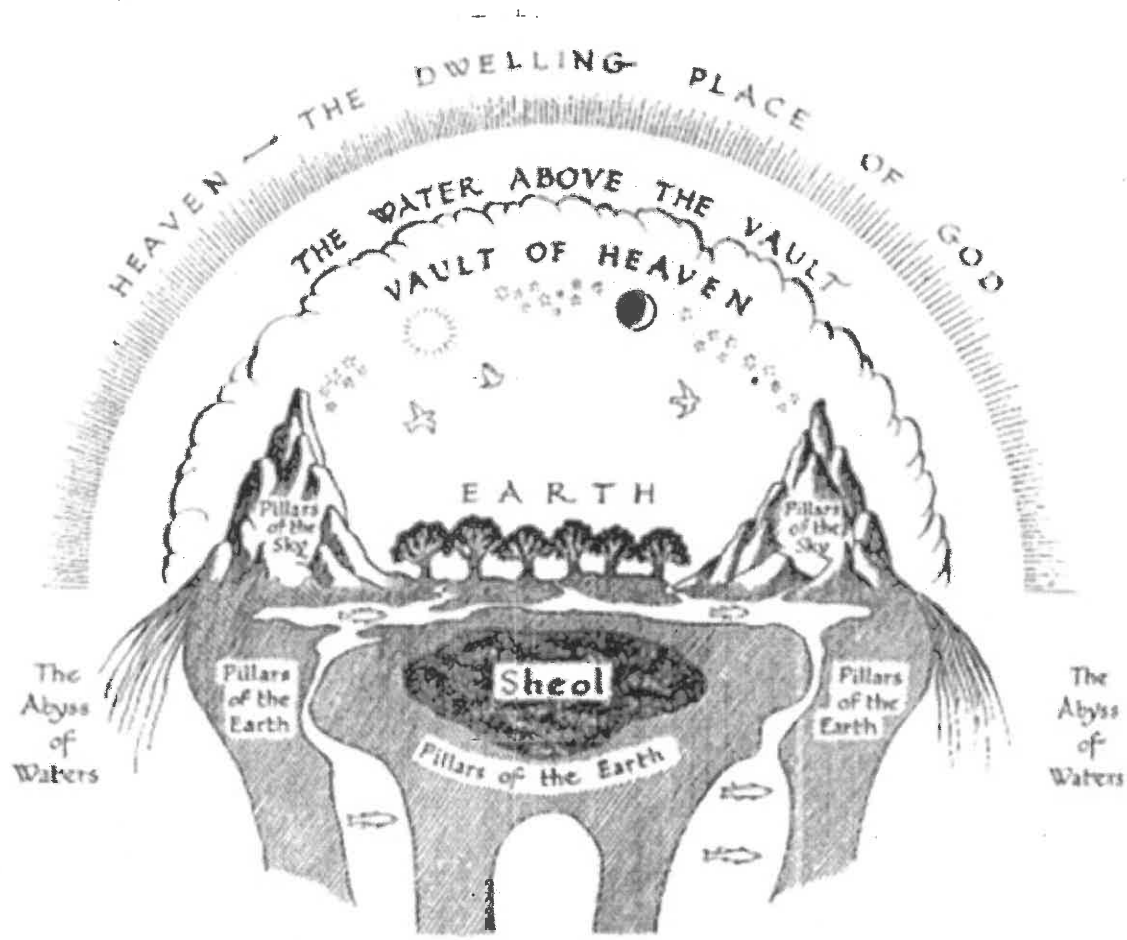
Job 9:6; Ps 75:3;
102:25

FOUNDATIONS OF HEAVEN

Job 26:11; 2 Sam 22:8

THE CHAOS DRAGON

Ps 74:13-15; Job 7:12;
9:13; 26:12-13



AN ANCIENT CONCEPT OF THE UNIVERSE