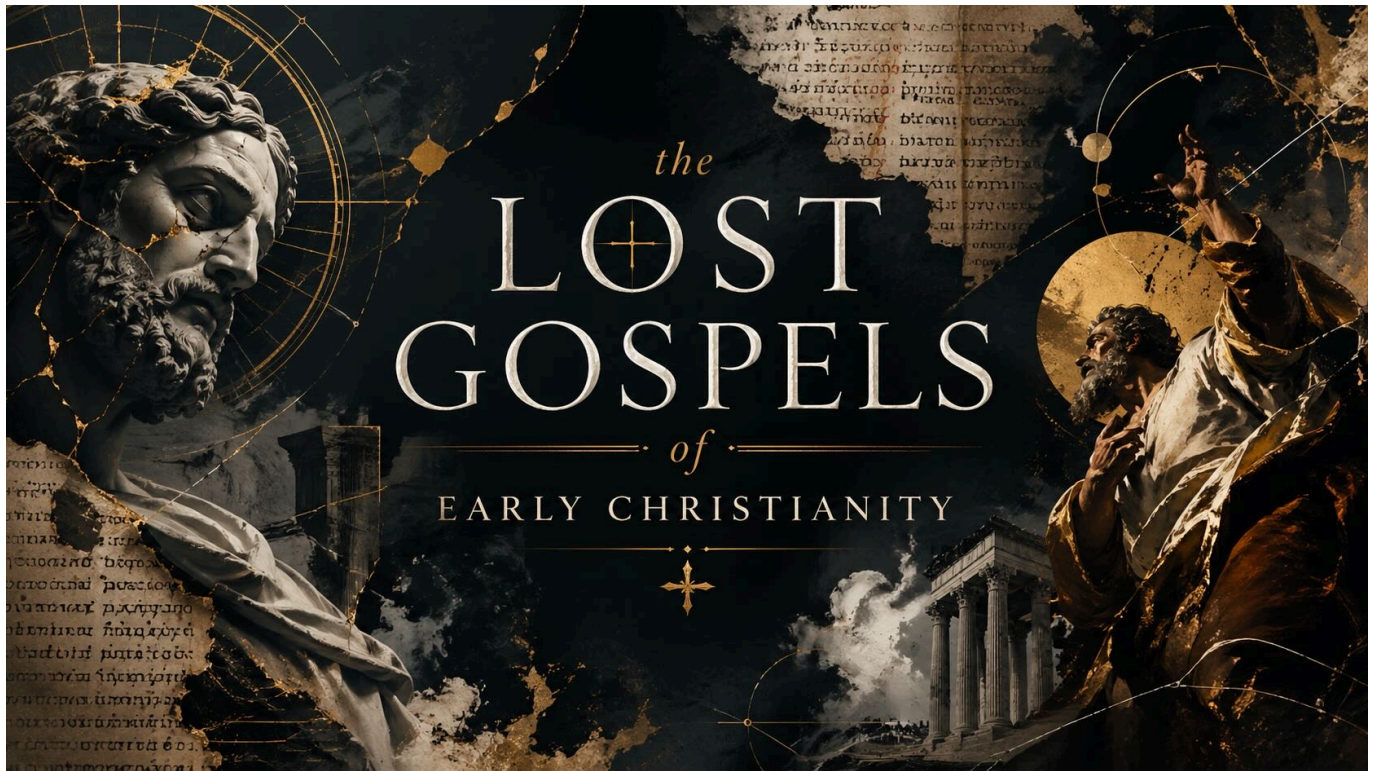




Introduction

Hi everyone. Welcome to your official introduction to the Christian writings often called the “lost gospels”. These are the texts that didn’t make it into the New Testament. But that doesn’t mean they are worthless. They still show how diverse and creative early Christianity really was. More importantly it shows us how people then reacted to these revelations. So in our study this week keys explore the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts focusing in on works like the Gospel of Thomas or Mary, and then let’s also look into the ideas connected to *Pistis Sophia*, a text where “Faith” (*pistis*) and “Wisdom” (*sophia*) are brought together in a story about descent, struggle, and restoration. All of these works challenge familiar ideas about authority, knowledge, and the role of the individual in encountering the divine. Mostly it shifts the focus inward and instead of centering on institutions like the men administrating it points to interpersonal integration. As you work through this workbook, hopefully you’ll see that these texts aren’t alternatives but part of the same continuing conversation about what it meant to follow Jesus in the earliest centuries.

Reading: [Introduction to the Lost Gospels \(New Testament Apocrypha\)](#).



TLG

THESAURUS LINGUAE GRAECAE

The world's most comprehensive digital library of Greek texts from antiquity through the medieval period.



MASSIVE LIBRARY
Thousands of Greek texts from classical authors to early Christian writers and beyond.



POWERFUL SEARCH
Search across all texts at once to see how words and ideas were used over time.



DIACHRONIC INSIGHT
Reveals how language, meanings, and concepts shift across authors, contexts, and centuries.



FOUNDATIONAL TOOL
Essential resource for translation, commentary, and historical-linguistic research.



WHY IT MATTERS



See words as early believers saw them—in their own context.



Beyond one translation—see the full range of meaning.



Closer to the originals. Closer to how early Christians thought, spoke, and wrote.

KEY TERMS. MANY CONTEXTS. EVOLVING MEANINGS.

πίστις (pistis)  faith, trust, allegiance, faithfulness Varies by author and context.	σοφία (sophia)  wisdom, skill, divine wisdom Philosophical, practical, or spiritual.	βασιλεία (basileia)  kingdom, kingship, royal rule Heavenly, earthly, or spiritual realm.	γνῶσις (gnōsis)  knowledge, insight, spiritual knowing Intellectual knowledge or revealed truth.
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LANGUAGE IS FLUID. CONTEXT MATTERS. THE TLG SHOWS THE WHOLE STORY.

The Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) is a massive digital library that collects and preserves texts written in Greek from antiquity through the medieval period. It has everything from classical authors like Homer and Plato to early Christian writers, many of the same voices connected to the lost gospels and texts like *Pistis Sophia*. What makes the TLG so important is that it allows scholars to search across thousands of texts at once, showing diachronic linguists just how specific words, phrases, and ideas were used over time. Removing the guess work that later theologians and language specialists assumed they understood. For this study, this tool is critical as the meaning of key terms like “faith” (*pistis*), “wisdom” (*sophia*), “kingdom,” or “knowledge” will never fixed. Language is fluid and all of these words shift depending on context, author, and community. The TLG allows us a way to see those shifts directly, so we don’t rely on a single translation or interpretation. In other words, it helps us move closer to how early Christians themselves were using language, which is so important when working with complex and symbolic texts like the lost gospels.

Reading: [Open TLG mission / purpose page](#)

Explanation of TLG

TLG THE TEXTUS RECEPTUS
IN TRANSLATING
THE NEW TESTAMENT

✦ WHAT IT IS

- The Textus Receptus, meaning “received text,” is a Greek New Testament text that served as the foundation for most printed Bibles and English translations for over 400 years.
- The TLG refers to the specific Greek text underlying the Textus Receptus, preserved through a long line of manuscripts.
- It reflects the Byzantine text-type, the most widely transmitted form of the New Testament in the Greek-speaking world.

✦ WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

- It was the basis for the King James Version and many other historic translations that shaped Christian faith and theology for centuries.
- It preserves key readings that affirm essential doctrines about the deity of Christ, salvation, and the authority of Scripture.
- It provides a stable and consistent textual tradition for teaching, preaching, and personal study.
- It remains a vital witness to the faith of the early church and the transmission of God’s Word through the ages.

“HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY,
BUT MY WORDS WILL NOT PASS AWAY.”
MATTHEW 24:35

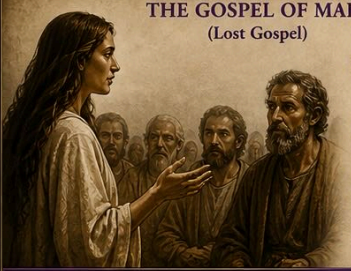
The Textus Receptus, meaning “the received text,” is a series of early printed editions of the Greek New Testament produced in the sixteenth century, through the work of Desiderius Erasmus. It became the textual foundation for many translations, including the King James Version, and for centuries shaped how Christians encountered the language of the New Testament. Its importance for understanding the lost gospels are in contrast to the canon. The Textus Receptus is a relatively late and standardized stream of the Greek textual tradition, and it shows what became dominant in the Byzantine world. The lost gospels, preserve alternative voices, earlier traditions, and different theological trajectories that were not carried forward into that standardized stream. Studying the Textus Receptus alongside these noncanonical texts show us how certain readings, ideas, and emphases were selected, preserved, and transmitted, while others were set aside. So, the Textus Receptus is a reference point for understanding how the diversity of early Christianity was gradually narrowed into the textual tradition that later generations inherited.

Readings: https://www.blueletterbible.org/tr/mat/1/1/s_930001

SAME WOMAN. DIFFERENT AUTHORITY.

EARLY CHRISTIAN VOICES. DIFFERENT PATHS. DIFFERENT LEGACIES.

EXAMPLE 1: MARY MAGDALENE—TEACHER AND REVEALED



THE GOSPEL OF MARY
(Lost Gospel)

-  Receives direct revelation from the Savior.
-  Teaches the male disciples and shares hidden knowledge.
-  Peter questions her authority. Levi defends her: "If the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her?"

AUTHORITY COMES FROM REVELATION AND UNDERSTANDING.

EXAMPLE 2: MARY MAGDALENE—WITNESS AND MESSENGER



GOSPEL OF JOHN 20:11-18
(Canon – KJV Tradition)

-  First witness of the resurrection.
-  Told by Jesus to go and announce the news.
-  Not shown teaching or holding ongoing authority.

AUTHORITY IS TIED TO APOSTOLIC WITNESS AND PUBLIC COMMISSION.

EARLY DEBATE OVER FEMALE AUTHORITY

THE GOSPEL OF MARY
(Lost Gospel)

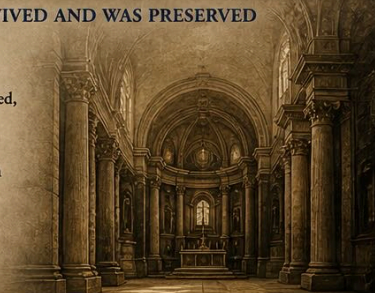
 **PETER:** "Did the Savior really speak privately with a woman and not openly to us?"
  **LEVI:** "If the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well."

 This shows that early Christian communities actively debated the role and authority of women.

THIS IS NOT A MODERN QUESTION. IT WAS ALREADY BEING CONTESTED.

TRADITION THAT SURVIVED AND WAS PRESERVED

CANONICAL TRADITION
(KJV Stream)



-  Authority becomes structured, institutional, and male-led.
-  Female figures are faithful and present, but not shown as doctrinal authorities.
-  The stream that became standard was preserved, copied, and canonized.



AUTHORITY IS NOT JUST ABOUT WHO WAS THERE.

IT'S ABOUT WHO WAS ALLOWED TO SPEAK.

Different communities. Different texts. Different understandings of Jesus, revelation, and the role of women.



When we compare the canonical Gospels preserved in translations such as the King James Version with the noncanonical or "lost" gospels, we are observing different streams within early Christianity that developed alongside one another. The King James Version shows a form of Christianity whose texts were preserved, standardized, and transmitted through established channels of authority. In this tradition, authority is tied to apostolic witness, public teaching, and the continuity of church interpretation. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John present similar narrative accounts of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, teaching a shared and communal proclamation of the gospel.

Then the lost gospels preserve voices from other early Christian communities that approached authority and revelation differently. In many of these texts, authority is grounded in public apostolic transmission but more so in one's ability to receive personal revelation, visionary experience, or insight that is granted to specific authoritative figures such as Mary. These writings often take forms that differ from narrative biography. Some present collections of sayings, as in the Gospel of Thomas, others record visionary dialogues, as in the Gospel of Mary, and others convey symbolic or ritual teachings, as in the Gospel of Philip.

These texts represent the same religion, but demonstrate the people's reactions and ways early Christians understood Jesus, revelation, and the path to salvation before one stream of tradition became dominant.

Reading:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/5CDA1810265CC33B72AE04BEB9B7087/S0017816000002066a.pdf/apocryphal-and-canonical-gospels.pdf?utm>

COGNITIVE FLUENCY
THE HIDDEN FILTER IN HOW WE STUDY SCRIPTURE

WHAT IS COGNITIVE FLUENCY?
Cognitive fluency is the mental ease with which we process information. When something is familiar, clear, or repeated, our brain processes it faster and with less effort—and we automatically trust it more.

KEY FACTORS THAT CREATE FLUENCY

- FAMILIARITY**
The more we see something, the more true and reliable it feels.
- SIMPLICITY**
Clear, streamlined messages are easier to process and more quickly accepted.
- REPETITION**
Repeated exposure builds automatic acceptance without deep evaluation.
- SOCIAL CONFIRMATION**
If others believe it, we feel safer believing it too. Our brain seeks agreement and belonging.

WHY COGNITIVE FLUENCY AFFECTS OUR STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

- WE TRUST WHAT FEELS EASY**
Verses we've read many times in familiar translations feel true simply because they feel familiar—not because we have examined them deeply.
- COMFORT CAN OVERRIDE TRUTH**
Familiar interpretations can become mental shortcuts that protect our worldview and resist new or challenging insights.
- TRANSLATIONS SHAPE PERCEPTION**
The more fluent we are with a translation, the less likely we are to question its word choices, even when better ancient evidence exists.
- IT CREATES BLIND SPOTS**
Fluency can make us blind to what is missing, altered, or theological conditioned—keeping us from seeing the deeper, original meaning of Scripture.

THE GOAL ISN'T WHAT FEELS RIGHT—IT'S WHAT IS RIGHT.
Slow down. Question. Compare. Seek truth beyond what feels familiar.
Let the Word shape your mind—not the other way around.

Cognitive fluency is the ease with which information is processed and understood. So when something feels familiar, clear, or easy to read, the human mind naturally tends to accept it as more accurate or more trustworthy. This is not because it is more true, but because it is easier to process. In the study of early Christian texts, this principle becomes so important to understand is the main driver in rejecting the role of women and the role of the Mother. Most readers approach scripture through translations and traditions that have been standardized over centuries, like our King James Version.

Because these forms are familiar and widely accepted, they feel authoritative and stable. However, when we encounter less familiar texts, such as the lost gospels, the experience is different. The language may feel unusual, the structure less organized, and the ideas more symbolic or complex. This reduced cognitive fluency can make these texts feel less reliable at first glance, even though they have valuable insights into how early Christian communities understood authority, revelation, and the role of figures like Mary. So don't give up on them, cognitive fluency can quietly shape how we evaluate competing traditions, making us to favor what feels clear over what may actually be closer to the diversity of early Christian thought. Recognizing this tendency allows us to approach canonical and noncanonical texts more carefully, and shows us how evaluating them based on context and evidence is the best approach.

Reading: <https://gc-bs.org/articles/cognitive-fluency-driver-trust-behavioral-intention/?utm>

TYPES OF LOST GOSPELS

DIVERSE VOICES FROM EARLY CHRISTIANITY



SAYINGS GOSPEL: THOMAS

A collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus.
No passion or resurrection narrative.



REVELATORY DIALOGUE: MARY AND JUDAS

Dialogues revealing hidden knowledge and spiritual insight after the resurrection.
Focus on revelation and authority.



RITUAL GOSPEL: PHILIP

Emphasizes sacraments, union, and the “bridal chamber.”
Salvation through ritual and participation.



PASSION EXPANSION: PETER

Expands on the passion and resurrection story with dramatic and vivid details beyond the canonical Gospels.



INFANCY EXPANSION: INFANCY THOMAS AND PROTOEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

Expands on the birth, childhood, and early life of Jesus and Mary.
Answers questions the canonical Gospels leave open.



Different texts. Different communities. One search for the meaning of Jesus.



The lost gospels do not all function the same way. Some, like the Gospel of Thomas, are sayings gospels, meaning they preserve collections of teachings attributed to Jesus and do not tell a full story of His life, death, and resurrection. Others, such as the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Judas, are revelatory dialogues, where Jesus gives hidden, higher, or post resurrection instruction to a chosen figure, raising questions about authority, revelation, and who has the right to interpret His message. The Gospel of Philip is more like a ritual or sacramental gospel, using symbolic language about baptism, anointing, union, image, and the bridal chamber to explore salvation as participation in divine reality. The Gospel of Peter expands the passion and resurrection story with dramatic details beyond the canonical accounts. Finally, infancy texts such as the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and the Protoevangelium of James fill in narrative gaps about the childhood of Jesus and the early life of Mary. Together, these texts show that early Christians preserved many kinds of gospel writing, including sayings, visions, rituals, expanded narratives, sacred biography, but most of all it shows us how they were receiving the gospel in their time.

Readings: <https://rsc.byu.edu/new-testament-history-culture-society/noncanonical-gospels?utm>

THE LOST GOSPELS WHAT THEY ARE



ANCIENT WRITINGS

Textual works written in the first three centuries (c. 50–300 AD)



SPIRITUAL INSIGHT

Offer deeper teachings on Jesus, Mary, the soul, and the Kingdom



A VIEW INTO THE NASCENT CHURCH

Reveal beliefs, debates, and diverse theologies of early believers



REACTIONS TO THE GOSPELS

Show how different communities received, interpreted, and responded to Jesus' message



COMPLEMENTARY PERSPECTIVES

Expand our understanding of Jesus' life beyond what was later canonized



HISTORICAL WITNESSES

Valuable witnesses to faith, culture, and thought in early Christianity



THEY WIDEN THE LENS. THEY DEEPEN THE STORY.
THEY BRING US CLOSER TO THE HEART OF CHRIST
AND THE EARLY VOICES THAT FOLLOWED HIM.



The lost gospels show multiple early Christian worlds existing at once. They are valuable because they reveal:

- the disagreements
- the competing authorities
- the shifting meaning of salvation
- and the evolving definition of “gospel” itself

If the canonical texts are a finished portrait, the lost gospels are the sketch layers underneath—the revisions, arguments, and erased lines that explain why the final image looks the way it does.

Read: https://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl_thomas.htm Gospel of Thomas

<https://www.gnosis.org/library/marygosp.htm> Gospel of Mary

<https://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gop.html> Gospel of Philip

THE LOST GOSPELS WHAT THEY ARE NOT



NOT CANONICAL

Not included in the 66-book canon
(c. 367–397 AD)



NOT ORIGINAL WITNESS

Not written by apostles
(Mostly 2nd–4th centuries)



NOT UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED

Rejected by early church fathers
(~2nd–5th centuries)



NOT HISTORICAL FACT

Do not override early, reliable sources
(Gospels: c. 60–110 AD)



NOT MYTH OR FICTION

They are religious writings
with theological agendas
(Spiritual, not literary)



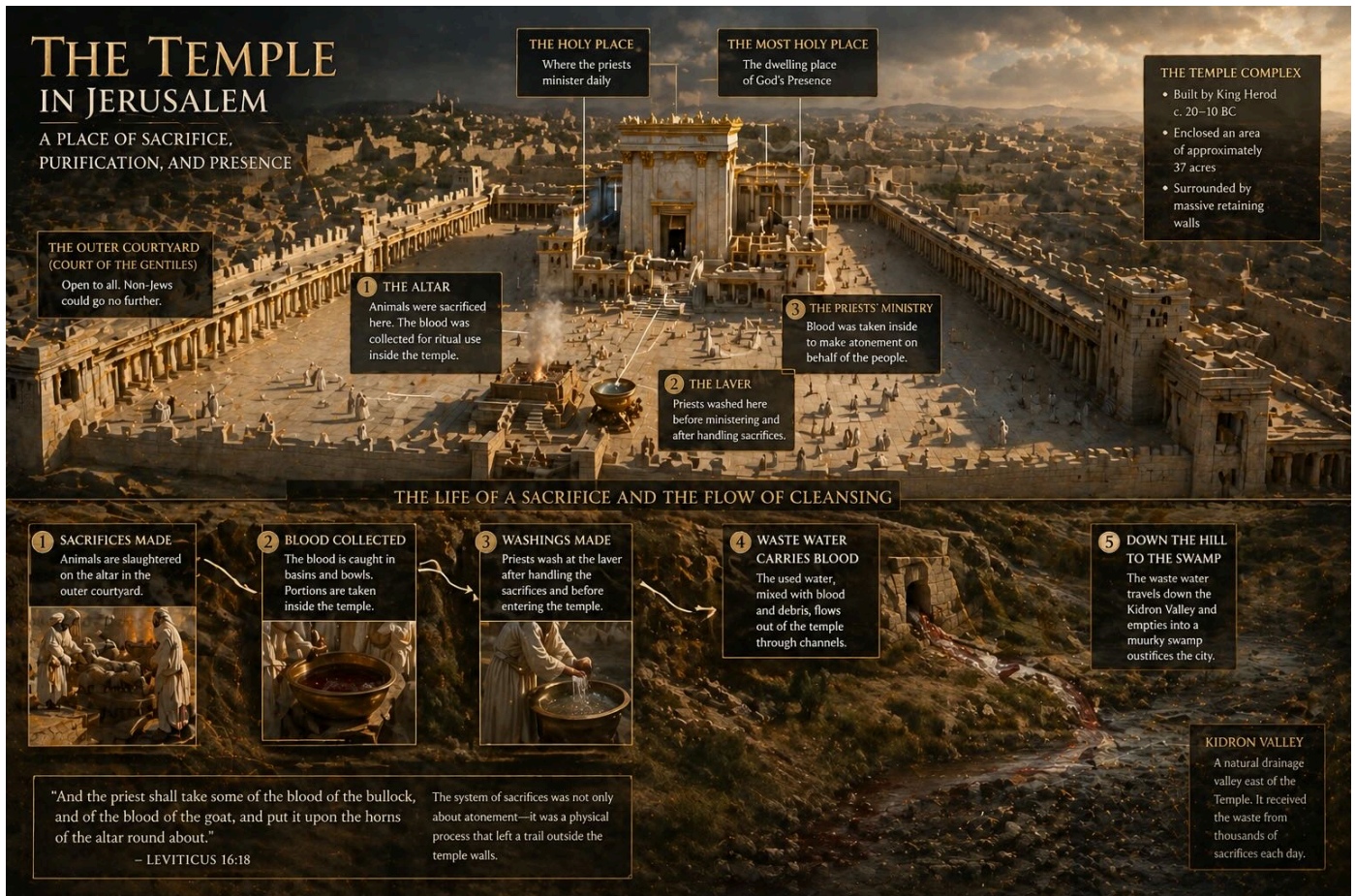
**DISCERNMENT PROTECTS TRUTH.
NOT EVERYTHING ANCIENT IS APOSTOLIC.**



The lost gospels are not the missing parts of the New Testament but they are alternative early Christian writings that show how diverse beliefs about Jesus were in the first centuries.

1. Not a secret “missing Bible”
2. Not all early or eyewitness accounts
3. Not a single unified group
4. Not historically neutral biographies of Jesus
5. Not equal in historical reliability

Read: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/New-Testament-Apocrypha>



The temple at the time of Christ was supposed to be the central location of sacrifice, purification, and covenant mediation within Jewish religious life. Its structure and rituals show this highly ordered system in which access to divine presence was regulated through priesthood, sacrifice, and sacred space (Exodus 25–40; Leviticus 16). Yet the language of the New Testament does not treat this system as static. Instead, it consistently signals movement, transition, and redefinition. The Gospel writers are precise in their descriptions of place and action, often using spatial and ritual language to frame Christ's mission in terms of restoration rather than simple participation. This is especially evident in passages that describe Christ moving beyond the temple, crossing boundaries, and entering spaces that stand in contrast to its formal structure (John 18:1).

This linguistic pattern is significant. Rather than locating Christ's most critical covenantal act within the temple itself, the narrative deliberately situates His suffering in a garden across the Kidron Valley, a place associated with the outflow of the temple's sacrificial system. This movement is not incidental. It reflects a broader theological shift in which established forms of mediation are being reframed. The temple remains the symbolic center of sacrifice, yet the language of the text redirects attention outward, emphasizing a restoration of earlier patterns of divine encounter tied to creation, covenant, and direct presence. In this way, the Gospel narratives use precise spatial and ritual language to signal that Christ is not simply operating within the existing system, but fulfilling and reconfiguring it, drawing sacred action beyond its traditional boundaries and into a renewed covenantal framework.

SLIDE 1

THE TEMPLE WAS ALREADY BEING QUESTIONED

A SHIFT FROM INSTITUTION TO PRESENCE

KEY SCRIPTURES: John 4:21-24 | Matthew 21:12-13 | Mark 13:1-2 | 2 Kings 23:4-7 | Genesis 2-3 | John 18:1

1. CHRIST CHALLENGES THE TEMPLE SYSTEM

John 4:21-24
Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father... God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

Matthew 21:12-13
Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves.

Mark 13:1-2
"As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down," Jesus answered."



2. THE TEMPLE HAD ALREADY BEEN REFORMED

2 Kings 23:4-7
King Josiah's reforms:

- He removed the sacred objects from the temple.
- He brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD.
- He broke down the houses of the male cultic prostitutes that were in the house of the LORD, where women wove hangings for Asherah.
- He brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places where they offered sacrifices.

Possible Asherah (8th-7th century BCE)

The temple was not always as it was in the time of Christ. Earlier practices—including tree and divine feminine symbolism—were removed and replaced.

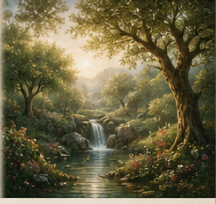


3. THE GARDEN MOTIF REMAINS

Genesis 2-3
Humanity's first experience of the divine presence occurs in a garden.

John 18:1
"When he had finished saying these things, Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered."

Location: Kidron Valley (Mount of Olives)
Outside the temple system—where the outflow of water and sacrificial blood from the temple descended.





FROM GARDEN → TEMPLE → GARDEN

Sacred space begins in the garden.



The temple becomes the center of worship, sacrifice, and atonement.

Sacred space is recontextualized in a garden outside the system.

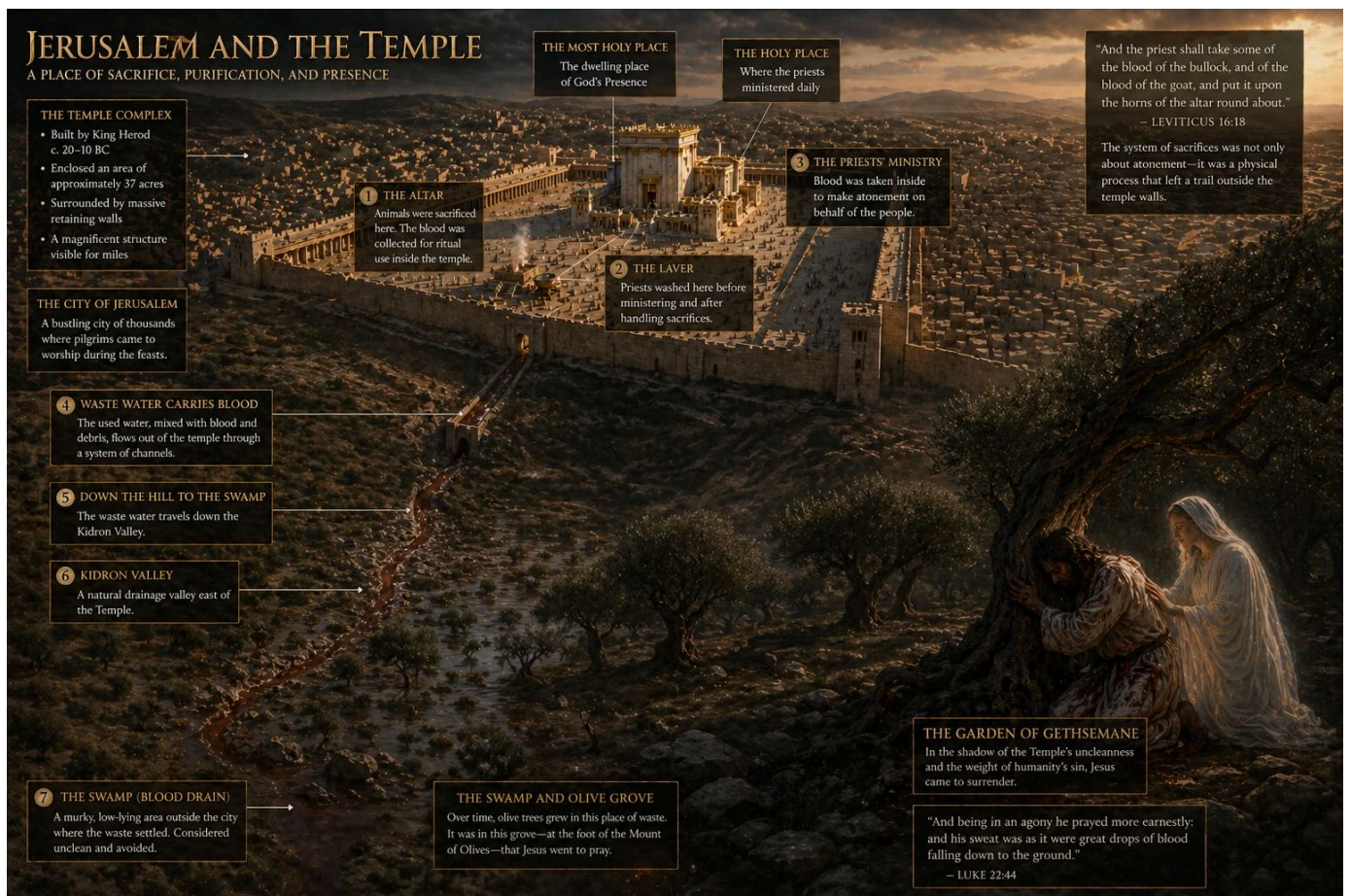


KEY TAKEAWAY

The temple was not eternal or unchanging. By the time of Christ, it was already a reformed institution—and He reveals a new way of presence and worship.

In the Gospels, Jesus explicitly reframes worship, stating that it will no longer be tied exclusively to Jerusalem but will instead be defined by the internal and external process of growth in spirit and truth. He shows this in the temple, with the cleansing of the money changers, which is a critique of how the space was being used. This issue is not entirely new. Earlier reforms, under Josiah, had already reshaped the temple by removing elements associated with prior forms of worship, including the Asherah.

This proves the temple had undergone significant transformation over time. At the same time, the broader biblical narrative begins in a garden setting, where divine presence and human interaction are first established. There are of the first temple has a garden in the Holy Room and By the time of the New Testament, we find Jesus returning to the garden again, this time in the Kidron Valley, outside the formal temple structure as it has been removed. Sacred space, once associated with garden and temple, is now shown to be the convergence of temple critique, prior reform, and garden imagery needed for the ultimate price. Christ was restoring the Temple. Showing what was needed most



When we see Christ go to suffer for the sins of the world in the Garden of Gethsemane, the narrative linguistically goes out of its way to tell us about this spatial distinction. He does not go into the temple. Instead, as stated in Gospel of John 18:1, He crosses the Kidron Valley and enters into a garden, specifically an olive grove. This location is not incidental. The Kidron Valley was a natural drainage system for the temple, carrying away water, blood, and refuse from centuries of sacrificial activity. The linguistics emphasize the setting which places Christ physically outside the formal temple structure, in a space associated with the outflow and removal of what the temple system produced. And it is also clearly emphasized that the presence of cultivated trees growing in those sacrifices are being used to slow the older layers of Israelite religious symbolism.

Scholarly work, such as Joan Taylor's study on the Asherah and sacred tree imagery, help make that linguistic tree symbolism emphasize, including living priesthood forms, once connected to divine presence and Lady Life. Although these elements were removed from the temple during reforms such as those described in 2 Kings 23:6, traces of this symbolic language persisted in broader religious thought. Within this setting, Gospel of Luke 22:43–44 describes a heavenly messenger appearing to strengthen Christ as He suffers, with His anguish expressed in imagery of blood falling to the ground. While the Greek text does not identify this figure as feminine, and no direct linguistic evidence names the presence as "the Mother," the convergence of symbols is highlighted.

Christ is positioned in a garden space, near the flow of sacrificial blood, at the moment of ultimate suffering, accompanied by divine assistance. The scene brings together themes of temple, sacrifice, purification, tree imagery, and restoration. Rather than demonstrating a direct historical continuity, the narrative situates Christ within a symbolic landscape where earlier patterns of sacred space and divine interaction are gathered and reframed. Dr. Richard Worthington’s work in *The Hebrew Goddess Asherah in the Greek Septuagint* shows those connections best.

CHRIST GOES TO THE GROVE, NOT THE TEMPLE

Away from the Temple, Across the Kidron Valley, Into a Grove

THE EXPLICIT TEXT: CHRIST GOES TO A GROVE

John 18:1 (KJV)

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples.



LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE: "GROVE" LANGUAGE IN THE GREEK TEXT

John 18:1 (Greek Text)

ταῦτα εἰπὼν Ἰησοῦς ἐξῆλθεν μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ πέραν τοῦ χειμάρρου Κεδρὼν, ὅπου ἦν κῆπος, εἰς ὃν εἰσῆλθεν αὐτός καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ.

• πέραν	(peran)	– beyond, across
• χειμάρρος	(cheimarros)	– a stream, brook
• Κεδρὼν	(Cedrōn)	– Kidron (Cedron) Valley
• κῆπος	(kēpos)	– garden, cultivated grove
• εἰσῆλθεν	(eiselthen)	– he entered

ACROSS
the Brook Cedron

↓

AWAY FROM
the Temple

↓

INTO A
GROVE (Garden)

RICHARD WORTHINGTON – KEY ARTICLE



Richard Worthington,
"The Hebrew Goddess Asherah in the Greek Septuagint"
Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
Supplement Series 152 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).

"In a number of passages the Septuagint translates Hebrew terms associated with Asherah or her symbols with words such as *alsos* (ἄλσος, 'grove'), *kēpos* (κῆπος, 'garden'), and *dendron* (δένδρον, 'tree'). These renderings preserve traces of the earlier tradition in which Asherah was connected with the sacred tree or grove."

GROVE / TREE LANGUAGE FOR ASHERAH IN THE LXX

Selected Examples (Septuagint)

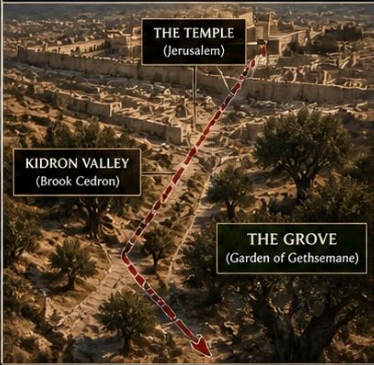
Deut. 16:21
... οὐ στήσεις σεαυτῷ ἄλσος ἱερὸν ...
(LXX: "you shall not set up for yourself a sacred grove")

Judges 6:25
καὶ κατέστρεψε τὸ ἄλσος τὸ ἐξωθεν τῆς πόλεως
(LXX: "and he destroyed the grove that was beside the city")

2 Kings 23:6
καὶ ἐξήνεγκεν τὸ ἄλσος ἐξω τοῦ οἴκου Κυρίου ...
(LXX: "and he brought out the grove from the house of the Lord")

LXX often uses ἄλσος (*alsos*, *grove*), κῆπος (*kēpos*, *garden*), or δένδρον (*dendron*, *tree*) for places or objects linked to Asherah in the Hebrew text.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE NARRATIVE





THE SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE

The Temple system removed Asherah and the sacred tree. Centuries later, Jesus goes away from the Temple, across the Kidron Valley, and into a Grove—where the blood of sacrifice flowed—as the Divine Presence comes to strengthen Him.

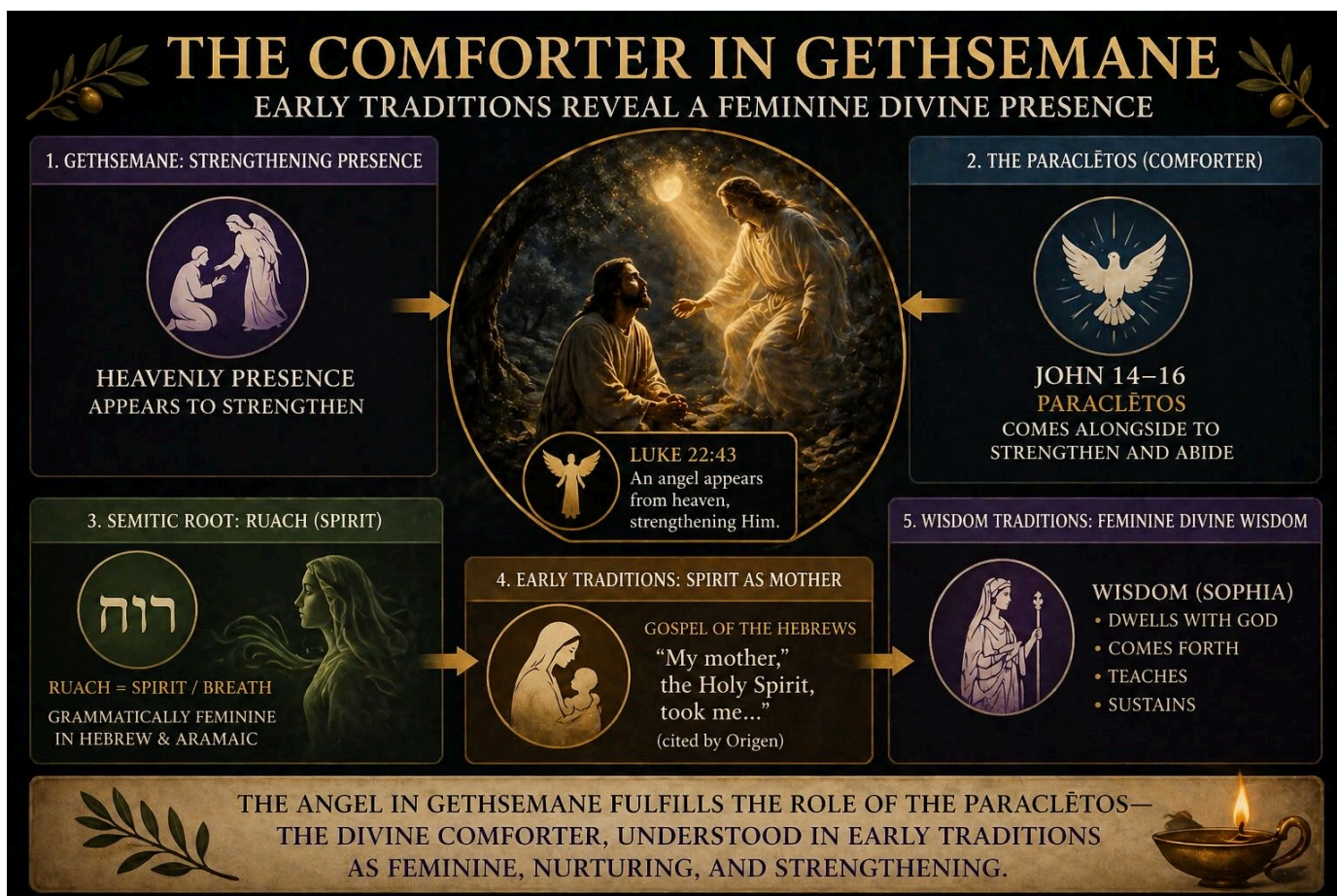
Luke 22:43–44 (KJV)

And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

NOT PROOF, BUT PATTERN

The text does not name "the Mother." But the symbols—tree, garden, blood, divine help, removal from the Temple—converge in this moment.





The linguistic argument is strongest when we treat Gethsemane as a convergence of several traditions rather than as a single proof text. In Luke 22:43 to 44, Christ suffers in agony, receives heavenly strengthening, and His sweat is described “like drops of blood falling to the ground.” The figure who strengthens Him is called an *angelos*, meaning messenger or angel, and the text does not identify this being as female. However, the function of this figure closely resembles the role of the Johannine *Paraklētos*, the Comforter or Advocate, who comes alongside, strengthens, teaches, abides, and continues divine presence after Christ’s visible departure. In John 14 to 16, the Paraclete is the one who remains with the disciples, teaches them, reminds them, witnesses of Christ, and strengthens the community. In Gethsemane, that same functional pattern appears in concentrated form. Christ is alone, suffering under the weight of the cup, and a heavenly presence comes alongside Him to strengthen Him.

The diachronic evidence becomes even more important when we move from Greek into the earlier Semitic and Syriac Christian world. In Greek, *pneuma*, the word for spirit, is grammatically neuter, while *Paraklētos* is grammatically masculine. In Hebrew and Syriac, however, *ruach* or *ruha*, meaning spirit, breath, or wind, is grammatically feminine. Sebastian Brock shows that in the earliest Syriac Christian literature, the Holy Spirit was regularly treated grammatically as feminine, especially in the Old Syriac Gospels, Aphrahat, Ephrem, and the Acts of Thomas. He also notes the famous fragment from the Gospel according to the Hebrews, where Jesus refers to “my mother, the Holy Spirit.” This does not prove that Luke’s angel is literally named as the Mother, but it shows that some early Christian communities had a linguistic world in which divine strengthening, Spirit, comfort, and maternal imagery could naturally overlap. When Christ

receives strength in the garden while suffering the bitter cup, the scene gathers together Spirit language, comforter language, blood imagery, and early maternal imagery for divine presence. This is why the Gethsemane scene matters for a diachronic reading of the text. A flat reading sees only an angel appearing to help Jesus. A layered linguistic reading notices that the angel performs the role of the Comforter, that the Comforter is associated with the Spirit, that Spirit language in Semitic and early Syriac traditions is feminine, and that some early Christian texts explicitly use maternal language for the Holy Spirit. The argument should be stated carefully: the text does not explicitly say that the angel is the Mother. What it does show is that the symbols of comfort, strengthening, Spirit, suffering, blood, and divine nearness converge in a way that later Greek and Latin traditions often flattened. The Gethsemane moment becomes a powerful example of how meaning shifts across languages and traditions, and how earlier feminine imagery for divine presence may still be visible beneath the surface of the text.

Academic readings and sources: Sebastian Brock, "The Holy Spirit as Feminine in Early Syriac Literature," is the most important source for the Syriac evidence and the feminine grammar of *ruha*. Claire Clivaz, "The Angel and the Sweat Like 'Drops of Blood'," is a major scholarly article on the textual problem of Luke 22:43 to 44. The NET Bible textual note gives a useful summary of the manuscript evidence and cites Bart Ehrman and Mark Plunkett's article "The Angel and the Agony." For the Paraclete, use John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7, alongside standard Johannine scholarship such as Raymond Brown and Craig Keener.

EARLY WITNESSES TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AS MOTHER Testimony from Origen and Jerome on the Gospel According to the Hebrews			
ORIGEN – COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 2, 12 (Preuschen 1903:67) If anyone should lend credence to the Gospel according to the Hebrews, where the Saviour Himself says, 'My Mother (<i>mētēr</i>), the Holy Spirit, took me just now by one of my hairs and carried me off to the great Mount Tabor', he will have to face the difficulty of explaining how the Holy Spirit can be the Mother (<i>mētēr</i>) of Christ when She was herself brought into existence through the Word. But neither the passage nor this difficulty is hard to explain. For if he who does the will of the Father in heaven [Mt. 12:50] is Christ's brother and sister and mother (<i>mētēr</i>), and if the name of brother of Christ may be applied, not only to the race of men, but to beings of diviner rank than they, then there is nothing absurd in the Holy Spirit's being His Mother (<i>mētēr</i>); everyone being His mother who does the will of the Father in heaven.		ORIGEN – HOMILIES ON JEREMIAH 15, 4 (Klostermann 1901:128) but if one accepts (the following): 'My Mother (<i>mētēr</i>), the Holy Spirit, took me just now and carried me off to the great Mount Tabor,' one could see who is his Mother (<i>mētēr</i>)." 	
JEROME – COMMENTARY ON EZEKIEL 4, 16, 13 (Glorie 1964:178) and this relates to the Holy Spirit, who is mentioned with a female name (<i>nomine feminino</i>) among the Hebrews. For also in the Gospel which is of the Hebrews and is read by the Nazaraeans, the Saviour is introduced saying: 'Just now, my Mother (<i>mater</i>), the Holy Spirit, took me up ...' 		JEROME – COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH 11, 40, 9 (Adriaen 1963:459) And also this: (in the text) 'like the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress' [Ps. 123:2], the maid is the soul and the mistress (<i>dominam</i>) is the Holy Spirit. For also in that Gospel written according to the Hebrews, which the Nazaraeans read, the Lord says: 'Just now, my Mother (<i>mater</i>), the Holy Spirit, took me.' Nobody should be offended by this, for among the Hebrews the Spirit is said to be of the feminine gender (<i>genere feminino</i>), although in our language it is called to be of masculine gender and in the Greek language neuter. 	
WHAT THESE TEXTS SHOW Early Christian writers testify that in the Gospel According to the Hebrews, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "My Mother." They explain that among the Hebrews, the Spirit is understood with feminine language. 		✓ LINGUISTIC: Spirit (<i>ruach / ruha</i>) is feminine in Hebrew and Syriac. ✓ THEOLOGICAL: The Holy Spirit acts as Mother, Comforter, and Life-Giver. ✓ DIACHRONIC: Early Semitic traditions preserve feminine imagery that later Greek and Latin theology tended to neutralize.	
SOURCES: • Origen, <i>Commentary on the Gospel of John</i> 2, 12 (Preuschen 1903:67) • Origen, <i>Homilies on Jeremiah</i> 15, 4 (Klostermann 1901:128) • Jerome, <i>Commentary on Micah</i> 2, 7, 6 (Adriaen 1969:513)		KEY CONCLUSION The Holy Spirit as Mother is an early, attested tradition in the Semitic Christian world. • Sebastian Brock, <i>The Holy Spirit in the Syro-Antiochene Tradition</i> (2021) • Sebastian Brock, "The Holy Spirit as Feminine in Early Syriac Literature" (2018)	

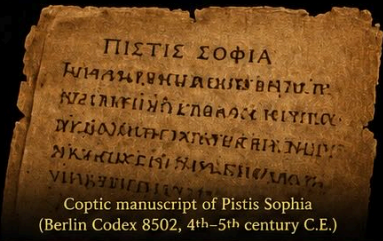
Reading: <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/3225/7763?utm>



PISTIS SOPHIA

FAITH WISDOM • FAITHFUL WISDOM THAT SEEKS RESTORATION

Pistis Sophia is both a divine figure and the title of a major Gnostic text. It reveals a cosmic drama of descent, faithfulness, suffering, and restoration.



Coptic manuscript of Pistis Sophia
(Berlin Codex 8502, 4th–5th century C.E.)

LITERAL MEANING	DEEPER MEANING	WHY THIS MATTERS
 Πίστις (pistis) faith, trust, fidelity, loyalty, faithfulness	• Pistis is more than belief. In Greek it means trust rooted in relationship, covenant loyalty, and faithfulness through trial. • Sophia is personified. In Jewish and Christian tradition, Wisdom (Sophia) is a divine feminine presence, associated with creation (Prov. 8) and cosmic order. • In Gnostic thought. Sophia plays a central role in the drama of creation, error, exile, and restoration.	 1. TEMPLE LOGIC Descent = separation Ascent = restoration Mirrors sacred movement patterns in temple tradition.
 Σοφία (sophia) wisdom, insight, divine wisdom	IN THE TEXT PISTIS SOPHIA • Sophia falls from the divine realm. • She suffers, repents, and calls out for help. • She is restored through divine intervention and returns to the fullness of the Light.	 2. FEMININE DIVINE MOTIF Sophia represents a feminine divine presence, often marginalized in later orthodoxy.
BEST TEACHING RENDERING <i>“The Faithful Wisdom that Seeks Restoration”</i> or <i>“Wisdom that remains faithful through descent and is redeemed.”</i>		 3. EPIPHANIC ARC STRUCTURE Problem: Sophia falls Tension: suffering and confusion Resolution: restoration through divine aid
		 4. THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE Emphasizes mercy, repentance, and the possibility of return to the Divine Source.



ONE-LINE HOOK: *Pistis Sophia is not just “faith and wisdom.” It is the story of wisdom that falls, remains faithful, and is brought back into divine presence.*



The conceptual framework of the divine feminine develops from earlier linguistic, theological, and symbolic traditions. We’ve seen them in the preceding discussions, early Semitic language structures and Syriac Christian thought preserved a conception of the Spirit that could be expressed in feminine and relational terms, associated with nurturing, sustaining, and life-giving presence. This concept finds a parallel in the figure of Lady Wisdom, or *Sophia*, who is personified in the Hebrew Bible. In texts such as Proverbs 8, Wisdom is depicted as existing alongside God in creation, participating in the ordering of the world, and calling humanity into alignment with divine truth (Proverbs 8:22–31). Here, Wisdom is an active, relational presence that teaches, guides, and sustains. As Jewish and early Christian traditions develop, this figure of Wisdom becomes increasingly significant as a way of articulating divine interaction with the world. In Second Temple and early Christian literature, *Sophia* carries forward themes of presence, mediation, and restoration. This reaches an expression in texts such as the *Pistis Sophia*, where the term combines *pistis* (faithfulness, trust, covenant loyalty) with *sophia* (wisdom). The result is a narrative pattern or a path: wisdom that descends, suffers, remains faithful, and is ultimately restored.

The path of Hesed from the Old Testament. When read in light of earlier traditions of Lady Wisdom and the feminine conceptualization of divine presence, *Pistis Sophia* is an extension of an already existing theological language. It does not introduce the idea of a feminine divine figure so much as it amplifies and dramatizes a pattern that had long been embedded in the linguistic and

symbolic world of the Hebrew Bible and early Christianity. This continuity allows for a more integrated reading of the tradition. The Spirit as nurturing presence, Wisdom as divine companion in creation, and *Pistis Sophia* as the narrative of faithful restoration all participate in a shared conceptual framework. Together, they reflect an ongoing effort within early religious thought to describe how divine presence engages the world through relationship, guidance, suffering, and restoration.

Reading: <https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/ps/ps004.htm>



This pattern is recurring in linguistic movement across the Hebrew Bible where the presence of God is encountered through processes of motion and approach, pressure, transformation, and eventual indwelling. Please do not read these as individual events, all of these are using restoration language and motifs which show key moments like Sinai, the Tabernacle, and later symbolic forms like the olive tree participate in a shared theological pattern. At Mount Sinai, divine presence descends in a setting marked by distance, boundary, and mediated access (Exodus 19–20). God is near, yet not fully approachable, and covenant is established through awe, separation, and structured encounter. This movement continues in the Tabernacle, where the presence that once rested on the mountain is given a dwelling place among the people (Exodus 25–40). The architecture itself encodes a progression inward, guiding movement from outer space toward inner sanctity and reflecting a gradual drawing near to the divine presence (Leviticus 16). This pattern deepens as it shifts from constructed space to organic symbol.

The olive tree emerges as a living representation of continuity, rootedness, and covenant transmission (Jeremiah 11:16; Hosea 14:6). Its theological significance is intensified through its function in producing oil, which is obtained only through pressing. Oil serves as a primary medium of consecration and divine authorization in Israelite ritual life (Exodus 30:22–33; 1 Samuel 16:13). The process of pressing introduces a critical dimension to the pattern: pressure becomes the means through which sacred presence is revealed. This dynamic is reflected linguistically in Hebrew roots associated with bitterness and suffering, particularly מָרָה (*marah*), meaning “to be bitter,” as seen in narratives of transformation such as Exodus 15:23–25 and Ruth 1:20. In these cases, affliction becomes the condition through which covenantal understanding and divine intervention are deepened. These trajectories converge in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Gospel accounts intentionally locate this event outside the temple structure, across the Kidron Valley, in a cultivated olive grove (John 18:1). This geographical movement is significant. The Kidron Valley functioned as a drainage system for the temple, carrying away water and sacrificial residue (cf. 2 Kings 23:6; Josephus, *War* 5.5.6), placing Gethsemane in a space associated with the outflow of the sacrificial system. The established pattern leads to the olive press which becomes the location where Christ undergoes intense pressure, aligning the symbolic process of pressing with the theological reality of suffering (Matthew 26:36–46; Luke 22:44). Here, the themes present throughout the earlier tradition and the Path of Hesed with approach, testing, covenant, and transformation. They are concentrated into a single moment. The pattern of movement, rupture, and restoration provides a conceptual lens for understanding these developments. Movement represents the approach toward divine presence. Rupture marks the moment of tension, suffering, or separation. Restoration follows as alignment is reestablished and presence is renewed. Christ stands at the convergence of these movements, not simply as one example among many, but as the point at which the pattern reaches its fullest expression. What was once externalized in geography, ritual, and symbol is drawn inward and made complete within Him.

Read: [“The Radical Embodiment of God” \(HTS Theological Studies\)](#)



This pattern is further focused expression in the theme of anointing, pressure, and transformation as preserved in the Gospel traditions. The woman, identified in Gospel of John as Mary, anoints the feet of Jesus with costly oil (John 12:1-8). Jesus Himself interprets it as preparation for His burial, linking it directly to His impending suffering and death (John 12:7). Within the broader symbolic framework of the Hebrew Bible, anointing carries deep theological weight. Olive oil is used to consecrate kings, priests, and sacred objects, marking them as set apart for divine purpose (Exodus 30:22-33; 1 Samuel 16:13). The title "Messiah" is derived from this act of anointing, designating one who has been chosen and commissioned within a covenantal structure.

This symbolic act is inseparable from the material reality that underlies it. Olive oil is produced only through pressing. The transformation of the olive into oil requires pressure, something theologically and narratively significant when read alongside the events in the Garden of Gethsemane. The name Gethsemane itself derives from an Aramaic expression meaning "oil press," situating the narrative within a space defined by crushing and extraction (Matthew 26:36; Mark 14:32). In this setting, Jesus undergoes intense anguish, prayer, and submission, described in terms that emphasize both physical and emotional strain (Luke 22:44). The juxtaposition is deliberate. The one who has been anointed with oil now enters the place where olives are pressed. The outward sign of consecration meets the inward reality of suffering. This creates a coherent theological pattern that aligns with earlier scriptural developments. Anointing marks one as set apart for divine purpose. Pressure introduces testing and crisis. Transformation of the individual aligns with the divine will under conditions of strain. Covenant is sustained through faithfulness in that process, and redemption unfolds as life emerges through sacrifice. Mary's act of anointing anticipates Gethsemane by signaling that the anointed one will undergo the very process that produces the oil used in consecration. The narrative thus unites symbol and event. The Messiah, defined by anointing, becomes the one who is pressed, and

through that pressing, the full realization of purpose, covenant, and redemption is brought into completion.

Read: <https://rsc.byu.edu/approaching-holiness/jesus-messiah>