

The Lexham Glossary of Theology

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Abiezrites — One of the clans of the tribe of Manasseh, named for their ancestor Abiezer ([Josh 17:2](#); [Judg 6:11](#), [8:2](#)).

abomination of desolation — The pagan altar built in the Jerusalem temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 168 BC ([Dan 11:31](#); [12:11](#)). The Gospels use the phrase to point to (a) future antichrist(s) figure in the end times ([Matt 24:15](#); [Mark 13:14](#)).

Abrahamic covenant — The covenant God made with Abraham, in which he promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan and nations of descendants. God also promised that Abraham's descendants would bless the world ([Gen 12:1–5](#); [17:19](#)).

absolute — A grammatical construction in which a word or clause stands independent of other elements in the sentence. The absolute state is the base form of a Hebrew noun when it is not in [construct](#) state with another noun. For example, shanah, “year” (absolute) versus shenath, “year of” (construct).

accentuation — A system of symbols developed by the Masoretic scribes to mark clauses and stressed syllables in the Masoretic Text.

accession year — The period of time between the start of a king's reign and the start of the next calendar year. The accession year might only last a few months if the king's reign began late in the year. A king's reign may be counted by the non-accession year system, where the years of the king's reign are counted from the day he actually begins to reign.

accommodation — The idea that God communicates with humankind in ways that make his message understandable to humans.

accusative case — A morphological noun category that primarily serves to indicate the direct object.

Achaemenid period — Another name for the Persian period, the time when the Persian Empire dominated the Middle East (late sixth century BC to late fourth century BC).

acropolis — The central citadel in a Greek city built atop the highest hill in the area. The Acropolis in Athens is known as the Acropolis, though there are many such structures throughout Greece.

acrostic — A method of structuring a piece of literature in which the first letter of each line spells out a message or follows the alphabet.

Adar — The Babylonian name for the twelfth month in the lunar calendar used by the Jews.

adiaphora — A term meaning “indifferent things” which is used to refer to things that are nonessential to the faith.

adoptionism — A teaching in the early church period that claimed that Jesus became God's Son through adoption during His earthly life (whether at His baptism, resurrection, or ascension) and

denies the preexistence of Jesus. The early church condemned Adoptionism, though it was revived in 8th-century Spain.

aetiology — A story concerned with causes and origins such as explaining the origin of a people, nation, or practice.

afterlife — The concept dealing with what happens to a person after death. In Christian theology, those who believe in Jesus meet him in heaven upon dying.

agnosticism — The view that something cannot be known with certainty, especially used for someone who believes the existence of God cannot be known with certainty.

agrapha — Meaning "unwritten (things)" and used generally for sayings of Jesus found in Christian tradition but not in the four canonical gospels.

Ahura Mazda — The supreme god in Zoroastrian religion.

Akkadian — The oldest known Semitic language from ancient Mesopotamia. It was named after the city of Akkad in southern Mesopotamia, which was the center of a Semitic-speaking dynasty in the third millennium BC. Assyrian and Babylonian are the two major dialects of Akkadian.

Aleppo Codex — A Masoretic manuscript in the Ben Asher tradition, dating to the mid-tenth century AD. It is the base text for the Hebrew University Bible Project. Most of the Pentateuch was reportedly destroyed in a 1947 fire in Aleppo, Syria.

Alexander the Great — Born Alexander III of Macedon, Alexander the Great ruled Macedonia and Greece 336 BC–323 BC.

Alexander Jannaeus — A violent Hasmonean ruler and high priest (ca. 103–78 BC) and the son of John Hyrcanus I. He married Salome Alexandra and had two sons, Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II. An ardent supporter of the Sadducees, he had 800 Pharisees crucified and their families executed following an unsuccessful revolt.

Alexandra Salome — Widow of Aristobulus I and, later, Alexander Jannaeus whose two sons, Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II, fought for control of Judaea. She supported the Pharisees after Alexander Jannaeus' death and ruled Judaea 78–69 BC.

Alexandrian text-type — One of several families (types) of NT texts. It is regarded highly by most scholars and is possibly traceable to Alexandria, Egypt.

allegory — A story that has symbolic meaning for everyday life; also a biblical interpretation method for ordinary passages. Reading biblical texts as allegories has been used to discern the meaning—or a deeper meaning—of difficult passages.

allomorph — An alternate form of a [morpheme](#) that is used based on context. For example, the plural morpheme in English appears in several forms (i.e., allomorphs), including “-s,” “-es,” and “-ren” (e.g., “children”).

allophone — An alternate form of a [phoneme](#) based on the letters that surround it. For example, the phoneme “s” sounds different in the words “single” and “busy.”

allusion — A figure of speech that makes an implied or indirect reference to literature, culture, history, etc., leaving the reader or hearer to make the connection.

Amalekites — Nomadic or semi-nomadic people descended from Esau and associated with the region southeast of the Dead Sea. The Amalekites were traditional enemies of Israel.

amanuensis — An ancient scribe or secretary hired to write a letter that was usually dictated to him.

Amarna Letters — An important collection of cuneiform letters from Canaanite kings to the Egyptian pharaohs in the fourteenth century BC. The letters provide information on Canaanite politics and culture from the Late Bronze Age prior to the Israelite conquest described in Joshua.

amillennialism — The theological position that there will be no 1,000-year earthly reign of Christ after his second coming. It suggests that references to a millennium for the period between Christ’s ascension and second coming are figurative.

Amoraim — Meaning “the speakers” and often used to designate the rabbis of classical Judaism of the 3rd to 5th centuries AD. Their teachings concentrated on interpreting the Mishnah and were compiled in the Talmuds.

Amorites — One of the people groups inhabiting Canaan prior to the Israelite conquest ([Josh 3:10](#)). The Amorites were a Semitic people who lived in northwest Mesopotamia and northern Syria in the second millennium BC.

amphictyony — An ancient Greek concept of social organization which brought together different Greek peoples allied to maintain and protect a religious shrine. The Delphic amphictyony was made up of twelve tribes. The concept was applied by analogy to explain the history of early Israel with 12 tribes unified by their worship of Yahweh. This model of early Israel was popular in the mid-twentieth century but lost influence after further research uncovered the essentially artificial nature of the connections between the Greek league and biblical Israel.

Anabaptist — A Christian group emphasizing believers’ baptism that arose during the [Reformation](#). Anabaptist teachings differed in many ways from the main Reformation groups (i.e., Luther, Calvin), so they are often labeled part of a radical wing of the Reformation.

anacoluthon — A grammatical construction that departs from the expected sequence.

analogy — A comparison drawing on similar features between two things.

anaphoric — From the Latin noun anaphora, it indicates a reference back to a previous context by the repetition of a word or phrase.

ancient Near East — The region of the world roughly corresponding to the modern Middle East, including Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, Persia, Syria, Israel, Jordan, and Asia Minor. The ancient Near East (ANE) was the historical and cultural world of the Bible.

angelology — The doctrine of angels or the development in religious thought of ideas concerned with angels, such as their roles, hierarchy, names, and powers.

angel of Yahweh — A divine being often depicted as a direct representative of Yahweh or the embodiment of Yahweh in human or angelic form.

Anglicanism — The branch of the Christian church that developed out of the English Reformation and the Church of England.

aniconism — The rejection of the practice of making a physical representation/icon of a deity.

annihilationism — The belief that some people will cease to exist after death, especially the idea that God’s punishment of non-believers will be complete non-existence.

anointed one — A reference to someone set apart by God for special service as prophet or king. The term later became a messianic title and is the literal meaning of the words “Messiah” and “Christ.”

anointing — The practice of pouring oil on a person or thing that symbolizes some type of special recognition, setting a person or thing apart as holy and/or conferring divine authority.

anthropomorphism — The act of attributing human qualities to a deity or animal.

antichrist — The archenemy (or archenemies) of Jesus who will spread wickedness and lawlessness throughout the earth in the end times before Christ’s second coming. First John speaks of antichrists (plural), making it also a reference to anyone opposed to Jesus’ work.

antinomianism — The position that Christians are not bound by any law, whether related to religious practice or ethical behavior. This view may include the idea that salvation and freedom from the law permit believers to sin without consequence. Paul objects to this understanding of the Christian life in [Rom 6:1, 15](#).

Antiochus — Antiochus Epiphanes or Antiochus IV, who ruled Greece 175 BC–164 BC. He is infamous for his harsh treatment of the Jews and is the “little horn” in the apocalypses from the book of Daniel.

Antipas — Second oldest of Herod the Great’s surviving sons, he governed Galilee and Perea in Judaea’s northern territory. In the NT, he’s best known for executing John the Baptist ([Matt 14:1–12](#)) and mocking Jesus during his trial ([Luke 23:6–12](#)).

Antipater I — Grandfather of Herod the Great and the first governor of Idumea appointed by Alexander Jannaeus.

aphorism — A succinct statement of a truth, principle, or sentiment—a proverb.

Aphrodite — The Greek goddess of love and beauty.

apocalypse — A world- or time period-ending, cosmic cataclysm. Also a genre of religious writing concerned with this disaster that uses symbolic imagery to depict the final battle between good and evil and the resurrection of the righteous. The climactic end of history (or a period of history) that ushers in the messianic or millennial age of God's reign.

apocalypticism — A worldview that anticipates God's intervention in human history to save his people and destroy their enemies. It arose in oppressed Jewish and Christian groups and was often accompanied by the expectation of the establishment of the kingdom of God—a just, utopian society wherein peace, justice, and righteousness prevail.

apocryphal — Means “hidden” and refers to books in the Greek OT but not the Hebrew, covering the time period between the events depicted in Daniel and Jesus' life. Catholics and some other denominations accept the Apocrypha as Holy Scripture, but most Protestants do not.

apodictic law — A legal requirement that is usually unconditionally true or always applicable, meaning the law applies the same in virtually all cases.

apodosis — In a conditional sentence, the clause that presents a consequence or result (i.e., the “then” clause). In Greek grammar, the second clause in a conditional (“if-then”) sentence. The first clause is known as the [protasis](#).

apologetics — The discipline of offering a reasoned defense of a belief or particular point of view. It is often used in the context of defending a faith-based position against secular attacks.

apostasy — Renouncing faith or turning away from previously held beliefs and religious practices.

Apostle's Creed — A short statement of faith listing the key beliefs of Christian faith and sometimes believed to be one of the earliest creeds of the Church.

apposition — A pair of adjacent nouns that refer to the same person or thing. One noun is an appositive for the other.

Aqaba — The region on the northeastern end of the Red Sea. The Gulf of Aqaba is the easternmost prong of the Red Sea.

Aqedah — The Hebrew name for the story of the “Binding of Isaac” in [Gen 22](#). “Aqedah” (also spelled “Akedah”) is Hebrew for “binding.”

Aquila — A second-century AD Jewish convert who produced a Greek translation of the OT.

Aramaic — A Semitic language that is closely related to Hebrew; spoken widely in the ancient Near East from the seventh century BC to the seventh century AD; the language of the Targums (Targumim), part of the OT, and most of the Talmud.

Aramaism — A term to describe a typical feature of the Aramaic language when used in another language.

Arianism — The heresy associated with Arius (early 4th century AD) who taught Christ was a created being, the first being created by God the Father, and thus was not eternal like God the Father is.

Aristeas, Letter of — A Jewish account of the translation of the Pentateuch into Greek. The account, written in Greek, is framed as a letter from Aristeas to his brother Philocrates, where Aristeas provides a firsthand account of the events from the third century BC. The composition more likely dates to the second or first centuries BC, and while it recounts the story of the translation of the Law of Moses into Greek, the larger purpose of the work seems to be a defense of Jewish law and culture.

Aristobulus II — The younger son of Alexandra Salome, Aristobulus ousted his brother, Hyrcanus II, from power after his mother's death, sending Judaea into civil war. His forces suffered defeat at the hands of the combined military powers of Hyrcanus II and the Roman general Pompey.

ark of the covenant — A wooden box or chest that held the tablets of the law that Moses received on Mount Sinai. The ark was placed in the most holy place of the temple and tabernacle and came to symbolize the presence of Yahweh, who was envisioned as enthroned over the ark.

Arminianism — A doctrinal system based on the teachings of Arminius that emphasizes humanity's free will and holds that predestination to salvation is based on God's foreknowledge of who will believe. Arminian doctrines are often discussed in contrast to Reformed or Calvinist doctrines because the two systems have fundamentally different starting points for answering the same theological questions. See [Calvinism](#).

Artaxerxes — The king of Persia during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (464–424 BC).

asceticism — The practice of denying bodily pleasures or inflicting suffering on the body in an attempt to attain greater spirituality. Ascetic practices can include fasting, abstinence, or eschewing physical comforts (like sleeping on a hard floor instead of a soft bed). Asceticism can sometimes be overemphasized with people attempting to earn God's favor through physical suffering.

Asherah — A Canaanite goddess associated with fertility and wife of the chief god, El. The word is also used to designate the wooden pole or tree that was associated with worship of the goddess.

Asia Minor — Also called Anatolia. The peninsula surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the south, the Aegean Sea to the west, and the Black Sea to the north. Roughly equal to modern-day Turkey and Armenia.

Asiatics — A translation of the generic term used by the ancient Egyptians for Semitic people from Syria-Palestine.

aspect (verbal) — A category used to describe how a grammar marks the duration or type of temporal activity denoted by a particular verb. For example, “I am walking” is present in [tense](#) but [imperfective](#) in aspect.

assimilation — The process whereby a sound changes to match the sound before or after. For example, the letter nun (n) in Hebrew often assimilates to the following consonant. This is why the niphāl imperfect is yiqqātēl, not yinqātēl.

assonance — A similarity between or repetition of vowel patterns.

assurance — The teaching that believers in Christ can know for certain that they are saved or be assured of their salvation.

Assyria — A region in north central Mesopotamia centered around the Tigris River and the cities of Asshur and Nineveh. Assyria was the dominant military power in Mesopotamia 745–612 BC, with an empire that spanned from western Iran to eastern Asia Minor and included Syria-Palestine.

astral worship — Worship of the sun, moon, and stars.

asyndeton — A figure of speech where a word is left out for emphasis.

atheism — The belief that there is no God or gods.

atonement — The doctrine concerned with the removal of guilt, the covering over of sin, or the satisfaction of the penalty for sin that separated humankind from God, especially with reference to the obedience of Christ even unto death on the cross.

Atrahasis Epic — An ancient Mesopotamian text that contains a version of an ancient flood story with similarities to the biblical account in [Gen 6–9](#).

Augustine — An important theologian of early Christianity who lived from 354 to 430. He was bishop of Hippo in North Africa. His teachings emphasized God's sovereignty and the doctrines of grace.

autograph — The original manuscript or document of a writing. The Greek word *autographos* literally means “written in one’s own hand.” No autographs of biblical books have survived.

Avesta — The book of sacred writings for [Zoroastrianism](#).

Baal — The Canaanite storm god and god of fertility. Baal worship was the most prominent of the Canaanite religious practices to influence the Israelites.

Babel — The site of the Tower of Babel incident described in [Gen 11:1–9](#) and the Hebrew name for Babylon, the city in south central Mesopotamia on the Euphrates River.

Babylonia — The region of southern Mesopotamia dominated by the city of Babylon.

Babylonian Talmud — A compilation of rabbinic law and tradition that combines the Mishnah with interpretive commentary on the [Mishnah](#) and on the biblical texts—forming the basis for the laws in the Mishnah. The Babylonian version of the Talmud dates to around AD 500 and provides a much more authoritative and complete collection of rabbinic tradition.

baptism — A religious rite involving water and signifying new birth and new allegiance to God and his kingdom.

baptismal regeneration — The idea that baptism is the means by which original sin is washed away. That is, water baptism is how the Holy Spirit performs the [regeneration](#) of the believer, so it is a necessary part of salvation.

baru — An expert in divination from Mesopotamia, from the Akkadian word baru, meaning “to see.”

base text — The single text or manuscript from which a translation (or a diplomatic critical edition) is made.

battle of Armageddon — The final, climactic battle between good and evil, where Christ is victorious.

beatitude — A genre of literary statements about blessings or happiness. The word comes from beati, the Latin for “blessed”; also called “macarisms” from the Greek makarios meaning “blessed.”

ben Asher tradition — A system of vocalizing and accenting the OT text practiced by the ben Asher family of Tiberian Masoretes. The Aleppo Codex is in the ben Asher tradition; the Leningrad Codex was corrected toward the ben Asher tradition.

benediction — A short invocation of blessing or good wishes.

Benjaminite — A member of the Israelite tribe of Benjamin.

ben Naphtali tradition — A system of vocalizing and accenting the OT text practiced by the ben Naphtali family of Tiberian Masoretes.

biblical criticism — In biblical studies, “criticism” refers to an approach to studying the text of Scripture using critical thinking, not an attack on the Bible. Biblical criticism is the study, evaluation, and interpretation of the Bible. [Source criticism](#) and [form criticism](#) are distinct approaches within the field of biblical criticism.

biblical theology — Theology that takes the Bible itself, rather than a particular authoritative religious tradition or philosophical system, as its stated starting point for understanding the nature of God and his dealings with humanity.

binyanim — A Hebrew word meaning “structures” that is used in Hebrew grammar to refer to the seven verbal stems: Qal, Niphal, Piel, Pual, Hiphil, Hophal, and Hithpael.

birthright — The privileges or rights of inheritance to which the firstborn son was entitled.

blasphemy — Language that insults or shows contempt for God or anything sacred.

blessing — A statement wishing happiness, prosperity, and well-being for someone.

breathing mark — A [diacritical mark](#) in Greek that indicates whether an “h” sound should precede a vowel sound.

Byzantine — Relating to the ancient Greek city of Byzantium, often used in connection with the Greek-speaking side of Christendom in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Byzantine text-type — One of several families (types) of NT texts. It includes the majority of available manuscripts, which circulated throughout the Byzantine Empire (ca. AD 324–1450) and provided the basis for the Textus Receptus, the Greek edition behind the KJV.

Cairo Codex of the Prophets — A Masoretic manuscript of the Former and Latter Prophets in the ben Asher tradition, dating to AD 895.

Cairo Genizah — A medieval collection of thousands of worn out or flawed sacred manuscripts found in a storage room of an old synagogue in Cairo, Egypt.

Calvinism — The system of doctrine based on the teachings of John Calvin. Calvinism emphasizes human sinfulness, predestination, justification by grace through faith alone, the authority of Scripture, and a high view of God's sovereignty. The "Five Points" of Calvinism are summarized under the acronym [TULIP](#).

Calvin, John — An important theologian of the Reformation, who lived from 1509-1564. His Institutes of the Christian Religion is one of his most important works and foundational for the doctrinal system of [Calvinism](#).

canon — An authoritative collection of scriptural writings.

canonical criticism — A method of biblical interpretation that focuses on the final canonical form of a biblical book and considers the text in terms of its reception and function within communities that accept it as authoritative Scripture.

canopic jars — Containers in the ancient Egyptian embalming process to store the bodily organs of the deceased.

Cappadocian fathers — A group of three 4th century church fathers who were strong opponents of [Arianism](#). They were Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa.

case (grammatical) — A grammatical category where noun forms are morphologically marked to identify their role in a sentence.

casuistic law — A law that applies only under appropriate conditions. Case law.

cataphoric — From the Latin noun cataphora, it indicates a reference forward to a following word or phrase.

catechesis — Oral instruction in the basic doctrines of Christianity given to converts and children of members before they are admitted to full membership in a church community. The instruction uses a catechism, a summary of religious doctrine often in the form of questions and answers.

Catholic Letters — The seven epistles written to a general (“catholic”) church audience: James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude.

cave of Machpelah — A location in Canaan purchased by Abraham as a burial site. The cave was the burial place of Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob.

Chaldeans — A people group occupying the region of southern Mesopotamia, often synonymous with Babylonians. The term later became a designation for a class of Babylonian wise men or magicians.

charismatic — Describes churches or individuals that emphasize spiritual gifts, especially miraculous gifts like healing the sick or speaking in tongues.

Cherethites — A mercenary group, probably related to the Philistines, who served King David.

cherubim — Heavenly beings that served as guardians of the divine throne, usually depicted with both human and animal features and two pairs of wings.

chiasm — A literary structure where parallel elements correspond in an inverted order (i.e., A-B-C-C'-B'-A').

Chislew — The Babylonian name for the ninth month in the lunar calendar used by the Jews.

Christology — The area of Christian theology concerned with the person and nature of Christ.

Christophany — A manifestation or appearance of Christ either before the incarnation (OT) or after the resurrection (NT).

Chrysostom — John Chrysostom (ca. AD 354–407) was bishop of Constantinople. He is most famous for the many sermons and letters he wrote throughout his life.

Cicero — A famous Roman statesman and orator of the first century BC whose many writings include speeches, letters, and works devoted to rhetoric and philosophy.

circumcision — The surgical removal of the foreskin from the penis. According to the Mosaic law, male children were required to be circumcised eight days after their birth ([Lev 12:3](#)). This law has its origin in God’s covenant with Abraham; circumcision represented Abraham and his children’s obedience to (and agreement in) God’s covenant ([Gen 17:10–14](#)).

clause — The smallest grammatical unit expressing a complete proposition. A clause typically consists of at least a subject and a predicate. Clauses may be independent or dependent. An independent clause is a complete sentence. A dependent clause is subordinate to an independent clause (e.g., a relative clause).

Code of Hammurabi — An ancient Mesopotamian law code attributed to the Babylonian king Hammurabi from the early second millennium BC.

codex — Bound sheets, much like a modern book, which became prominent in the fourth century AD.

Codex Alexandrinus (A) — An important fifth-century uncial manuscript that contains most of the Bible.

Codex Ambrosianus (7a1) — A sixth/seventh-century manuscript of the Peshitta that is the [base text](#) for the Leiden [Peshitta](#).

Codex Sinaiticus (א) — An important fourth-century uncial manuscript that contains most of the OT and all of the NT; a good representative of the Alexandrian text-type.

Codex Vaticanus (B) — An important fourth-century uncial manuscript that contains most of the Bible; a good representative of the Alexandrian text-type.

cognate — Refers to words that are related through a common etymological origin or shared source.

common grace — The love and favor God shows toward all his creation, regardless of whether they acknowledge him or have faith in Christ.

complementarian — The position toward gender roles in the church that argues men and women were created to serve the church and each other in different but complementary ministry capacities and that some leadership roles are intended only for men, such as pastor or elder.

Complutensian Polyglot — The first printed polyglot of the Bible (1514–1517), containing Hebrew, Latin, Greek, and Aramaic. See also [polyglot](#).

concupiscence — Refers to the tendency of humanity to sin.

confession — The act of either admitting sins or affirming belief.

confirmation — The practice in some Christian denominations that serves to facilitate a person's official membership in the church by acknowledging their public testimony of faith and confirming they understand the core doctrines of Christianity.

conflation — The combining of two elements into one; used in textual criticism to describe when a scribe included two variant readings in one text.

congregationalism — A type of church government where the leadership is responsible to the congregation and the congregation makes major decisions about the operation of the church, usually by voting on issues.

conjugation — The pattern of [morphological](#) changes to a verb.

consecration — The setting apart of a person, thing, or place as sacred.

construct — The form of a Hebrew noun when it is grammatically linked to the following noun. The construct is often used to indicate possession (compare [genitive case](#)).

consubstantiation — The Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper that supposes that while the elements do not literally become the body and blood of Jesus (as in [transubstantiation](#)), the body and blood are actually "in, with, and under" the elements.

Coptic — The language of Egyptian Christians from the first century through the Middle Ages.

cosmic geography — The belief that certain locations were under the dominion of specific divine beings.

cosmology — A theory or worldview concerned with describing the origin and structure of the universe.

Council of Chalcedon — The church council of AD 451 that finalized the orthodox view on the nature of Christ. Their conclusion was that Christ was one person with two natures, fully human and fully divine.

Council of Nicaea — The church council of AD 325 formed to address the teaching of [Arianism](#), which claimed that Christ was a created being and not of the same substance as the Father.

courtier — An official who served the royal court.

covenant — A formal agreement with binding obligations. Biblical covenants formalized God's relationship with his people and promised blessings in return for obedience and warned of judgments for breaking the covenant by disobeying God.

covenantal nomism — A phrase coined by E. P. Sanders that describes Jewish religion as focused on obedience to the law within a larger framework of the OT covenants and the theme of election rather than legalism.

covenant theology — A system of theology that focuses on God as a covenant-making God and identifies two primary covenants in history: the covenant of works (also called the Adamic covenant) and the covenant of grace (also called the new covenant). Also known as "federal theology."

creationism — A label for a variety of perspectives on the origins of the natural world that share the core belief that God is ultimately responsible for creating all things. Young-earth creationism often teaches a literal 7-day creation as described in [Gen 1](#) and argues that the earth is less than 10,000 years old.

creed — A short summary of beliefs or statement of faith listing the key doctrines of Christianity that believers should affirm.

critical apparatus — The data that accompanies a critical edition of the Bible (usually in footnotes) and identifies the sources of variant readings; also called a textual apparatus.

critical edition — A printed biblical text created by textual critics to represent the best version of a single manuscript (a diplomatic edition) or the best hypothetical original text of the Bible (an eclectic version); created by evaluating and selecting superior textual variants according to the

standards of textual criticism; includes a critical apparatus detailing the variants and editorial choices.

cult — A system of religious worship, especially with reference to its rituals and ceremonies. This definition is to be distinguished from the more specific and common modern usage of the word in the sense of “a religion regarded as unorthodox or false.”

cuneiform — The wedge-shaped writing used to record the Akkadian language.

cupbearer — A royal official whose primary job was to taste the king’s wine to check for poisoning. Cupbearers’ access to the king sometimes allowed them considerable influence.

curse — A statement calling for harm or misfortune to come upon someone.

Cynicism — A Graeco-Roman philosophical movement that believed a virtuous life should be free of excessive material goods and social standards.

dagesh — A point or dot in the center of a Hebrew consonant that indicates either doubling of the consonant or a voiced pronunciation of the consonants bet, gimel, dalet, kaph, peh, or tav.

Damascus Document — A sectarian document discovered in the genizah (temporary storage area) of a Cairo synagogue in the late 19th century; also known as the Cairo Damascus Document ([CD](#)). Copies of the same writing were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The contents of the document focus on admonitions and laws related to the covenant community associated with the scrolls.

dative case — A morphological noun category that primarily indicates an indirect object.

daughter translation — A translation of a translation; the term is specifically used of translations of the Septuagint into other languages.

Davidic covenant — The covenant God made with David to establish his dynasty and ensure its continuation ([2 Sam 7:8–16](#)).

deacon — A leadership role in the church that is oriented around service to those in need (see [1 Tim 3:8–13](#)).

Dead Sea Scrolls — A large collection of ancient Jewish manuscripts found in caves on the northwest end of the Dead Sea at various times between 1946–1956. These texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek date from 250 BC to AD 70. They represent the oldest existing copies of the OT (including almost all OT books) and include religious texts outlining the practices of a Jewish sect.

declension — The pattern of morphological inflection of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and articles.

deconstruction — A postmodern method of literary interpretation that highlights the inherent disjunctions or contradictions of language that are thought to undermine a text's presentation of meaning.

deification — Raising a person to the status of deity, such as treating the king as if he is a god.

Deir 'Alla Inscription — An eighth century BC Canaanite inscription reporting a vision of Balaam son of Beor ([Num 22–24](#)).

deism — The view that there is a Supreme Being or God who created everything but no longer engages actively with creation.

deity — A god or supreme being, from the Latin word *deus*, meaning “god.”

demigod — A mythical being that is half god and half man or a mortal who becomes divine.

denomination — A group of churches organized under a larger entity (the denomination) on the basis of shared beliefs or practices.

depravity — The view that sinfulness is inherent to human nature and that all people are inclined to sin. With total depravity, sin has a complete hold on human behavior so that no one is able to earn salvation by their good behavior.

deuterocanonical — Means “part of the second canon” and refers to books that were in the Greek OT but were not part of the Hebrew Bible; also called the “apocryphal books.”

Deuteronomic source (D) — In the [Documentary Hypothesis](#), the book of Deuteronomy is attributed to a writer or school whose theology heavily influenced the [Deuteronomistic History](#) as well as other biblical books such as Jeremiah.

Deuteronomistic History — The historical books of the OT including Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings. These books are grouped together because they share a similar perspective on the history of Israel. The label “Deuteronomistic” indicates that the writers’ theology is closely related to the book of Deuteronomy.

diachrony — The study of how a language changes over time (compare [synchrony](#)).

diacritical mark — Small notations added to Greek letters to indicate pronunciation.

dialect — A variation of a language usually localized to a particular geographic region or spoken by a particular subculture of the society.

Diaspora — Literally meaning “dispersion,” a term used to refer to Jewish communities outside the land of Israel, especially in Babylon, Egypt, Persia, and Asia Minor ([1 Pet 1:1](#)).

Diatessaron — A second-century Syrian harmony of the Gospels by Tatian, a Christian convert who was a student of Justin Martyr before being charged with heresy for his ascetic beliefs. The Diatessaron’s popularity grew when Syrian church father Ephraem produced a commentary on it.

diatribe — A form of ancient rhetoric in which the author or speaker debates a hypothetical [interlocutor](#) as a form of argumentation.

Didache — An early Christian text containing ethical and liturgical instructions. It is an important text for reconstructing early Christian thought and practice.

diphthong — A sequence of two vowel sounds that form a single sound.

diplomatic edition — A critical edition of a text that reproduces a single manuscript; the BHS is a diplomatic edition of the Leningrad Codex.

dispensationalism — A theological system that interprets the Bible and history according to specific ages or “dispensations” where different principles governed God’s relationship with people. The dispensationalist perspective has heavily influenced popular views of the end times and [eschatology](#).

dittography — A manuscript error that results from the unintentional duplication of a letter, syllable, or word. It is the opposite of [haplography](#).

divination — The practice of rituals designed to aid in foretelling the future, including interpreting omens or consulting with supernatural forces.

divine council — An assembly of gods or heavenly beings. In ancient Near Eastern mythology, the divine council met to determine the fate of the universe. In the OT, a similar concept is used to describe Yahweh’s sovereignty, depicting Him as a ruler surrounded by his heavenly court of supernatural beings who carried out his decrees.

divine passive — A verb that is grammatically passive and that has God as the implied agent.

docetism — A doctrine in the period of the early church that claimed that Jesus only appeared to be human. Docetic teaching emphasized the deity of Jesus and downplayed the importance of His earthly life. The church ultimately deemed Docetism to be a heretical understanding of the nature of the incarnation.

Documentary Hypothesis — An attempt to explain the composition of the Pentateuch as a combination of four sources designated J, E, D, and P. Variations in vocabulary, style, and the repetition of material are considered clues for dividing Gen–Deut into discrete sections that were developed and combined over time.

dogmatics — A name for the practice of systematizing accepted and authoritative doctrines into a coherent theological statement.

Donatism — A movement in the 4th and 5th centuries that strongly condemned Christians who had complied with Roman demands during a period of persecution in the early 4th century. The Donatists favored martyrdom and viewed those who had complied with Rome as traitors and cowards.

doublet — The repeated written occurrence of a narrative or saying; common in Gospel and Genesis studies.

doxology — A series of declarations of praise announcing who God is and what he has done—sometimes in the form of a song.

dualism — May refer to a dual or two-part understanding of history: the present age of wickedness and the future age of righteousness. This was a common feature of Jewish [eschatology](#). The term may also refer to a theological view that the universe is ruled by two equal and opposing divine powers—one good and the other evil.

dynamic equivalence — A translation theory that tries to represent the sense or meaning conveyed by the source text into the target language

Eastern Orthodoxy — The branch of the Christian church that separated from the Roman Catholic Church in AD 1054 over doctrinal disagreements with Rome.

Ebionism — An early Jewish-Christian sect that emphasized [asceticism](#) and good works and denied the divinity of Jesus.

Ebla tablets — A large archive of third millennium BC [cuneiform](#) texts discovered in northwest Syria. The texts provide important evidence for ancient Near Eastern history and culture.

ecclesiology — The area of Christian theology focused on the Church, derived from the Greek word for “church,” *ekklēsia*.

eclectic edition — A critical edition of a text that combines the most accurate readings of multiple manuscripts to create a hypothetical original manuscript. The Oxford Hebrew Bible is planned as an eclectic edition. The Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament is an eclectic edition.

ecumenism — A movement seeking unity and cooperation among all Christian churches and denominations. Sometimes used generically for cooperation among people of different faiths.

editor — Scribe of the biblical text during its literary development and early transmission who shaped the text prior to its final form.

Edomites — The descendants of Esau ([Gen 36](#))—the oldest son of Isaac and Rebekah—who settled to the southeast of the Dead Sea.

egalitarian — The position that men and women are equally capable of serving the church in all capacities and that their participation should not be limited by gender. For example, an egalitarian would argue that both men and women should be ordained to the pastorate.

elder — Generally, an older member of a community with some level of influence or authority. In a Christian context, a leadership role in the church also sometimes called “overseer,” with responsibilities for administration and teaching the congregation (see [1 Tim 3:1–7](#))

election — God's choice of individuals for a specific task or role or his choice of the people who will have a relationship with him such as his choice of Israel or his choice of those who will be saved through faith in Christ.

Elephantine — A Jewish military colony at the border of upper Egypt. An important collection of Aramaic documents was discovered there that shed light on Jewish life and practice in Egypt during the fifth century BC.

Elohism tradition (E) — One of the four standard source divisions of the theory that the Pentateuch is a combination of multiple traditions. The Elohist tradition (E) takes its name from its frequent use of Elohim as the name for God in Genesis.

embalming — Or mummification. The practice of treating a corpse with chemicals to preserve it from decay—common in ancient Egypt.

emperor worship — The Roman practice of attributing divine status and worship to an emperor, living or dead.

endogamy — The practice of marrying within one's family or kinship group.

Enlightenment — An eighteenth-century cultural and philosophical movement that emphasized human reason and autonomy over the traditional authority of faith.

Enoch, books of — Jewish apocalyptic texts written during the Second Temple period and ascribed to Enoch ([Gen 5:18–24](#)). First Enoch is presented as visions and revelations that Enoch received in ancient times. Second Enoch is primarily an account expanding on events in [Gen 5:21–32](#).

enthymeme — An argument based on two premises, with one of them implied. An incomplete syllogism.

Enuma Elish — The Babylonian creation account that tells the story of [Marduk's](#) rise to kingship over the gods through his defeat of the sea monster Tiamat.

ephod — An apron-like garment worn by the high priest, woven of wool, linen, and gold thread and decorated with onyx stones engraved with the names of the [twelve tribes of Israel](#). The ephod also held the [Urim and Thummim](#) used for [divination](#).

Ephraim Gate — The western gate of the Jerusalem temple complex.

Epic of Gilgamesh — An Akkadian narrative recounting the adventures of Gilgamesh king of Uruk who sets out on a quest for immortality. The story is most well-known for containing a version of the Mesopotamian [flood](#) story.

Epicurean — A member of the philosophical school started by Epicurus in the late fourth century BC in Athens. The philosophy emphasized physical and intellectual pleasure and emotional calm (the most pleasure with the least pain).

epigram — A succinct, witty saying that is often mysterious or contradictory.

episcopal — Describes a type of church government where local congregations are governed by bishops, where each bishop has responsibility for a specific area or group of congregations. The structure is usually hierarchical, where higher ranking bishops have larger areas of responsibility with one highest ranking bishop overseeing all churches affiliated with that denomination or branch of the church. The Roman Catholic Church is an example of this form of church government.

epistemology — The branch of philosophy focused on the nature and foundation of knowledge, especially its limits and validity.

epithet — A word or phrase used in place of an actual name and applied to a person or thing based on actual or attributed qualities. In biblical and ancient contexts, the term usually refers to additional titles associated with a deity.

Erasmus — A sixteenth-century humanist who produced a Greek NT that became the basis for the Textus Receptus.

Eridu — An ancient Sumerian city in southern Mesopotamia located on the right bank of the Euphrates River. In ancient times, it was known as the world's oldest city.

eschatology — The theology of last things, the end of the age, or a period of time

eschaton — The end times or the end of this age. From the Greek term eschatos, meaning “last.”

Essenes — A Jewish sect from the [Second Temple period](#) mentioned by the Greek and Roman writers from the first century AD, who practiced asceticism and believed both the [Pharisees](#) and [Sadducees](#) were corrupt, as was the temple in Jerusalem. The reported customs of the sect have some similarities with those of the community of the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#).

ethics — The branch of philosophy or theology concerned with morals.

ethnocentrism — The belief that one's own culture and ethnicity is superior to that of others.

Euhemerism — A philosophical theory that believed the ancient gods originated through the deification of mortals.

eunuch — A royal official, usually a castrated male, in charge of the king's harem.

euphemism — The substitution of one word or expression to replace another that is potentially disagreeable or offensive.

evangelicalism — A movement in Christianity emphasizing personal faith and individual conversion and affirming traditional theological positions such as salvation through faith in Christ alone and the authority of Scripture.

execration — A curse or the act of cursing a person, place, or thing.

exegesis — The act of explaining or interpreting a text.

exilic — Refers to the period when the Jews were in exile in Babylon during the mid-sixth century BC.

existentialism — A philosophical system emphasizing existence, personal experience, and free will that often reflects a pessimistic and depressing view of the universe and the individual's place in it.

ex nihilo — A Latin phrase meaning “out of nothing”; often used in theological discussions about creation.

exodus — A term designating a mass departure and used to refer to the Israelite departure from Egypt, where they had been enslaved in the second millennium BC.

exogamy — The practice of marrying outside one’s family or kinship group.

exorcism — The act of expelling an evil spirit from the person it has possessed.

exordium — The introductory, or opening, section of a writing in terms of ancient rhetorical categories.

expiation — The position that [atonement](#) serves to remove the guilt of the sinner.

external evidence — Manuscript evidence in textual criticism that relates to the age, grouping, quantity, and distribution of the biblical manuscripts.

extrabiblical — A catch-all term to refer to ancient literary and archaeological evidence that is not part of the Bible, but might provide evidence related to the Bible, its world, and biblical people.

faith — Belief and trust in God that is not founded on empirical proof but rather on acceptance of God's trustworthiness to keep his promises ([Heb 11:1](#)).

fall, the — Refers to the fall of people into sin through the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden ([Gen 3](#)).

Feast of Ingathering — The harvest festival celebrated at the end of the agricultural year ([Exod 23:16](#)). Later equated with the Feast of Booths or [Feast of Tabernacles](#).

Feast of Tabernacles — The seven-day autumn harvest festival begun on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. Also called the Feast of Booths. The festival commemorates Israel’s time of wandering in the wilderness.

Feast of Trumpets — A day of rest observed on the first day of the seventh month, announced by trumpet blasts.

Feast of Weeks — The Jewish pilgrimage festival celebrated seven weeks after Passover, called “Pentecost” in Greek. The feast celebrates the spring grain harvest and was later associated with the making of the Sinai covenant.

feminism — A movement devoted to articulating the perspectives of women, adding female voices to current discussion, and exposing the many ways that male-oriented culture, discourse, and literature marginalize female experience. Feminists seek to uncover the often implicit sexism influencing cultural norms and philosophical assumptions to bring about greater equality for women to the benefit of all society.

Fertile Crescent — The fertile agricultural region circling the northern and western sides of the Arabian Desert, including Mesopotamia and the area of Syria-Palestine.

Festival of Unleavened Bread — A seven-day pilgrimage festival begun on the fifteenth day of the first month of the year and closely associated with Passover.

fideism — The position that reason cannot provide proof of theological truths so those truths have to be accepted by faith.

firmament — An arch that separates the heavens (or sky) from the earth, envisioned as a solid dome or vault in biblical [cosmology](#).

firstfruits — The first-ripe grain and fruit that was to be offered to Yahweh.

Flavius Josephus — A Jewish historian who wrote a detailed history in Greek that recounted the events of the Jewish War against Rome in the mid-first century AD. Josephus is an eyewitness source of the events in the first century AD and also wrote a history of the Jews from ancient times.

flood, the — The book of Genesis recounts the story of an ancient catastrophic flood from which God saved Noah and his family because they chose to follow him ([Gen 6–9](#)). Many world cultures have traditional stories of an ancient [primeval](#) flood, often with a single hero who survives the deluge.

foil — A literary device where a character serves primarily to emphasize contrasts with another character, usually the protagonist. The foil usually draws attention to the positive characteristics of the main character.

folk etymology — An explanation of a name or definition of a word based on a wordplay or similarity in sound or spelling between two words.

foreknowledge — Knowing something in advance. With reference to God, his knowledge of things before they have happened. Describes God's [omniscience](#) from a human, time-bound perspective. Foreknowledge of a person's faith is the basis of God's [election](#) in [Arminianism](#).

formal equivalence — A translation theory that tries to represent the linguistic form of the source text; also called word-for-word or literal translation.

form criticism — A method of biblical study that focuses on classifying the smaller literary pieces that make up a larger text and connecting those pieces with an original social or historical setting called the “setting in life” or Sitz im Leben.

Former Prophets — The section of the Hebrew canon that contains Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings; the first section of the [Nevi'im](#).

Free Grace — The view which holds that the only condition of salvation is faith, excluding good works and perseverance, holding to eternal security.

free will — The idea that a person has control over their own actions and that every event is not predetermined according to fate or divinely foreordained.

freewill offering — Any type of voluntary offering brought to the temple or tabernacle.

fulfillment citation — Referencing or quoting an OT passage as being fulfilled, especially in NT interpretations of how Jesus fulfills OT scriptures.

fundamentalism — A conservative movement in North American Christianity in the late 19th and 20th century that emphasized holding firmly to the "fundamentals" of the faith and opposing liberal influences that undermined those "fundamentals."

futurist approach — The method of reading Revelation as a prophecy of future events.

Gadarenes — The inhabitants of the Greek city of Gadara in the Decapolis region southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

Galilee — The northern region of the land of Judaea.

Garden of Eden — The site where Yahweh settled Adam and Eve, the first people he created. The garden was a place of beauty and abundance and likely the place where God and his [divine council](#) met ([Gen 2–3](#)).

Gauls — Ancient Celtic inhabitants of central Europe and Asia Minor.

Gehenna — A name for the place of torment for the wicked, derived from the name of the [Valley of Hinnom](#), which was used for burning refuse and the corpses of criminals in NT times.

gender (grammatical) — A formal feature for classifying nouns as masculine, feminine, or neuter. There is no necessary relationship between biological gender and grammatical gender.

genealogy — A record of a person's or family's descent from an ancestor

general revelation — God's revelation of himself to all humankind through creation; contrasts with his [special revelation](#) through Scripture.

Genesis Rabbah — A midrashic text from classical [rabbinic](#) literature that consists of rabbinic commentary on the book of Genesis. The commentary was probably compiled between AD 400–600.

genitive case — A morphological noun category that often indicates possession.

genizah — A room where worn out or flawed sacred manuscripts were stored until they could be properly disposed of; see also [Cairo Genizah](#).

Gentile — A biblical term for non-Jewish people, derived from the Latin word for “people” or “nation” and used to translate the Hebrew goyim and Greek ethnē, both meaning “nations.”

giantism — The state of being a giant—having an abnormally large size and great strength.

glorification — The last stage of salvation where believers are conformed fully to the glorified Christ and given a new form that is free from physical and spiritual defect.

gloss — A short explanation, usually written in the margins or between the lines of biblical text.

glossolalia — The practice of speaking in tongues, especially the spiritual gift of speaking in a language that one has not learned in order to present the gospel to those who speak the language.

gnomic — Used of a verb tense that refers to a timeless or general truth.

Gnosticism — A system of religious thought that blended elements of Christianity with Greek philosophy and [Zoroastrianism](#). The basic tenet was that the created world was evil and salvation came through secret knowledge (gnosis).

Godhead — The essence or nature of God, especially as existing as multiple but unified persons.

Golden Calf — The molten calf idol forged by Aaron at the urging of the Israelites while Moses was on Mount Sinai ([Exod 32](#)). The incident became programmatic for the biblical writers to refer to Israel's history of idol worship.

Goliath — The Philistine warrior, traditionally understood to be a giant, who was killed by the shepherd boy David with a sling ([1 Sam 17](#)).

Great Commission — Jesus' charge to his followers to spread the gospel throughout the world ([Matt 28:18–20](#)).

Great Isaiah Scroll — A nearly complete and intact copy of the book of Isaiah that was one of the first seven [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) discovered in 1947.

Hades — The god of the underworld in Greek mythology. His name came to be synonymous with the place of the dead in Greek, so the [Septuagint](#) uses “Hades” almost exclusively to translate the Hebrew name for the underworld, Sheol.

halakhah — The technical term for Jewish teaching on matters of daily living handed down through the Talmud, Mishnah, and the midrashim.

Ham — One of Noah's three sons and the forefather of the people of Canaan, Egypt, Cush, and Put.

hamartology — The theological study of sin, especially its origin and transmission through all humanity.

hapax legomena — From a Greek phrase meaning “something said once,” it refers to words that occur only once in a given document or set of writings.

haplography — A manuscript error that results from the unintentional omission of a letter, syllable, or word. A letter, word, or phrase is written only once when it should be written more than once. It is the opposite of [dittography](#).

harlot — A prostitute or a sexually immoral woman—often associated in the Bible with religious practices that Yahweh opposed.

harmonization — In textual criticism, a change to the biblical text where one passage is made to align more closely with another related passage.

Hasmonean — Referring to a dynasty of high priests and kings who ruled Judaea from the mid-second century BC to the mid-first century BC. The family was descended from the priest

Mattathias, father of Judah Maccabee. The family is also referred to as the Maccabees, based on Judah's nickname.

heavenly host — An expression used to denote either the stars, especially as objects of worship, or the spiritual beings of Yahweh's army.

Hebraism — A term to describe a typical feature of the Hebrew language when used in another language.

Hebrew Bible — A label for the Old Testament, used to refer to the Jewish Scriptures in Hebrew and Aramaic.

Hebron — An important city of Judah located on a mountain ridge about nineteen miles south-southeast from Jerusalem. Hebron was King David's first capital. The city is prominent in the patriarchal narratives since Abraham bought a [cave](#) and field nearby for a burial site.

Hellenistic — Relating to ancient Greek language and culture, especially the spread of Greek culture connected to the conquests of [Alexander the Great](#). The label is also applied to the Greek-styled kingdoms into which Alexander's empire was divided.

hendiadys — A figure of speech in which two related nouns or verbs are used to communicate a single idea, often heightening its meaning (e.g., "signs and wonders").

heresy — A teaching that is presented as truth about God or Christ but is contrary to widely accepted Christian doctrine and lacks Scriptural support.

hermeneutics — The study of how to interpret the Bible using established principles. More broadly, the theory and practice of interpretation.

hermeneutic of suspicion — An approach to interpretation that begins with doubts or suspicions about a text's truth or reliability. Using a hermeneutic of suspicion may also mean one refuses to accept the claims of a text at face value and seeks instead to uncover the agenda of the author or the presuppositions that influenced the writer's presentation of content.

Herodotus — An ancient Greek historian who wrote in the fifth century BC. His history provides information on ancient Egypt, Babylonia, and Medo-Persian history. He was especially interested in Darius' invasions of Greece in the early fifth century BC.

Hexapla — Origen's six-column document that included the Hebrew text, Origen's Greek transliteration of the Hebrew, Greek translations of Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, and an annotated column that compared the Hebrew with the Greek (the fifth column); dates to third century; survives only in other documents and fragments.

hieroglyphs — A system of writing that makes use of pictorial characters.

higher criticism — The analysis of biblical texts to determine authorship, date, sources, and composition of biblical books.

high priesthood — The office of the primary official in Israelite religion.

hiphil — A Hebrew grammatical term referring to the verbal conjugation that usually indicates a causative sense of the basic meaning of a verb (e.g., akal, “to eat,” becomes “to cause to eat” or “feed” if put into the hiphil conjugation).

historical criticism — An approach to biblical interpretation that emphasizes the historical context of the world depicted in the biblical text. Historical criticism looks at the broader historical and cultural context of the ancient Near East and Mediteranean world to understand biblical events and ancient customs.

historical Jesus — A label indicating a focus on what can be known through historical inquiry about Jesus as an actual person. Research on the "historical Jesus" often rejects much of the NT presentation of Jesus as unreliable theological story-telling. Some even call into question Jesus' actual existence.

historical theology — The study of how doctrines developed and changed throughout Christian history.

historicist approach — The method of interpreting the book of Revelation as symbolic of future events of world history.

historiography — The practice of writing history.

hitpael — A Hebrew grammatical term referring to the particular verbal forms that usually indicate a verb has a reflexive meaning.

Hittites — Refers to either an ethnic Canaanite group from the time of the patriarchs or to the Hittite Empire based in [Asia Minor](#) in the second millennium BC.

Hivites — One of the people groups listed as indigenous to the land of Canaan prior to the Israelite conquest.

Holiness Code — A label given to [Lev 17–26](#) because of its emphasis on holiness. The section was possibly an independent law code incorporated into Leviticus.

Holiness movement — A movement in Christianity (often indebted to the teachings of John Wesley) emphasizing Christian perfection as a life devoted to godliness and the achievement of total sanctification.

Holy of Holies — The inner chamber of the temple or tabernacle where the presence of Yahweh dwelled over the [ark of the covenant](#).

homiletics — The branch of theology devoted to the practice of delivering sermons. It involves teaching people how to preach and prepare sermons.

homograph — Identically spelled words with different meanings.

homophony — Two words that sound alike but are spelled differently; in textual criticism it refers to a scribal error of this nature.

hophal — The Hebrew name for the verbal stem that is the passive of the [hiphil](#). The stem indicates a causative-passive sense for the verb. One of the seven [binyanim](#).

household code — A collection of ethical advice addressed to various members of a household and emphasizing responsibilities relevant for each one's role and status

humiliation of Christ — A phrase that describes Jesus' act of becoming human and experiencing suffering and death for the sake of humanity.

Hurrian — A people group, probably of Indo-European origin, who inhabited northwest Mesopotamia and Asia Minor in the third to first millennia BC. Possibly related to the biblical Horites.

Hyksos — A dynasty of Semitic invaders who ruled Egypt during the early second millennium BC. These Semitic pharaohs could have been responsible for elevating Joseph to a position of influence, or they may have been responsible for enslaving the Hebrews.

hyperbole — A type of figurative language characterized by extreme exaggeration.

hypocrisy — Taking on the false appearance of piety or virtue.

hypostasis — A representation of the substance or essential nature of something, such as an embodiment of a divine attribute or an abstract concept.

hypostatic union — The union of human and divine natures in the person of Jesus.

iconoclasm — The destruction of images of Jesus Christ that were worshiped in some early Christian churches.

idealist approach — A way of interpreting the book of Revelation as a divinely inspired message that offers a way of understanding the meaning of all of world history in general, not referring to any particular historical period.

idolatry — Worship of any natural or created object as a god, worshiped in the place of the true God, Yahweh, as revealed in the Bible.

Idumean — A member of the region of Idumea, a territory in the southern hill country of Judaea whose border stretched into the northern reaches of the Negev desert. They may have descended from the Edomites.

illumination — The idea that the Holy Spirit works in believers to help them understand the Scriptures.

imago Dei — A Latin phrase meaning "image of God."

immaculate conception — The Roman Catholic doctrine that Mary was born without [original sin](#).

immanence — The idea that God is present and involved with his creation.

imminence — Meaning that something could happen at any time. Especially used with reference to the Second Coming of Christ.

immortality — The idea of not being mortal and thus not subject to death.

Immortals — An elite force of 10,000 royal soldiers that fought for the Achaemenid Empire. They served as both imperial guards and members of the standing army during the Graeco-Persian Wars.

immutability — The attribute of God referring to his unchangeable nature.

impassibility — The attribute of God conveying the idea that God cannot be emotionally moved to act contrary to his plan or promises.

impeccability — The attribute of God meaning he is unable to sin and is totally free from sin. It is especially used to refer to Jesus and his sinless earthly life.

imperative mood — The verbal [mood](#) used for expressing a command.

imperfective — The verbal [aspect](#) that indicates the action extends over a period of time.

imperfect verb — In Hebrew, the verbal conjugation characterized by adding prefixes and indicating future action. In Greek, the imperfect conjugation indicates repeated or continuous action in the past.

imprecatory — Relating to the language of curses or the act of uttering curses on enemies.

imputation — The ascription of the guilt or righteousness of one individual to another.

incarnation — God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ ([John 1:14](#); [1 Tim 3:16](#)).

inclusio — A literary device that repeats words or themes at the beginning and end of a section. The repetition brackets the section. The Bible makes frequent use of inclusios to structure both long and short sections of text.

indicative mood — The verbal [mood](#) used for simple declarative statements.

indulgences — The practice of the Roman Catholic Church of soliciting payment from people on the promise that their contribution would release the soul of a dead loved one from purgatory. The lack of a biblical basis for this practice was one of the catalysts for Martin Luther's opposition to the Roman Catholic Church that set off the Protestant Reformation.

inerrancy — Meaning "without error." Typically used to describe Scripture as without error.

infallibility — The idea that the Bible or other Christian teaching will not fail to accomplish God's purpose for it.

inspiration — The work of God through the Holy Spirit that guided the composition and transmission of Scripture to produce God's written revelation to humankind.

Instruction of Amenemope — An ancient Egyptian wisdom text. The striking parallels between Amenemope and [Prov 22–23](#) suggest the writer of Proverbs was familiar with the content of the Egyptian text.

intercalation — The act of inserting additional days into a calendar, usually done to realign a lunar calendar with the solar year.

interlinear — A language-learning resource that provides a foreign language text with a translation inserted in between the lines and aligned with the foreign language words.

interlocutor — A partner in dialogue or, in terms of ancient rhetoric, a hypothetical opponent whose objections are challenged by a writer or speaker.

internal evidence — Manuscript evidence in textual criticism that relates to the habits of scribes (see also [transcriptional probability](#)) and the stylistic and theological bent of the author (see also [intrinsic probability](#)).

intertextual — Relating to the complex web of relationships between a text and other texts that affects both the interpretation of existing texts and the creation of new texts.

intrinsic probability — The textual critic's assessment of a variant's likelihood based on the author's style, language, or theological argument; a component of internal evidence.

iota subscript — A small Greek letter iota written under the vowels alpha (α), eta (η), or omega (ω).

ipsissima verba — Latin for “the very words” of Jesus.

Irenaeus — A second-century church father and apologist.

irresistible grace — The Calvinist doctrine that God's saving grace enables a member of the elect to come to faith and that this grace is specially endowed capacity to believe that cannot be resisted.

Ishmaelites — The descendants of Abraham's son Ishmael.

Israelite law — The legal portions of the [Pentateuch](#) or [Law of Moses](#).

itture sopherim — A small set of minor omissions in the Hebrew OT made by the Masoretes for uncertain reasons.

Jebusite — An inhabitant of the Canaanite city of Jebus, which later became the Israelite city of Jerusalem.

Jerome — A Christian biblical scholar of the fourth and fifth centuries AD (331–420); translator of the Latin Vulgate.

Jezreel Valley — The largest valley and open plain in central Israel. The Jezreel Valley extends southeastward from the Mediterranean coast at Acco (Haifa) to the Jordan Valley at Beth-Shan.

Johannine — Refers to the NT writings associated with the apostle John and may also describe language or ideas that characterize John's writings.

John Hyrcanus II — The older son of Alexandra Salome, Hyrcanus served as high priest during his mother's reign and assumed political power after her death. He later fought his brother, Aristobulus II, for control of Judaea.

jubilee principle — The proclamation of liberty accompanying the [Year of Jubilee](#).

Judaizer — Jewish Christian who, in the NT era, attempted to impose Jewish cultural practices on Gentile Christians.

judgment — The decision made concerning guilt or innocence which may include the pronouncement of punishment for sin and the execution of that punishment.

justice — The idea that people receive what they have a right to expect under the law or other agreement. If someone is guilty of a crime, justice requires they pay the penalty for the crime. If someone is wronged, justice requires the wrong to be made right in some way.

justification — The process of being vindicated or acquitted. In Christian theology, it describes the act or state of being made right with God, often emphasizing the starting point of an individual's life of faith.

Kaige recension — An early Greek version of the OT in which the translator used the Greek phrase *καί γε* (*kai ge*) for all occurrences of the Hebrew *גַּם* (*gam*); also called the proto-Theodotion recension.

Karaites — A Jewish sect known for its emphasis on the Hebrew Bible (and not oral tradition) as its only authority.

kenosis — Describes Christ's "emptying himself" in the sense of obedience to God in the [incarnation](#) ([Phil 2:6–8](#)).

kerygma — Literally "proclamation." It refers to the fundamental message of the gospel that the early Christians preached about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

kethiv — Literally "what is written." A word in the consonantal text of the Masoretic Text that should be read with the vowels of a different word ([qere](#)) in the margin.

kethiv-qere — A shorthand reference for the scribal phenomenon of writing an alternate reading or correction (*qere*) in the margins to replace a word in the consonantal text of the Masoretic Text (*kethiv*).

Ketuvim — "Writings"; the third of three sections of the Hebrew canon (Torah, *Nevi'im*, Ketuvim); includes Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Ruth, and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

kinship — Refers to a family relationship by blood, adoption, or marriage.

kinsman — A male relative.

Kohathites — One of the three clans of the Levites.

lamentation — An expression of grief or sorrow, especially a type of biblical poetry that expresses mourning or sadness.

Late Bronze Age — The period of ancient history and archaeology from 1570–1200 BC.

Latter Prophets — The section of the Hebrew canon that contains Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 Minor Prophets; the second section of the [Nevi'im](#).

Law of Moses — The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Also called the [Pentateuch](#).

lectio brevior — The principle of textual criticism that states that the shorter (brevior) reading (lectio) is to be preferred.

lectio difficilior — The principle of textual criticism that states that the more difficult (difficilior) reading (lectio) is to be preferred.

lectionary — A book with selected Scripture readings for a given day or occasion on the Christian or Jewish calendar.

legalism — A disposition toward law and rule-keeping that emphasizes strict observance to the law and prizes obedience to the law above all else.

Leningrad Codex — The oldest complete Masoretic manuscript, dating to AD 1009; the base text for Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.

Letter of Aristeas — A [pseudepigraphal](#) document that purports to give the history of the Septuagint translation—that 72 third-century BC Jewish delegates translated the Pentateuch in 72 days with complete agreement.

Levant — The region on the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea, referring to the area of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan.

Leviathan — The name of a mythical sea serpent or dragon that represents the forces of chaos in [Ugaritic](#) and biblical texts. The name means “twisting one.”

levirate — The practice of marrying a widow to her late husband’s brother or next of kin if he died without an heir.

Levite — A member of the Israelite tribe of Levi. This tribe was set apart for religious service at the tabernacle and temple. Some Levites served as priests while others assisted the priests and cared for the temple buildings.

lexeme — A lexical unit apart from any specific forms the word may take. For example, *dābār* (“word”), *debar* (“word of”), *debārim* (“words”), and *debārāv* (“his words”) all reflect the same underlying lexeme: *dābār* (“word”).

lexicon — A list of the words and [morphemes](#) of a language with definitions explaining the terms; a dictionary.

lex talionis — Refers to the biblical law of retaliation—an eye for an eye, life for life, etc.—based on [Exod 21:23–25](#). Jesus’ reformulation of this principle is found in [Matt 5:38](#).

liberalism — A movement promoting change in the status quo such as accommodating Christian theology and practice to modern sensibilities. Liberalism in Christianity also tends to prefer the moral and ethical teachings of Scripture, showing a strong concern for social justice.

liberation theology — A theological perspective that emphasizes the biblical theme of liberation or being set free from oppression and uses it to motivate marginalized peoples to action in the contemporary world.

limited atonement — The view that Jesus’ death accomplished atonement for the sins of the elect, not of all humanity equally. This is one of the more controversial points of Calvinist doctrine because it is often misunderstood as teaching that the gospel should not be freely offered to everyone. Rather, the doctrine speaks to the actual efficacy of the atonement for those who are saved. While proponents of this doctrine affirm that the value of Christ’s atoning sacrifice is sufficient to cover the sins of all humankind, they say the intended effectiveness of this atonement is specific to the elect. Otherwise—because the ultimate purpose of God cannot be thwarted—all people would in fact be saved regardless of whether they had faith in Christ. For these reasons, this doctrine is often termed “definite” or “particular” atonement.

literary criticism — An approach to biblical interpretation that studies the Bible as literature and discusses the literary aspects of the text such as plot, setting, and characterization. Sometimes biblical scholars used the term literary criticism to refer to [source criticism](#), though this has been uncommon after the mid-20th century.

literary device — A convention of the writing style or format.

liturgical — Relating to prescribed readings or rituals accompanying public worship.

London Polyglot — The most extensive printed [polyglot](#) of the Bible (1654–1657).

Lord’s Supper — The sacrament in which bread and wine represent Christ’s body and blood ([1 Cor 11:17–34](#)). Also called communion or the Eucharist. The ritual is based on Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples ([Matt 26:17–29](#)).

lower criticism — The process of evaluating variants in the biblical text to determine the most authentic reading; an older expression for [textual criticism](#).

Lukan — Refers to language or ideas associated with Luke’s writings, especially the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

lunar calendar — A calendar in which months were reckoned by the lunar cycle and years by the seasonal cycle.

lunisolar — Relating to the moon and the sun, such as a calendar that is based on a combination of the movements of the moon and the sun.

Lutheranism — The branch of Protestant Christianity founded by Martin Luther.

Luther, Martin — A key leader of the Reformation in the early 16th century. Luther was a Roman Catholic monk who became increasingly disillusioned with the Roman Catholic church.

Maccabean Revolt — The Jewish revolt against Greek domination in 166–160 BC led by the Hasmonean leader Judas Maccabeus; also called the Hasmonean Revolt.

magi — A class of priests or wise men from ancient Persia who were probably astrologers. The term derives from Latin magus, meaning “magician.”

Maimonides — A preeminent medieval Jewish scholar and philosopher.

Majority Text — A family of texts (a text-type) from the Byzantine period; the basis for Erasmus' Greek NT, the Textus Receptus (the Greek text of the KJV).

mandate letter — A genre of Graeco-Roman letter sent from a higher official to a subordinate. The letter conveyed commands or instructions telling the subordinate how to carry out his responsibilities.

Marcionism — An early Christian [heresy](#) based on the teachings of Marcion, who rejected the Old Testament because he viewed the OT God as incompatible with the loving God revealed in the NT.

Marduk — The Babylonian god of storm and fertility and the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon. Also called “Bel” or “Lord.”

Mariology — Refers to the theological doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church related to Mary.

Mari texts — A collection of more than 20,000 Akkadian documents from the second millennium BC, discovered in the Mesopotamian city of Mari. These texts help illuminate the cultural background of the narratives in [Gen 12–50](#).

Markan — Refers to language or ideas connected to Mark's gospel.

martyrdom — Suffering death on account of a religious affiliation or belief.

Marxism — The philosophical system based on the writings of Karl Marx, who was especially concerned with economic inequality and the exploitation of the poor by the rich.

Masorah — A collection of textual notes made by the Masoretes to regulate the copying of OT manuscripts.

Masoretes — The group of Jewish scholars who preserved the Hebrew text of the OT in the early Middle Ages.

Masoretic Text — Any Hebrew text of the OT preserved by the Jewish scholars known as Masoretes in the early medieval period. This standard Hebrew text of the OT is also referred to as MT and is usually based on the copy from the Leningrad Codex, the oldest complete Masoretic manuscript dating from AD 1009.

matres lectionis — Latin phrase meaning “mothers of reading”; refers to Hebrew consonants used to indicate vowels in the biblical text to help readers.

Matthean — Refers to language or ideas connected to Matthew's gospel.

medium — An individual who acts as a channel of communication between the worlds of the living and the dead.

memorialism — The view on the Lord's Supper holding that it is a remembrance of Christ's death and that Christ's body and blood are not actually present in, with, under, or as the elements; this view was strongly promoted by the Reformer Zwingli.

Mennonites — A Christian Anabaptist movement emphasizing believers' baptism and pacifism. The name "Mennonite" derives from the 16th century Anabaptist leader Menno Simons.

merism — An expression using contrasting parts to indicate totality, e.g. “head to toe” or “heaven and earth.”

Messiah — God's chosen one—for a time, like Moses or David, or forever, like Jesus—who will restore his people to right relationship with him; meaning “[anointed one](#).”

messianic age — The expected future time of peace on earth under the reign of the Messiah.

messianic expectations — A longing for God's intervention by means of his Messiah. These hopes generally arose during times of distress and oppression against the Jews.

messianic woes — A period of intensified tribulation that will immediately precede the inauguration of the messiah's kingdom.

metaphor — A figure of speech based on the comparison of two things. It describes something in terms of another idea, object, or process.

metaphysics — The branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of ultimate reality, especially what reality lies beyond what can be physically observed.

metathesis — A scribal error in which one letter or word is transposed with an adjacent one.

Methodism — A Christian evangelical movement (and later denomination) founded by John and Charles Wesley in the 18th century.

metonymy — A figure of speech that uses the name of one thing to describe another with which it is closely associated.

middle knowledge — The theological theory that God knows all possible realities or outcomes, not just actual events. God's knowledge would then include knowing how a person would have responded in a certain situation, even if they were never faced with that situation.

Midianites — Nomadic inhabitants of northwest Arabia, descended from Abraham through his son Midian by his second wife Keturah.

midrash — The genre of Jewish rabbinic commentary on Scripture, usually referring to texts dating from the second to the seventh centuries AD. The term “midrash” can also refer to the method of interpretation employed in rabbinic literature

milieu — The physical, social, or cultural setting or environment.

millennialism — The view that there will be a lengthy period of time where Christ reigns on earth ([Rev 20:4–5](#)); often understood as a literal thousand-year period.

millennium — Literally, a 1,000-year period, but often used for the expectation of a future time of peace on earth under the reign of the Messiah.

minuscule — A cursive script used in Greek manuscripts after the ninth century AD; also refers to manuscripts written in this script.

Mishnah — A collection of Jewish rabbinic teachings and interpretations of biblical passages that were compiled around AD 200. In Judaism, the Mishnah is believed to reflect the authoritative oral traditions passed down over centuries.

modalism — The view on the Trinity that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three manifestations of the same divine person, not three persons in one.

modernism — The perspective that religious beliefs and doctrines need to be modernized or brought up to date with contemporary philosophical, social, and scientific conclusions.

modernity — Typically refers to the 19th and 20th century Western worldview that knowledge and reason would lead inexorably to progress and the betterment of the human race.

Molech — The biblical name for a Canaanite deity worshiped through child sacrifice.

monarchianism — A movement in the early church of the 2nd and 3rd centuries that emphasized the unity of God but ultimately resulted in antitrinitarian heretical views like [modalism](#) and [adoptionism](#).

monasticism — The practice of separating from society and joining the community in a monastery. Monastic life is typically devoted to spiritual discipline, personal piety, and devotion to God.

monism — The philosophical view that reality is reducible to one thing or one principle that underlies everything.

monotheism — The belief that there is only one God.

Montanism — An early Christian movement based on the teachings of Montanus who claimed to receive new divine revelation through ecstatic prophecies that he attributed to the Holy Spirit. The movement was mainly focused on living holy lives in preparation for the imminent end of the world.

mood (verbal) — The verbal category that indicates the degree of certainty with which something is stated or that expresses the statement's relationship to reality. For example, the [indicative mood](#) is used to declare something that is certain, while the [subjunctive mood](#) indicates uncertainty, a desire, a wish, or an impossibility.

morpheme — The smallest grammatical unit of a language that conveys meaning.

morphology — The study of the structure of words and how words are formed from [morphemes](#).

Mount Sinai — Sinai (or Horeb) is the mountain in the wilderness where Yahweh entered into a covenant with the nation of Israel after bringing them out of slavery in Egypt; also where he reveals himself to Moses ([Exod 3](#)) and gives him the law ([Exod 19](#)).

mummy — An embalmed corpse, usually ancient Egyptian.

Muratorian Canon — An early list of NT books found in a manuscript fragment that dates to AD 200–400. The list is incomplete and does not include all texts ultimately included in the NT.

mystery cult — A type of religious group(s) during the Graeco-Roman period characterized by a member's initiation into the secret rites and practices of the group and a focus on inward, private spirituality.

mysticism — Religious practices or teaching that are oriented toward gaining an experience of direct union with God or any ultimate reality. The goal of mysticism is spiritual access to the divine.

myth — A traditional story often involving supernatural beings or phenomena that serves to explain aspects of the natural world or provide a rationale for social or religious practices.

mythopoetic — Refers to images, ideas, or events that give rise to myths.

Nabu — The Babylonian god of writing associated with the city of Borsippa and depicted as son of [Marduk](#).

narrative theology — An approach to theology that preferences story over logic as a means of gaining theological insight. Narrative theology uses literary methods about how stories convey meaning to aid in theological reflection on biblical stories.

native language — A person's first language.

natural theology — The belief that knowledge about God can be gained through the observation of the natural world. It is distinct, but not incompatible, with the notion of divine revelation and revealed theology.

Nazirite — A person who is consecrated for divine service for a temporary period of time through taking a vow. The Nazirite vow involved abstaining from alcohol and prohibitions against cutting hair, eating unclean foods, and touching corpses.

Nebuchadnezzar — King of the Neo-Babylonian Empire 605–562 BC.

necromancy — The practice of attempting to communicate with the spirits of the dead as a way to foretell the future.

Negev — The southernmost region of Judah.

neo-orthodoxy — A movement in 20th century theology that returned to many orthodox doctrines and rejected some of the excesses of liberal Protestant theology, but maintained a concern for social issues and accepted certain findings of biblical criticism. Associated with the theology of Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Emil Brunner among others.

Neo-Platonism — A later development of Greek philosophy consisting of modifications to Platonic thought associated with Plotinus (3rd century AD). A key idea is that all reality emanates from "the One," the transcendent source and goal of all things.

Nergal — A Mesopotamian god of plague, pestilence, and war; also associated with the underworld.

Nero Redivivus Myth — Refers to the popular belief in the late first century AD that the emperor Nero had not really died in AD 68 but would return from hiding to destroy Rome. This legend allowed several pretenders in the late first century to amass a popular following and lead rebellions against Rome.

Nestorianism — The Christological view of Nestorius, the 5th century bishop of Constantinople. Nestorius held that Christ's human and divine natures were separate, dividing the being of Christ into two persons, one divine and one human. His view conflicts with the later christological orthodoxy articulated at Chalcedon that declared Christ was one person with two natures but that those natures were inseparable and indivisible.

Nevi'im — "Prophets"; the second of three sections of the Hebrew canon (Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim); includes the [Former](#) and [Latter Prophets](#).

new covenant — The covenant that fulfills all of God's promises to Israel and all of Israel's commitments to God ([Jer 31:31–34](#)).

new moon — The first day of the month in the lunar calendar, marked by the reappearance of the thin crescent moon.

Nicene Creed — The [creed](#) associated with the [Council of Nicaea](#) of AD 325 that clarified Christian doctrine in response to the [heresy](#) of [Arianism](#). A longer version with this title is commonly used in worship in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican churches.

Nile delta — The northernmost region of Egypt where the Nile River divides into channels that feed into the Mediterranean Sea. It is one of the most fertile regions in Egypt.

niphal — A Hebrew grammatical term referring to the particular verbal forms that indicate a verb is passive or reflexive.

Nisan — The Babylonian name for the first month in the lunar calendar used by the Jews.

Noahic covenant — The post-flood covenant God made with Noah and his descendants, in which he promised never to destroy the world with water again ([Gen 9:8–17](#)).

noetic — Related to the intellect or thinking.

nominalism — The philosophical view that abstract ideas or principles have no objective existence and are just names for mental constructs.

nomina sacra — Latin for “sacred names” that occur in manuscripts with an abbreviated form and a line above the word.

nominative case — A morphological noun category that usually indicates the subject of a clause.

nomistic — Adherence to the Mosaic law as an essential requirement of Christian faith.

nonaccession-year system — Where the years of the king’s reign are counted from the day he actually begins to reign, rather than the accession year system, which is the period of time between the start of a king’s reign and the start of the next calendrical year.

northern kingdom — The ten northern tribes of Israel who rejected the rule of Solomon’s successor Rehoboam and formed a separate kingdom under Jeroboam son of Nebat around 922 BC. This kingdom was known as Israel (and Ephraim in some poetic literature) while the southern kingdom was known as Judah. The northern kingdom was conquered and absorbed by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

number (grammatical) — A grammatical category for quantity. Hebrew and Greek indicate both singular (one of something) and plural (more than one). Hebrew also has a form for the dual, indicating two of something.

number parallelism — A feature of biblical poetry where successive parallel lines incrementally increase in numbered items—if one line has two items, the next (parallel) line will have three.

Nuzi tablets — An archive of more than 3,500 cuneiform tablets found in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Nuzi. The texts are important for understanding the daily life and culture in the ancient Near East during the second millennium BC.

oak of Moreh — The site of one of Abraham’s first encampments in the land of Canaan near Shechem.

Occam's razor — The philosophical principle that an explanation should not be more complicated than necessary.

occult — Referring to the supernatural or paranormal, usually in the negative sense of witchcraft or sorcery.

Old Greek — The earliest Greek translations of the Hebrew OT; they predate Christianity.

Old Latin — Latin translations of the Bible that are independent of the Latin Vulgate.

omnipotence — The attribute of God indicating that he is all-powerful.

omnipresence — The attribute of God that allows him to be everywhere at once.

omniscience — The attribute of God indicating that he is all-knowing.

ontological argument — A logical argument for the existence of God that rests mainly on the conclusion that the idea of God makes the existence of God logically necessary.

ontology — The branch of philosophy that describes the essential nature of existence.

open theism — A view on the nature of God that rejects classical attributes like [omniscience](#) or [immutability](#) in favor of positing a God who learns, adapts, takes risks, and modifies his plans in response to human actions. In this view, God's [foreknowledge](#) is limited by the uncertainties inherent in creating humanity with truly free will where even he does not know what free human agents will choose to do.

oracle — A divine communication through a prophet. An oracle was usually a prophetic composition that explained the revelation from God and how God would accomplish his will in people’s affairs.

ordinance — A Christian practice directly established or commanded by Jesus Christ such as the Lord's Supper or baptism.

ordination — The act where a church or denomination officially appoints someone for ministry service, such as ordaining someone as priest or pastor.

ordo salutis — The sequence of events in salvation that comes from a Latin phrase literally meaning “order of salvation.” Both the Reformed and Catholic traditions emphasize the importance of the ordo salutis for knowledge of the faith, though their versions of the ordo salutis differ.

Origen — A Christian scholar and theologian of the early third century AD who typified the allegorical interpretation of Scripture; he also produced the Hexapla.

original sin — The doctrine that all humans are born into a state of sin.

orthodoxy — Refers to correct belief or doctrine or practice; what is deemed correct teaching by a consensus of authorities in the Church at large or among those believers in a particular segment of Christianity.

paedobaptism — The practice of infant baptism.

pagan — Referring to polytheistic religious practices and their adherents.

palistrophe — An extended chiasm, a literary structure in which parallel elements correspond in an inverted order (i.e., A–B–C–C'–B'–A').

panentheism — The view that "all" (pan) is "in" (en) "God" (theos). Everything that exists is contained within God, though God is distinct from and greater than everything that exists.

pantheism — The view that "all" (pan) is "God" (theos). Pantheism draws no distinction between Creator and creation.

pantheon — A collective reference to all the gods worshiped by a particular group.

papyrus — A writing material made from the papyrus plant; in textual criticism, plural "papyri" refers to biblical manuscripts on papyrus.

parable — A short, vivid fictional story that uses figurative imagery to convey principles—they have more than one meaning and are designed to teach important truths.

parablepsis — A textual error in which the scribe's eye skips over text and accidentally omits it.

Paraclete — A word meaning advocate or helper, derived from the Greek word used to refer to the Holy Spirit several times in [John 14–16](#).

paradigm (rhetoric) — A type of argumentation based on a call for imitation. For example, Paul calls on Timothy to follow his example in ministry (see [2 Tim 1:13](#)).

paraenesis — A passage of a writing in which the author aims to instruct or exhort the audience.

parallelism — A feature of biblical poetry where the successive lines repeat, reinforce, and expand on the previous line.

parchment — A writing material made from prepared animal skin; technically it is synonymous with vellum, which usually denotes higher quality.

parousia — A Greek word meaning "presence" or "arrival," often used in reference to the second coming of Christ.

parsing — Breaking down a word in terms of its grammatical parts.

partitio — The thesis, or thematic, statement of a writing according to ancient rhetorical categories.

paschal — Of or relating to the Passover.

paterfamilias — The male head of the household.

patriarchs — The Israelites' ancestors, who feature prominently in the narratives of [Gen 12–50](#). The most important patriarchs are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who is renamed Israel. Jacob's 12 sons are the forefathers of the 12 tribes of Israel and are sometimes also considered patriarchs.

patronage — Refers to a socioeconomic relationship within Graeco-Roman society in which a wealthy benefactor, known as the “patron,” gave material goods and financial support to a “client” in exchange for various services and loyalty.

patronym — A name derived from a father's name, like Isaiah son of Amoz ([Isa 1:1](#)) or names that include the Hebrew words ben or bar, meaning “son,” like Ben-Hadad.

Pauline — Refers to the NT writings associated with the apostle Paul and may also describe language or ideas that characterize Paul's writings.

peculium — A type of escrow account that slaves could use to buy their freedom or to make other purchases.

Pelagianism — The heresy named after [Pelagius](#), a British-born Roman theologian (ca. AD 354–415). Pelagianism rejected the idea that all people are inherently sinful and taught that it was possible for people to live holy lives in accordance with God's will and merit salvation by good works.

Pelagius — A British-born Roman theologian (ca. AD 354–415) who maintained that a person could fulfill the law apart from divine grace and therefore could merit salvation through good works. His views were vehemently opposed by Augustine of Hippo.

Pelethites — A mercenary group that served King David, probably related to the Philistines and always mentioned in association with the Cherethites.

penal substitution (atonement) — A view of the atonement that understands Christ's death on the cross as paying the death penalty for sin on behalf of sinners.

penance — The practice of doing something to demonstrate repentance for sin.

Pentateuch — The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, also known as the Law, the Law of Moses, or the Torah.

Pentecost — The Greek name for the Jewish festival of Weeks that came 50 days after Passover. In Christian tradition, it is celebrated to commemorate the apostles receiving the Holy Spirit in [Acts 2](#).

Pentecostalism — A Christian movement that emphasizes [charismatic](#) gifts and teaches believers should receive a special baptism of the Holy Spirit much like the apostles did at [Pentecost](#).

Perea — The area north and east of the Sea of Galilee.

perfect verb — In Hebrew, the verbal conjugation that uses suffixes and generally indicates past action. In Greek, the perfect expresses completed action with present effects.

peroratio — The summary or conclusion section of a letter according to the categories of ancient rhetoric.

perseverance of the saints — The view that people who are truly part of God's elect will remain faithful to Christ and will not fall away from the faith.

person (grammatical) — A grammatical category expressing relations between people relative to the speaker. In English, first person is “I” or “we”; second person is “you”; and third person is “he,” “she,” or “it.”

personification — A figurative way of speaking in which an abstract idea or thing is described in human terms.

peshar — A form of biblical interpretation mainly associated with commentary-like texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The interpretation is characterized by the tendency to read fulfillment of biblical passages into contemporary events.

Peshitta — The Syriac translation of the Bible. It may date to as early as the second century AD.

Petrine — Refers the NT letters associated with the apostle Peter or to language or ideas that seem typical of Peter's writings or thought.

Pharisee — A member of a prominent religious group in ancient Judaism, active in the first century BC and first century AD. Pharisees were lay leaders, part of an educated religious elite skilled in interpretation and application of biblical law to Jewish daily life. They are criticized in the NT for their narrow view of proper religious practice.

pharyngeal — A type of consonant sound created when air is constricted as it passes through the pharynx, the space between the mouth and the larynx; the Biblical Hebrew ה (het) is a pharyngeal (also called a “guttural”).

Philip — Third oldest of Herod the Great’s surviving sons, he administered the smaller enclaves northeast of the Sea of Galilee. His brother Antipas was condemned by John the Baptist for having an unlawful relationship with Philip’s wife ([Matt 14:3](#)).

Philo Judaeus — A Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Egypt who lived in the first century AD.

Phoenicians — The seafaring Canaanite inhabitants of the coastal plain at the foot of the Lebanon mountain range, northwest of Israel—Tyre and Sidon were their two main cities.

phoneme — The smallest sound units in a language.

phonology — The study of sounds and sound changes in language systems.

phratry — A kinship group or tribal subdivision.

phylactery — A leather box worn by some Jews on the forehead and left arm that contained scriptural passages. The practice was based on their interpretation of [Deut 6:8](#).

piel — A Hebrew grammatical term referring to the verbal conjugation characterized by a doubling of the middle root letter and traditionally associated with a meaning that intensifies the basic sense of the verb.

pilgrimage festivals — The annual religious observances that required an observant Jew to travel to Jerusalem for worship: Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles.

Pillars of Jerusalem — The Jewish Jerusalem-based apostles in first-century Christianity, led by James, the brother of Jesus ([Acts 15](#); [Gal 2:9](#)).

plenary inspiration — A view of biblical [inspiration](#) that emphasizes all Scripture is inspired, not just certain parts.

pluralism — A perspective on society and religion that values diversity in all forms. With respect to religion, pluralism holds that there is more than one valid way to connect to God and find salvation.

pneumatology — The doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

points (Hebrew) — The marks added by the [Masoretes](#) to indicate their tradition of vocalization for the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible.

polemic — An argument attacking or refuting a point of view.

polygamy — The practice of having more than one wife or husband at the same time.

polyglot — A printed edition of the Bible that contains three or more languages side by side.

polygyny — The practice where one husband has multiple wives at the same time.

polytheism — Worship of many gods.

postcolonialism — A philosophical perspective that grapples with the global legacy of Western colonialism and its exploitation of native peoples.

postexilic — Refers to the biblical period following the Jews' return from exile in the late sixth century BC.

postmillennialism — The theological position that Christ will return after the [millennium](#). The work of the gospel on earth is thought to lead to the utopian resolution of social ills and the achievement of millennial peace prior to Christ's return.

postmodernism — A philosophical perspective of the late 20th century Western world that rejects and problematizes the modernist assumptions of the Enlightenment such as the idea of objectivity or the assertion that rational universal principles can be used to explain reality.

postmortem evangelism — The theological theory that people who died without having heard the gospel will have a chance to hear and respond after death.

pragmatism — A philosophy that links meaning and truth to practical effects or consequences. In pragmatism, truth is relative and subject to modification in light of the practical consequences that might result from actions inspired by that truth.

praxis — Action or practice.

predestination — The idea that God has predestined (or decided in advance) who belongs to the elect. The notion is sometimes applied more broadly to God foreordaining the events of his redemptive plan.

prefect — An ancient Roman high official, possibly the ranking governor of a region or city.

premillennialism — The theological position that Christ will return prior to a thousand-year earthly reign characterized by a utopian peace.

Presbyterianism — A form of church government where the church is governed by elders or presbyters; a branch of [Reformed theology](#) and denominations associated with that theology.

presupposition — An idea that is assumed or taken for granted, rather than proven.

preterist approach — A method for interpreting the book of Revelation that explains the symbolism as pointing to past events from the first century AD.

prevenient grace — The grace God extends to all people that enables them to respond to either accept or reject the gospel. Usually associated with [Arminianism](#) and contrasted with [irresistible grace](#), though irresistible grace is simply prevenient grace that is only extended to the elect and cannot be rejected.

priesthood of believers — The idea that believers all have the right to stand before God with no need for a human intermediary. The idea was important in the Reformation because the Roman Catholic Church emphasized indirect access to God through the clergy.

priestly covenant — The covenant God made with Aaron and his sons (and the tribe of Levi), in which he gave them the responsibility to serve as Israel's priests ([Exod 40:12–15](#); [Num 18:19](#)).

Priestly tradition (P) — One of the four standard source divisions of the theory that the Pentateuch is a combination of multiple traditions. The Priestly tradition (P) is said to reflect the traditions and theology of the priests.

primeval — Relating to the earliest time in human history.

primogeniture — The right of succession of the eldest son, who took his father's throne upon his death, usually despite young age. Also, the right of inheritance for the firstborn son of the family.

probatio — The main body of an argument in terms of the ancient categories of rhetoric.

process theology — A theological system founded on the idea that all reality is in process, a dynamic and creative process of becoming. The view of God in this system is of a God with two poles: a transcendent, eternal pole and an immanent, experiential pole that is embedded in reality's process of becoming. Certain aspects of process theology can be found in [open theism](#).

progressive revelation — The notion that God has revealed his truth and his redemptive plan in a progression from OT to NT and that later revelation (such as the NT) builds on and adds to the truths about God that were known previously.

proleptic — Describes a future act as if it presently exists or is accomplished.

promised land — Refers to Canaan or Palestine as the land God promised to his people, beginning with Abraham.

prophetic literature — The biblical books produced by the “writing” prophets, including the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets.

propitiation — The position that [atonement](#) serves to appease divine wrath.

proselyte — A religious convert—often used for a person who has recently converted.

prosopopeia — In classic rhetoric, a figure of speech in which a thing or person is presented as speaking.

protasis — In a conditional sentence, the clause that presents a condition or hypothesis (i.e., the “if” clause). In Greek grammar, the second clause of a conditional (“if-then”) sentence that states what will happen if the condition of the first clause (the [apodosis](#)) is met.

Protestantism — The branch of Christianity that developed out of the [Reformation](#) when protests against certain Roman Catholic teachings and practices led to separation from the Catholic church.

protoevangelium — A term (based on the Greek words for “first” [protos] and “gospel” [euangelion]) that refers to the first allusion to the gospel in [Gen 3:15](#), where God promises that Eve’s offspring will prevail over the serpent’s offspring.

proto-Masoretic Text — The Hebrew manuscript tradition that became the Masoretic Text.

proto-Theodotion — An early Greek version of the OT that aligns well with a later version by Theodotion; also called the [Kaige recension](#).

proverb — A succinct statement embodying a principle of conventional wisdom.

pseudepigrapha — Anonymous writings that were attributed to famous or authoritative figures from the past to lend additional authority or credibility to the writing—often written by the dead person’s disciples based on what they taught (or supposedly taught).

pseudonym — A false name especially used as a pen name—a form of compliment to the person whose name is used, not plagiarism.

pseudonymous — Referring to a writing attributed to a famous or authoritative figure from the past for the sake of adding authority or credibility to the writing. This was an accepted literary practice considered to be a compliment to the famous figure, not a lie about the authorship of the work.

Ptolemies — The [Hellenistic](#) rulers of Egypt.

pual — The Hebrew name for the verbal stem that is the passive of the [piel](#). One of the seven [binyanim](#).

Purgatory — In Catholic theology, the process of purification that follows death and prepares the believing soul for the beatific vision.

Puritanism — A movement originating in the 16th century that began as an attempt to purify the Church of England. They emphasized simplicity in daily life and in worship and opposed practices for which they could find no scriptural support

Q — A hypothetical document containing sayings of Jesus. Some scholars argue Matthew and Luke used Q—which comes from the German word Quelle (“source”)—as a source for their Gospels.

qal — The Hebrew name for the simplest of the verbal stems (or [binyanim](#)). The Hebrew word qal means “light,” “small,” or “easy.”

qere — A scribal notation in the margins of biblical Hebrew manuscripts usually offered as a correction of the written text or as a way to note an alternative textual tradition.

qere perpetuum — A word in the written text of the Hebrew OT that is always to be read another way, though no scribal notation indicates this; see also [qere](#) and [kethiv](#).

queen mother — The mother of a current reigning king.

Qumran — An archaeological site near the caves where the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) were discovered. The site was inhabited in the first century BC and mid-first century AD.

Ra — The ancient Egyptian sun god.

rabbinic — Relating to the rabbis of Classical Judaism responsible for the [Mishnah](#) and [Talmud](#).

Ramban — A medieval Jewish commentator named Nahmanides; “Ramban” is an acronym for Rabbi Moses ben Nahman.

ransom theory (atonement) — The idea that sin places humanity under the authority of Satan and that Christ was the ransom paid in exchange for the release of humanity.

rapture — According to dispensational [premillennialism](#), an event that will happen in the end times when Christians will be taken up to meet Christ at his second coming.

rationalism — The belief that reason is the sole or primary source of knowledge.

reader-response theory — An approach to literary interpretation that emphasizes the role of the reader in determining the meaning of a text.

realized eschatology — The understanding that the end time events and conditions have begun but are not finished—they are present already but not yet fully completed.

recension — A revision of a text or document; a term in textual criticism to describe manuscripts that modified earlier manuscripts.

recognition formula — The common phrase in the prophets that emphasizes how someone “will know that I am Yahweh” when God acts in history to bring judgment.

reconstructionism — A movement that seeks to make biblical law the foundation of all government and society; effectively attempting to bring about the explicit rule of God on earth and exercise the dominion that God delegated to Adam by reconstructing all society into something that conforms with God's law.

redaction criticism — An approach to biblical interpretation that focuses on how a biblical passage or entire biblical book was edited into its final literary form.

Reformation — The 16th century movement that opposed the excesses of the Roman Catholic Church and questioned the biblical basis of some doctrines and practices. The most influential Reformers were Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli.

Reformed theology — The theological system derived mainly from the Reformation teachings of John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. The sovereignty of God is the central theme of Reformed theology.

regeneration — The change brought about by the Holy Spirit that results in new life in Christ; being born again or made alive in Christ ([Eph 2:5](#); [1 Pet 1:23](#)).

regnal year — The first full year of a king’s reign following his [accession year](#), or the period between the beginning of his reign and the start of the next new year.

remnant — Those who survive divine judgment or exile, often symbolizing hope in the future restoration of the community.

Rephaim — The dead dwelling in the underworld, sometimes specifically dead warrior-kings like those mentioned in many [Ugaritic](#) texts. The term can also refer to one of the giant clans in the OT.

resurrection — Brought back to life after having been dead.

revelation — Something that is revealed or made known. Often used for God's self-revelation through Scripture or creation.

revivalism — A movement emphasizing personal conversion and an emotional (as well as rational) response to the gospel. Associated with group meetings, music, and preaching all oriented toward sharing the gospel to a large number of people at one time.

revocalization — Changing the vowels in a Hebrew OT passage to create an alternative reading. The vowels were only added to the OT text in the early Middle Ages by the [Masoretes](#).

rhetoric (classical) — The theory and practice of the art of persuasive communication. Graeco-Roman rhetoric had well-established categories of communication designed to persuade an audience. Skill in rhetoric was highly valued in Graeco-Roman society and was a basic part of education.

ritual impurity — A state of defilement that prevented a person from participating in religious activities or entering the temple or tabernacle.

Rosh Hashanah — The Hebrew New Year. The phrase is Hebrew for “head of the year.” The holiday is the first day of the seventh month.

sabbatical year — Every seventh year the fields were to be left alone to observe a Sabbath for the land.

sackcloth — A coarse garment of camel or goat hair associated with mourning.

Sadducees — A priestly sect in [Second Temple Judaism](#) that controlled the temple worship, denied any belief in bodily resurrection, and rejected traditions about an oral law promoted by the Pharisees.

Samaritan Pentateuch — A sacred text that includes only the Torah and reflects the ideology of the Samaritan community.

sanctification — Literally refers to the process of setting something apart for a sacred purpose. In Christian theology, it denotes a doctrine concerned with the gradual purification from sin in the life of the believer and a progressive spiritual growth toward Christlikeness.

Sanhedrin — A ruling council of prominent Jews in Palestine with members from both the [Sadducees](#) and [Pharisees](#). Various depictions of the Sanhedrin attribute political, judicial, and religious power to the group.

sapiential — Refers to literature having to do with wisdom. The term is often used with reference to the wisdom writings of the Hebrew Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

satisfaction theory (atonement) — The view that sin had dishonored God and that the atonement was a means for satisfying God's honor.

satrap — The governor of a province in the Persian Empire, which was organized into twenty provinces called satrapies.

scribal emendation — An intentional change a scribe makes to a text, often to correct or improve it.

scribe — A copyist or writer who copied texts prior to the invention of the printing press.

Sea of Galilee — A large body of water in the northern region of Israel that links to the Dead Sea in the south by means of the Jordan River.

Sea Peoples — A coalition of nine seafaring people groups that migrated from the Mediterranean invading Asia Minor, the [Levant](#), and Egypt around 1200 BC. The Philistines were probably part of this migration.

Second Temple period — The era of Jewish history dated from the Jews' return from exile in the late sixth century BC, when they rebuilt the temple, to the destruction of that temple in AD 70. The period is important for the collection and transmission of the OT and forms the cultural backdrop for the NT.

sectarianism — Generally relating to a group that has broken away from a larger religious movement due to disputes over belief or practice. The sect emphasizes its separateness and often promotes its narrow doctrinal views as the only true and right form of belief.

secular humanism — The worldview that rejects religion, God, and the supernatural, and emphasizes the natural world and the potential of humanity to make the world a better place without the help of God or religion.

Seleucids — The [Hellenistic](#) rulers of Syria and Iraq following the death of Alexander the Great.

semantic range — The possible meanings that a word may have. The intended meaning depends on the context in which it is used.

semantics — The study of meaning in a language's [morphemes](#), words, phrases, and sentences.

Semite — A descendant of Shem, son of Noah. The designation was developed to help classify the related languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic. The term Semite or Semitic is often used in connection with the Jewish people.

sensus plenior — A Latin phrase for "fuller sense"; often used with reference to how Scripture has been read and understood throughout church history.

Septuagint — The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (Genesis–Malachi) begun around 250 BC. Sometimes abbreviated with the Roman numeral for 70 (LXX) based on the tradition that 70 (or 72) translators participated.

seraphim — A heavenly being present in Yahweh's throne room in Isaiah's vision ([Isa 6](#)). The creature has six wings and was beside and above God's throne.

Sermon on the Mount — Refers to Jesus' teachings found in [Matt 5–7](#).

Sermon on the Plain — The sermon in [Luke 6:20–49](#) with teachings which are somewhat parallel to those in the [Sermon on the Mount](#) in [Matt 5–7](#).

Shabaka Stone — An ancient Egyptian artifact that preserves one of the Egyptian creation stories known as the "Memphite Theology."

Sheba — A trading center in southwestern Arabia.

Sheep Gate — A gate on the northern end of the temple complex that was on the outer wall of Jerusalem that was rebuilt under Nehemiah.

Shema — A central creed for Judaism based on [Deut 6:4](#). The name is also used for a Jewish prayer based on that creed combined with several other biblical passages.

Sheol — The OT term for the place of the dead.

Shephelah — The region of low hills west of Jerusalem, separating the coastal plain from the central hill country of Judah.

shofar — A curved trumpet fashioned out of a ram's horn used to signal troops or sound the alarm.

Sidon — A Phoenician city on the Mediterranean coast northwest of Israel.

sigla — Abbreviations or symbols used to identify specific manuscripts; singular "siglum."

signet ring — A finger ring with a seal used for marking ownership. The signet or seal was a symbol of authority.

Sinai Covenant — Israel's agreement to obey Yahweh's Law at Sinai ([Exod 19–24](#)). The event is central to the Bible's story of Israel's relationship with God.

slave — A person who works under the ownership or dominating influence of another. In biblical contexts, the word can describe varying levels of employment obligation ranging from voluntary service for a period of time to hired help to forced servitude.

slavery — Voluntary or forced servitude to an individual or institution.

sola scriptura — A Latin phrase meaning "Scripture alone." The phrase reflects a key principle of the Reformation, the idea that Scripture alone is authoritative for Christian doctrine, not Scripture plus church tradition.

sophist — A member of a class of ancient Greek teachers of rhetoric and philosophy.

soteriology — The area of Christian theology focused on the saving work of Christ including the issues of atonement, grace, human nature, sin, and resurrection. The term derives from the Greek *sōtēria* meaning "salvation."

source criticism — The method of analyzing biblical texts that attempts to identify separate sources that may have been used to form the final composition. Mainly used in study of the Pentateuch and the Gospels.

source language — The language of a text being translated.

southern kingdom — The territory controlled by the tribe of Judah after the northern kingdom became a separate nation following the death of Solomon.

special revelation — God's revelation in Scripture of humanity's plight and his plan of salvation.

stem (Hebrew) — The [morphological](#) pattern of a Hebrew verb that identifies how to understand its meaning. See also [binyanim](#).

steward — The trusted manager of a household, palace, or large estate.

Stoicism — A popular philosophy within Graeco-Roman culture, founded by Zeno around 300 BC, that valued virtue, indifference to pleasure and pain, and material pantheism. Stoicism promoted freedom from passion, which was viewed as a lesser feeling than reason, through virtue.

strata — An archaeological layer.

structuralism — A theory in linguistics, anthropology, and literary criticism that sought to explain human language, literature, and culture in terms of underlying universal structures. In biblical studies, structuralist exegesis focuses mainly on finding patterns or structure in the form of the passage and puts more weight on those patterns than on the content of the passage itself.

subjunctive mood — The verbal [mood](#) used to indicate that a statement is uncertain, wishful, or contrary to fact.

substantive — A term referring to the grammatical classification of nouns and items that function as nouns, though lacking some of the formal characteristics of that category (such as adjectives or participles).

Sumerian King List — An ancient text from southern Mesopotamia listing the kings of Sumer and its neighbors, including how long each king reigned and where they reigned. The text refers to rulers from before and after a great flood and the most ancient have exceptionally long reigns, similar to the lengthy life spans from [Gen 1–11](#).

superlative — The highest status in a comparison. As a grammatical term, it refers to the ways that languages express the highest degree in a comparison (e.g., holy, holier, holiest).

supplication — A humble request.

suzerain — An overlord or ruling king who demands tribute and loyalty from less powerful kings called [vassals](#).

Symmachus — A second-century AD translator who produced a Greek translation of the OT.

sympathetic magic — The attempt to supernaturally affect someone or something by using its name or manipulating an object that represents it and resembles it in appearance.

synchrony — The study of a language and its structure from a single period in time. A synchronic description of a language is not concerned with historical development. Compare [diachrony](#).

syncretism — The combination of different religious practices.

synecdoche — A figure of speech where a part represents the whole.

Synoptic Gospels — Refers to Matthew, Mark, and Luke because of the large degree of overlap in language and descriptions of events. Mark was likely a source for Matthew and Luke.

synoptic problem — The [Synoptic Gospels](#) contain many similar passages and stories, often with minor differences. Research on the synoptic problem is concerned with explaining these similarities, studying the composition of the Gospels, and providing a theory to explain the literary interrelationship of the [Synoptic Gospels](#).

syntax — The study of the grammatical relationship between words and other components within a sentence.

Syria — Israel's northern neighbors, known variously as Aram and Damascus.

Syriac — A dialect of Aramaic used in early Christian texts and the Peshitta translation of the OT.

Syro-Hexapla — A [Syriac](#) translation of Origen's [Hexapla](#) produced during the seventh century.

systematic theology — The discipline focused on drawing together a group's beliefs about God, Scripture, and other religious or ethical matters into a coherent whole which is organized into a consistent system of thought.

Table of Nations — The genealogy of [Gen 10](#) that lists the descendants of Noah.

talent — A unit of weight used to value precious metals. One talent was about 75 pounds.

Talmud — A collection of rabbinic teachings and commentary on the [Mishnah](#). The Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud was compiled earlier (ca. AD 425). The Babylonian Talmud was later (ca. AD 525) but became more authoritative in Judaism.

Talmud, Jerusalem — A compilation of rabbinic law and tradition that combines the [Mishnah](#) with interpretive commentary on the Mishnah and on the biblical texts, which form the basis for the laws in the Mishnah. The Jerusalem Talmud was prepared in the land of Israel, though not Jerusalem directly, around AD 400. It is sometimes called the Palestinian Talmud. This version of the Talmud is less complete than the Babylonian and less authoritative.

Tannaim — A name for the most authoritative rabbis in classical Judaism, especially those mentioned in the Mishnah. The tannaim were teachers of Jewish oral tradition primarily in the first and second centuries AD. The period of the tannaim began with Shammai and Hillel (early first century) and ended with Judah the Patriarch, who compiled the Mishnah (early third century).

target language — The language of a text being produced from a text in another language (source language).

Targum — An Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Scriptures or OT.

teleological argument — An argument for God's existence based on the conclusion that the design and order evident in creation must logically point back to a designer.

Ten Commandments — Literally the “ten words.” A summary of biblical law embodied in the lists found in [Exod 20:1–17](#) and [Deut 5:6–21](#). The name comes from a reference to a summary of the law in [Exod 34:8](#), which itself may have originally referenced [Exod 34:12–26](#).

tense (verbal) — A verbal category indicating the time of an event or action in relationship to the time of speaking. Common tenses are past, present, and future.

terminus ad quem — Latin for “limit until which.” The latest time an event could have happened.

terminus post quem — Latin for “limit after which.” The earliest time an event could have happened.

Tertullian — One of the early church fathers who wrote in Latin, mainly in the early third century. He was an important apologist and theologian for early Christianity.

tetragrammaton — The four-letter personal name for God in the OT (YHWH), traditionally written without vowels; commonly indicated in English Bibles with “Lord” in small caps.

tetrarch — Someone who rules over a fourth of the kingdom.

text-type — A family or group of biblical manuscripts based on their similarity of text; three main text-types exist for Greek NT manuscripts (Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine).

textual criticism — The process of evaluating variants in the biblical text to determine the most authentic reading.

textual emendation — A correction to a biblical manuscript based on a superior reading (variant) or on a textual critic’s conjecture (conjectural emendation).

Textus Receptus — The Greek NT published by Erasmus in the sixteenth century and the text behind the KJV often confused with the Majority Text.

theism — The belief that God or gods of some sort exist.

theistic evolution — A view on the origins of the universe asserting that while life may have developed according to the theory of evolution, God used evolutionary processes as the means through which he created all things.

theocentricity — Making God the central focus for all of life.

theodicy — The theological problem of trying to reconcile suffering and evil in the created world with the idea of a good and loving God.

Theodotion — An early church father of the Alexandrian school and a second-century AD translator of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. His translation was in the sixth column of Origen’s Hexapla.

theology — Narrowly, the study of God, especially his attributes and nature (often called "theology proper"). Commonly, the investigation of God, his revelation in Scripture, and the relationship between God and the world.

theophany — An earthly manifestation of God accompanied by physical indications of his presence such as fire, cloud, smoke, thunder, or earthquake.

theophoric name — A name that includes the name of a deity, such as "Joshua," which means "Yahweh saves."

threshing floor — An agricultural area used for separating the grains of wheat from the chaff.

tiqqune soferim — Eighteen scribal emendations in the Masoretic Text that attempted to remove statements about God (or Moses; [Num 12:12](#)) that were considered irreverent.

Tishri — The Babylonian name for the seventh month of the lunar calendar used by the Jews.

toledoth — A literary formula used as a structural device in Genesis. It means, "These are the generations/descendants of ..."

Torah — Another name for the Law of Moses or [Pentateuch](#). In Jewish tradition, Torah can also refer to the legal parts of the Pentateuch, the entire Hebrew Bible, or the written Scripture plus the later traditions interpreting Scripture contained in the [Mishnah](#) and [Talmud](#).

Tower of Babel — In [Gen 11:1–9](#), the people of Babel attempt to build a tower to reach the heavens, where they believed the gods dwelt. The tower was probably a Mesopotamian [ziggurat](#), a large step pyramid with a temple at the top. The tower of Babel is a prominent biblical symbol of human arrogance in seeking equality with him, autonomy from him, and/or to reach him on their terms rather than his.

Tower of Hananel — A tower on the north wall of Jerusalem.

tradition criticism — The method of analyzing biblical texts that attempts to identify different oral or written traditions that contributed to the final compositions. Mainly used in the study of the Pentateuch and the Gospels.

transcendence — Refers to the quality of God as wholly Other or distinct from his creation.

transcriptional evidence — Text critical evidence related to the practices of scribes.

transcriptional probability — A text critical term referring to the likelihood of a scribe making certain types of mistakes.

Trans-Euphrates — The Persian province "across the river," referring to the area from the Euphrates to Egypt, which included Syria-Palestine.

Transfiguration — Refers to Christ's appearance in splendor and divine glory ([Matt 17:2](#)).

Transjordan — The region east of the Jordan River.

translation technique — A general term for the various methods that make up a translator's approach to the source text including word choice, how closely they follow the source text in word order or syntax, what grammatical categories they use to represent different categories in the source language, etc.

transliteration — The representation of a foreign language in another alphabet. For example, Hebrew קֶטֶף is transliterated into the Western alphabet as qets.

transubstantiation — The Roman Catholic view of the Lord's Supper that claims the physical elements of the bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the body and blood of Jesus, though they remain bread and wine in outward appearance.

tree of the knowledge of good and evil — One of two trees in the Garden of Eden that God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat from. This tree imparted some sort of higher level of knowledge or enlightenment, the exact nature of which is uncertain.

tree of life — One of two trees in the Garden of Eden that God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat from. This tree would give immortality to whoever ate from it ([Gen 3:22](#)).

tribulation — Refers to a period of upheaval and suffering, usually in reference to the end of days.

tributary — A subservient nation that pays tribute or annual revenue to a more powerful one.

tribute payment — A compulsory contribution paid to a more powerful ruler as a symbol of submission.

trichotomism — The belief that human nature has three parts: body, soul, and spirit.

Trinity — The Christian doctrine of the [Godhead](#): The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

TULIP — An acronym for the "Five Points" of Calvinism: Total [depravity](#), [unconditional election](#), [limited atonement](#), [irresistible grace](#), and [perseverance of the saints](#). These five are often considered the main distinctives of Calvinism.

twelve tribes of Israel — The familial divisions of Israelite society, founded by the twelve sons of Jacob.

typology — Theological interpretation that understands biblical people, things, or events as symbolizing or prefiguring later Christian beliefs. The term can be used generically to mean any kind of symbolic use of a figure, number, or thing

Ugarit — A coastal city in northwestern Syria where a large number of cuneiform tablets were found that help elucidate Canaanite religious practices during the biblical period.

uncial — A script that uses only capital letters; used in Greek (and Latin) manuscripts between the second and eighth centuries; also refers to manuscripts written in this script.

unconditional election — The Calvinist view that God's choice of who will be saved is not conditioned on the person's future faith or merit in any way. That is, election is not based on God's [foreknowledge](#) of who will come to faith.

unholy trinity — The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet of the book of Revelation.

Unitarianism — A movement that denies the Trinity, believes there is only one God, and denies Jesus was divine. They prize reason and experience over Scripture and doctrine.

universalism — The view that all people will be saved, regardless of their beliefs, and that no one will suffer eternal punishment.

Urim and Thummim — Sacred stones or dice used by the priest to determine the will of Yahweh.

Urtext — The hypothetical earliest form of a biblical text that textual critics may try to reconstruct.

Valley of Hinnom — The valley southwest of Jerusalem, notorious as the alleged site of child sacrifice in OT times.

variant — A term of textual criticism describing the different wording of one text when compared with another; also called variant reading.

vassal — A king or ruler who owes loyalty to a [suzerain](#) or more powerful high king.

Vatican — The residence of the pope in Rome. The location from which the pope oversees the Roman Catholic Church.

versification — The introduction of verse numbers in the Bible during the Middle Ages.

Via Maris — The coastal road or “Way of the Sea” from Egypt to Palestine.

vicarious atonement — The theological position that Christ's death atoned for sin on behalf of sinners, meaning the penalty due sin was paid by Christ in place of the sinner suffering judgment and death.

virgin birth — The doctrine that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and that Mary, his mother, did not have sexual relations with a human male that led to his conception.

virtue/vice List — A passage outlining a moral code either by highlighting types of wrongdoing (vices) that should be avoided or by specifying different virtues that should be practiced.

vizier — A high-ranking official or prime minister.

vocalization — The addition of vowel symbols by the Masoretes to the consonantal text of the OT.

voice (grammatical) — The grammatical category that indicates the relationship between the subject of the sentence and the action of the verb. Changes in voice often require changes in syntactic roles. For example, “John hit the ball” is active voice, while “The ball was hit by John” is passive voice. In the first sentence, John is the subject; in the second, the ball is the subject.

Vorlage — The source document behind a translation or a recension (the German word means “what lies before”).

Vulgate — The late fourth-century AD Latin translation of the Bible completed largely by St. Jerome.

Wadi Kidron — The valley that forms Jerusalem’s eastern border.

watcher — A type of angel or supernatural being.

Wesleyanism — A movement based on the theology and teachings of John Wesley.

Western text-type (D) — One of several families (types) of NT texts; thought to have originated in the West (Italy, Gaul, North Africa); also called the “delta” (D) text-type after the symbol of its primary manuscript, Codex Bezae (“D”).

Westminster Confession — A document outlining the essential doctrines of Reformed theology and completed in 1646.

wilderness wanderings — The forty-year period that the Israelites spent in the wilderness before entering the land of Canaan.

Wisdom of Solomon — One of two wisdom books in the Apocrypha, dating to the first century BC.

witnesses — A manuscript, translation, or quotation used to provide evidence in matters of textual criticism.

word pair — Two terms that frequently appear as a pair, either synonymous or antithetical.

wordplay — Creative use of words.

Xenophon — A Greek historian from the fourth century BC.

Yahweh — The proper name of God in the OT, also called the “[tetragrammaton](#)” because it consists of four Hebrew letters. Most English Bibles represent the divine name with “Lord” or “God” in small capital letters.

Yahwist tradition (J) — One of the four standard source divisions of the theory that the Pentateuch is a combination of multiple traditions. The Yahwist tradition (J) takes its name from its frequent use of the divine name Yahweh in Genesis.

Year of Jubilee — Every fiftieth year was the year of liberty—land ownership was to revert to original, assigned owners (or people groups) by Moses, and those who had been enslaved due to debt were freed ([Lev 25:8–10](#)).

Yom Kippur — The Hebrew name for the Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month. This was the one day per year when the high priest could enter the temple’s Most Holy Place.

Zadokite — Referring to the family of priests descended from David’s high priest Zadok.

Zeno — The founder of the Greek philosophy of Stoicism in the early third century BC.

ziggurat — A large step pyramid with a shrine or temple on top—these structures were built by ancient Mesopotamians.

Zion — Yahweh's earthly dwelling on the temple mount in Jerusalem. The term can also apply, by extension, to Jerusalem itself.

Zoroastrianism — A Persian religion founded by the prophet Zoroaster in the late second millennium BC. The religion was popular in the Persian Empire. It features a dualism between good and evil deities.

Zwingli, Ulrich — A leader of the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland who emphasized Scripture as the proper basis for doctrine. He opposed Luther's view of the Lord's Supper (consubstantiation) as lacking biblical support and promoted his own view that the Lord's Supper was a remembrance of Christ's body and blood (memorialism).