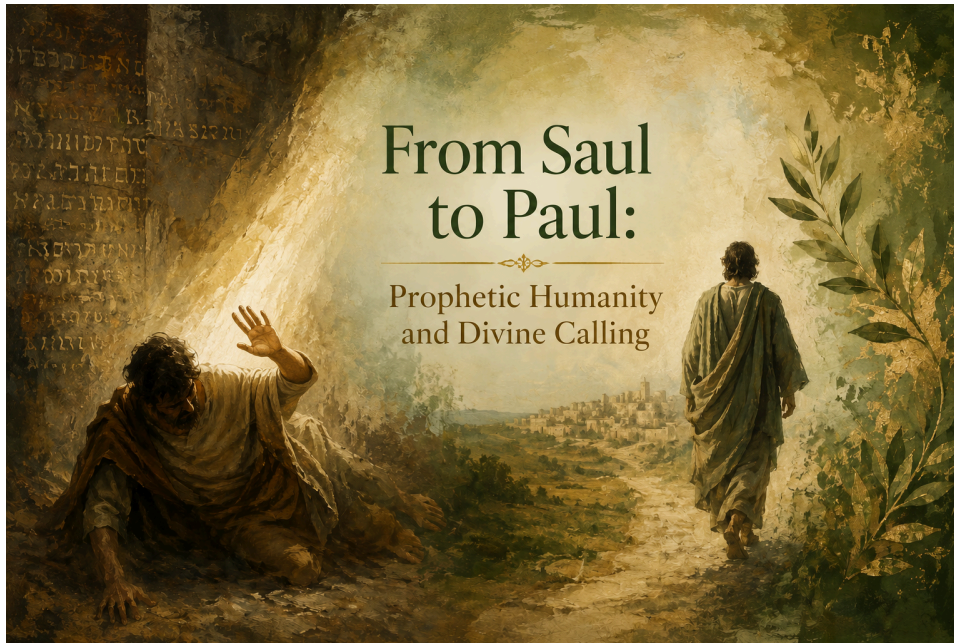




Class Teaching Plan

Class Title

From Saul to Paul: Prophetic Humanity and Divine Calling

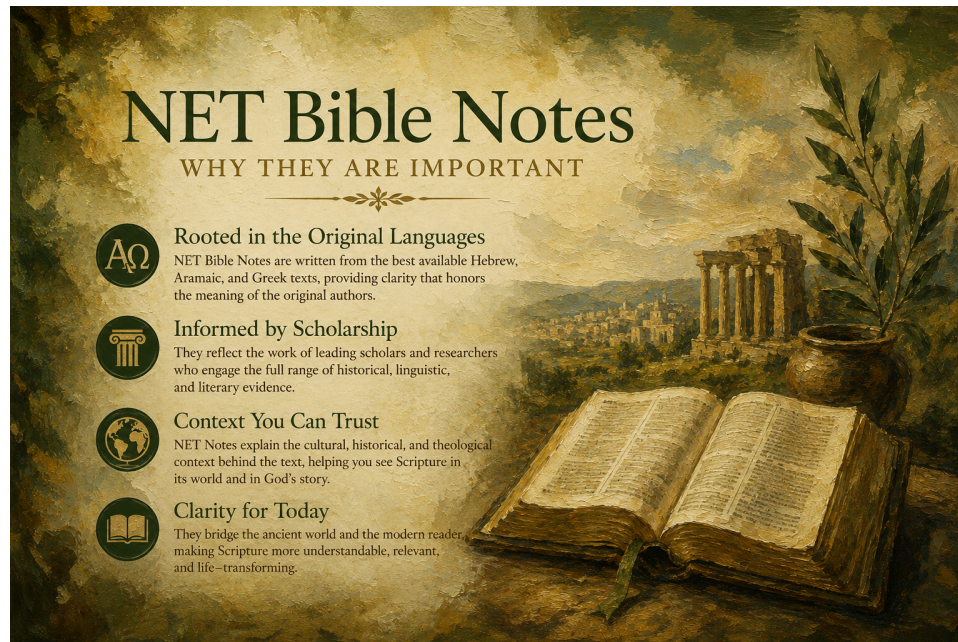
Central Thesis

In this week's class we will explore the transformation of Saul into Paul as a window into a larger biblical pattern of prophetic humanity, divine calling, covenant identity, and sacred naming. The phrase prophetic humanity refers to the scriptural pattern in which human and imperfect individuals are progressively shaped into witnesses of who God really is through revelation, covenant, suffering, and calling. The Path of Hesed as the Hebrews taught in patterns of life suffering through bitterness leading to the Love of God. Being brought into the New Testament Scripture we consistently see prophets, apostles, and disciples displaying their flaws and humanity as ordinary people who are transformed through sacred motions encountered through God. Moses fears, Peter doubts, and Saul persecutes the church, yet each is called through sacred motions of life that pass through bitter suffering. This pattern is shown through study which the NET Bible notes help by allowing readers to distinguish between what the text explicitly says and what contemporary and early traditions assume. Acts never actually narrates a formal renaming of Saul on the Damascus road in the same way Abram becomes Abraham or Jacob becomes Israel. Instead, Acts presents something much more subtle and possibly more profound. As Christ still calls him "Saul, Saul," while declaring that he will become a chosen instrument to bear Christ's name before nations, kings, and Israel. And so the transformation is therefore covenantal and vocational before it is ever practically nominal. Later, Luke introduces "Saul, also known as Paul," which the NET notes help us identify as a parenthetical clarification by the author, as this is not a dramatic renaming

scene. And so, this becomes the doorway into the larger theological pattern of scripture where names reveal identity, mission, belonging, authority, and future destiny in which the old identity remains present while the calling expands and reframes it. Abram becomes Abraham, Simon becomes Peter, Revelation promises a new name written upon a white stone, and Isaiah speaks of receiving a name better than sons and daughters. Throughout scripture and many ancient religious traditions, sacred names are symbols of transformation correcting our relationship with the Gods. The story of Saul becoming Paul is therefore about the human journey of zealous persecution becoming the bearer of the New Name and calling of God, revealing the larger scriptural pattern of imperfect humanity being transformed through a heavenly charge to become humble and small which becomes the covenant witnesses of Christ.

Welcome to the NET Bible Notes

This week I am excited to introduce you to the NET Bible notes, which are an incredible resource for our current study because they help us carefully distinguish between what the biblical text explicitly says, what later yet still contemporaneous traditions are assuming about the text, and what theological meaning can responsibly be drawn from the narrative. The Saul and Paul story is an excellent example of what many readers assume is Saul in a dramatic formal renaming on the Damascus road very similar to Abram becoming Abraham or Jacob becoming Israel, yet Acts never actually narrates such an event. In Acts 9, the risen Christ still addresses him as “Saul, Saul,” and the focus of the passage is his divine commissioning as one chosen to bear Christ’s name before nations, kings, and Israel. Later, in Acts 13:9, Luke introduces the phrase “Saul, also known as Paul,” which the NET Bible notes identify as a parenthetical clarification from the author in place of a formal renaming scene as shown in other naming examples. This becomes a narrative shift for us as the mission is linguistically shown to move slowly into the Gentile world. This pattern of our monastic study culminates in Revelation 2:17 which provides an explicit biblical example of the promise of a “new name,” giving the larger scriptural pattern connected to covenant identity, divine mission, and transformation through relationship with God. The NET Bible notes are useful for us in this process because they allow us to see the reasoning behind the translation itself through translator’s notes (tn), study notes (sn), and text critical notes (tc), helping us learn to read the text carefully and contextually before drawing broader theological conclusions.

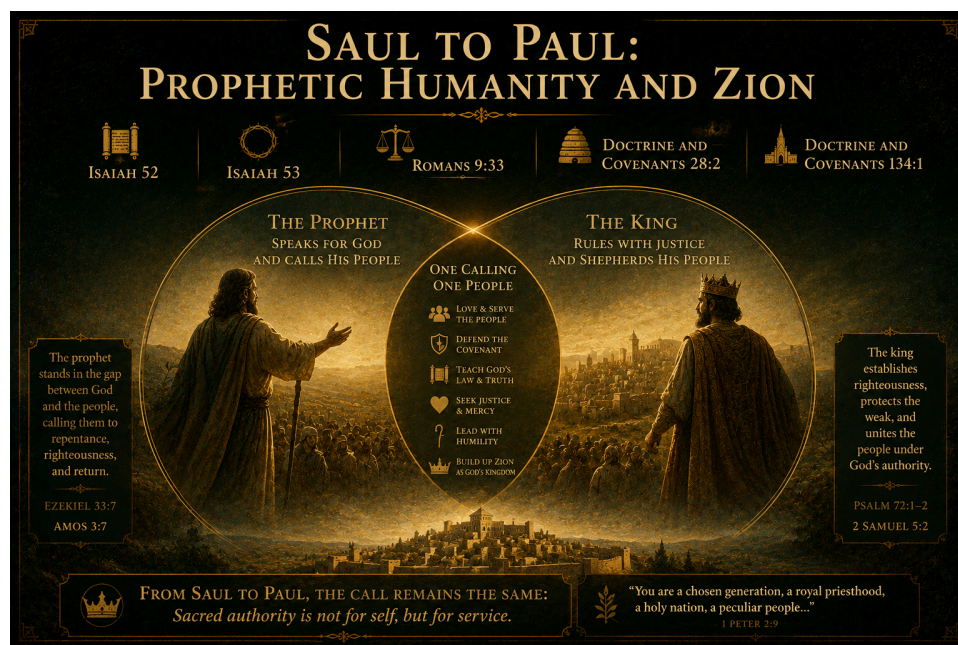


What the NET Bible Notes Are

The NET Bible Notes are incredibly valuable for our study because they allow us to see the reasoning behind the translation itself rather than only giving us a finalized English reading of the text. The notes are organized into categories such as translator's notes (tn), study notes (sn), and text critical notes (tc), allowing us to separate grammar, manuscript evidence, historical background, and interpretive observations in a much clearer way. This becomes especially important in passages like Acts 13:9 where the NET Bible reads, "Saul, also known as Paul," and the accompanying note identifies this phrase as a parenthetical clarification from Luke rather than a formal divine renaming scene. That distinction matters because it shows Luke carefully explaining Saul's alternate Roman name as the mission begins moving more fully into the Gentile world instead of presenting a sudden replacement of identity. The same careful reading process appears earlier in Acts 7:58 during the stoning of Stephen, where the NET notes explain that the witnesses laying their cloaks at Saul's feet refers to outer garments being removed to free the arms for throwing stones, placing Saul directly inside the violence against the early Christian movement. What makes the NET Bible notes so useful is that they help us read the text contextually and responsibly before drawing larger theological conclusions, allowing us to better distinguish between what the text explicitly says, what later traditions may assume, and what deeper narrative and theological patterns are actually emerging from the language itself.

Readings:

- [NET Bible Notes on Acts 13](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Acts 9](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Acts 7](#)
- [NET Bible Full Notes Edition](#)



The scriptures provide a linguistic covenant framework sitting underneath the Saul to Paul transformation narrative. When we explore the biblical concept of prophetic humanity the scriptures presents revelation as unfolding through kings, covenant communities, stewardship structures, collective agency, and individuals slowly transformed through encounter with God. It is the same pattern of the song of the prophets or the Shema of God. Doctrine and Covenants 28:2 shows us that revelation is received according to stewardship, while Doctrine and Covenants 13:41 explains that governments and rulers themselves hold sacred responsibility before God. Together these revelations show us an important theological lens that God allows humanity to participate in defining revelation through real agency, real governance, real failure, and real growth. This framework understanding is required when discussing Zion. Historically, Zion first referred to the Jebusite stronghold captured by David in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6–7). Long before Zion became Israel’s covenant center, it already existed as a sacred fortified place embedded within older Jebusite traditions. David does not invent Zion, but restores and recontextualizes it into the covenant center of Israel after learning of Zion from the inner sanctum of the Jebusites. Archaeological and textual evidence from the broader Canaanite world suggests that sacred cities such as Jebusite Jerusalem participated in temple systems involving priestesses, divine feminine symbolism, sacred high places, and royal cultic imagery connected to covenant and kingship. Because Zion originally referred to the Jebusite stronghold conquered by David (2 Samuel 5:6–7), many scholars argue that Israel inherited and recontextualized sacred geography and temple symbolism already embedded within the city before its integration into the Davidic kingdom. Scholars such as Mark S. Smith and Margaret Barker have noted that traces of older temple traditions and divine feminine imagery appear to remain preserved within later Israelite temple theology.

Readings:

- [Mark S. Smith, The Early History of God](#)
- [Margaret Barker, Temple Theology](#)

- [Jewish Encyclopedia on Zion](#)
- [BibleHub 2 Samuel 5 Interlinear](#)



understands God. The destroyer becomes the builder. Through this transformation Luke presents one of scripture's deepest meditations on prophetic humanity itself.

Readings:

- [NET Bible Acts 7 Notes](#)
- [NET Bible Acts 9 Notes](#)
- [NET Bible Romans 9 Notes](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Martys \(μάρτυς\)](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Stephanos \(στέφανος\)](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Paulos \(Παῦλος\)](#)
- [STEP Bible Greek and Hebrew Tools](#)

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA: ADULTERY AND THE DOWNFALL OF DAVID

THE NARRATIVE

- 1 DESIRE AND OPPORTUNITY**
David saw Bathsheba bathing and sent for her.
2 Samuel 11:2-4
- 2 ADULTERY**
David lay with Bathsheba, his neighbor's wife.
2 Samuel 11:4
- 3 DECEPTION**
David attempted to hide his sin and brought Uriah home.
2 Samuel 11:5-13
- 4 MURDER**
David sent Uriah to the front line and arranged his death.
2 Samuel 11:14-17
- 5 COVERED—BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**
Bathsheba mourned, then returned to David, and she bore him a son.
2 Samuel 11:26-27
- 6 CONFRONTED BY THE PROPHET**
Nathan confronted David with God's judgment.
2 Samuel 12:1-7
- 7 REPENTANCE—BUT CONSEQUENCES REMAIN**
David repented, but the child died and consequences remained.
2 Samuel 12:13-14, 18-23

THE CONSEQUENCES

- THE CHILD DIES**
The child born of this sin became ill and died.
2 Samuel 12:14-18
- DIVISION IN THE HOUSE**
Violence and conflict rose among David's sons.
2 Samuel 13:1-39
- KINGDOM INSTABILITY**
David's sin led to unrest and long-term turmoil in the kingdom.
1 Kings 1-2
- A BROKEN SPIRIT**
David's heart was deeply broken before the LORD.
Psalm 51:16-17
- GRACE AND RESTORATION**
Though David fell greatly, he repented sincerely, and God restored him.
Psalm 51
2 Samuel 12:13

GOD'S WORD IS CLEAR
"You shall not commit adultery."
Exodus 20:14

Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."
Matthew 5:28

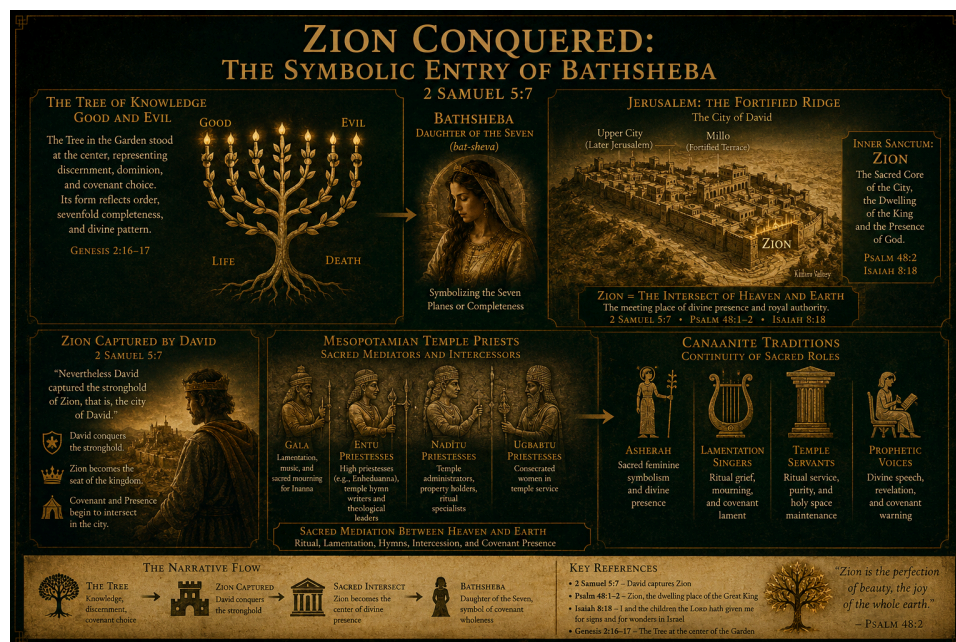
SIN BRINGS CONSEQUENCES, BUT REPENTANCE OPENS THE DOOR TO RESTORATION.
The mercy of God does not erase the consequences of sin, but it transforms a broken heart into a faithful witness.

The traditional reading of David and Bathsheba is usually presented almost entirely as a narrative about adultery, lust, and moral collapse. Now certainly, those themes exist inside the final form of the text, but once you begin studying the narrative linguistically and conceptually through the Hebrew itself, the story suddenly becomes far more complicated than the flattened modern reading we usually inherit. Remember, this narrative comes after David has already conquered Zion and restored Jerusalem as the covenant center of Israel. That placement matters because Bathsheba enters the narrative only after Zion itself has been restored. Her name becomes deeply important here. Bathsheba derives from bat meaning "daughter" and sheva meaning "seven," a number repeatedly associated throughout the Hebrew Bible with covenant fullness, sacred completion, transformation, cycles, and cosmic order. So conceptually, Bathsheba becomes the "daughter of the seven," the daughter of covenant transformation itself. What is fascinating is that the narrative consistently shows the men surrounding her interpreting

her almost entirely through political, sexual, and possessive frameworks while the text itself quietly presents her as functioning as a catalyst for covenant transition inside Israel's royal structure. The chaos surrounding Bathsheba does not originate from her manipulation. The chaos originates from the fractured desires, ambitions, insecurities, and instability of the men surrounding her. David's encounter with Bathsheba therefore becomes much larger than a simple morality tale about lust. The narrative exposes the instability of kingship, covenant authority, and human certainty itself. This is why the story ultimately moves toward Solomon, whose name derives from the Hebrew root *shalom* associated with peace, covenant wholeness, restoration, and sacred order. Through Bathsheba comes the royal line that builds the First Temple and permanently establishes Jerusalem as the symbolic center of covenant identity. Then the literary movement reaches its climax in 1 Kings 2:19 when Solomon publicly seats Bathsheba at his right hand as queen mother before the kingdom. The woman once associated with scandal now stands enthroned beside the king within the royal and temple centered covenant structure of Israel itself. That pattern matters because scripture repeatedly shows God transforming bitterness, instability, chaos, and human failure into covenant order, sacred kingship, wisdom, and ultimately temple restoration.

Readings:

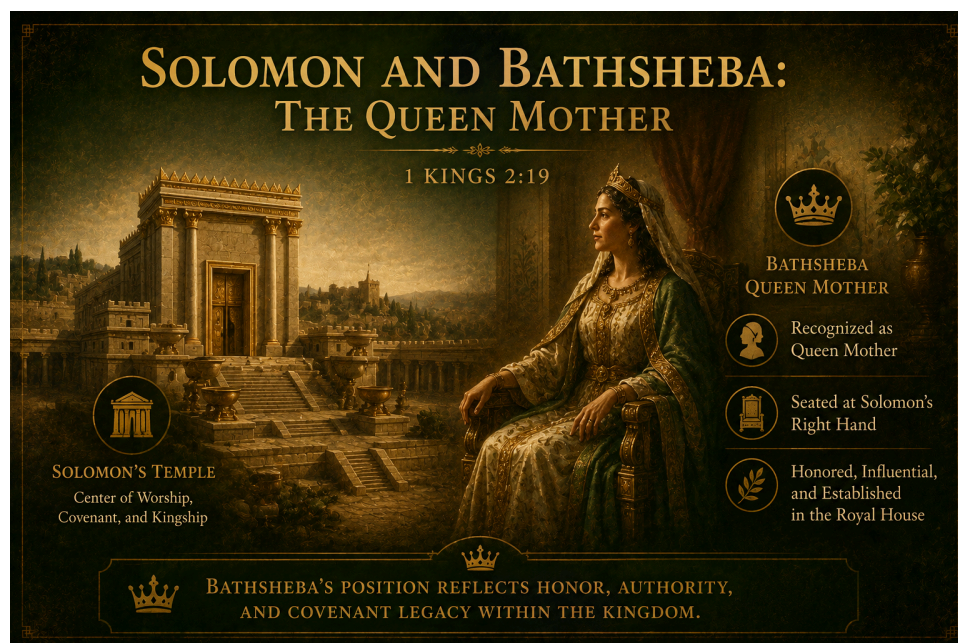
- [NET Bible Notes on 2 Samuel 11–12](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on 1 Kings 2](#)
- [BibleHub Hebrew Study of Sheva \(שבע\)](#)
- [BibleHub Hebrew Study of Shalom \(שלום\)](#)
- [BibleHub Interlinear 1 Kings 2:19](#)
- [STEP Bible Hebrew Tools](#)



What becomes fascinating once we begin studying Zion diachronically is that Zion does not originally emerge as a purely Israelite theological concept. Historically, Zion first refers to the Jebusite stronghold captured by David in 2 Samuel 5:7, meaning the sacred geography itself predates Israel's royal occupation of Jerusalem. This matters because throughout the ancient Near East, sacred cities were viewed as intersections between heaven and earth, places where covenant presence, kingship, temple authority, and divine mediation overlapped together. Jerusalem already carried this type of sacred structure before David ever conquered it. David therefore does not invent Zion. He inherits, restores, and recontextualizes a sacred center already embedded inside older Canaanite and Near Eastern temple traditions. This is why archaeological and textual evidence from the broader Canaanite world becomes important because these surrounding cultures consistently preserved priestesses, lamentation singers, temple servants, sacred feminine symbolism, ritual mediators, and prophetic voices connected to covenant presence and sacred kingship. Scholars such as Mark S. Smith and Margaret Barker have repeatedly argued that traces of these earlier temple patterns continue appearing inside later Israelite theology even after centralization reforms attempted to suppress portions of older traditions. This becomes deeply important once Bathsheba enters the narrative immediately after Zion has been restored. Her name ties her conceptually to covenant fullness, sacred completion, transformation, and divine order. The literary structure therefore quietly places Bathsheba into the restored Zion narrative as a symbolic figure associated with covenant transition itself. The narrative then moves directly toward Solomon with an emphasis on peace, wholeness, and covenant order, culminating in the construction of the First Temple. The movement is extremely deliberate. Zion is restored. Covenant transformation enters the narrative through Bathsheba. Then temple kingship, sacred order, and covenant peace emerge through Solomon. Once viewed together, the narrative stops functioning merely as isolated moral episodes and instead becomes a theological meditation on how God repeatedly transforms chaos, instability, fractured humanity, and older sacred traditions into covenant order, wisdom, temple restoration, and sacred kingship.

Readings:

- [NET Bible Notes on 2 Samuel 5](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on 1 Kings 1–2](#)
- [BibleHub Hebrew Study of Sheva \(שבע\)](#)
- [BibleHub Hebrew Study of Shalom \(שלום\)](#)
- [Mark S. Smith, The Early History of God](#)
- [Margaret Barker, Temple Theology](#)
- [STEP Bible Hebrew Tools](#)



After Zion has been restored through David and the covenant center established in Jerusalem, the narrative begins moving toward temple construction, sacred kingship and queenship, and covenant order through Solomon. What becomes remarkable is that Bathsheba, the same woman earlier associated with scandal and instability within the kingdom, now stands at the very center of the royal covenant structure itself. In 1 Kings 2:19 Solomon publicly rises to meet Bathsheba, bows before her, and seats her at his right hand before all the kingdom. Restoring her as the queen mother to the temple. This is one of the most influential figures within the royal court within dynastic and temple centered imagery. The Hebrew text intentionally elevates Bathsheba into a position of covenant honor, authority, royal legitimacy, and dynastic continuity directly alongside the king. The woman once associated with chaos and instability now restored enthroned beside the king during the rise of temple centered covenant order. Through Bathsheba comes Solomon. Through Solomon comes the First Temple. Through the First Temple comes the full establishment of Jerusalem as the symbolic intersection between covenant kingship, sacred presence, and Zion itself. This is why the narrative repeatedly resists simplistic flattening. Scripture consistently shows God transforming fractured humanity, instability, bitterness, political conflict, and covenant failure into wisdom, sacred order, temple restoration, and covenant continuity. Bathsheba's enthronement beside Solomon therefore functions as the culmination of that transformation pattern where what once appeared unstable becomes integrated into the covenant structure itself and participates directly in the establishment of sacred kingship and temple identity.

Readings:

- [NET Bible Notes on 1 Kings 2](#)
- [BibleHub Interlinear 1 Kings 2:19](#)
- [BibleHub Hebrew Study of Shalom \(שלום\)](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on 1 Kings 5–8](#)
- [Margaret Barker, Temple Theology](#)

- [STEP Bible Hebrew Tools](#)

SAUL AT THE DEATH OF STEPHEN

→ ACTS 7:58 ←

“ And they cast him out of the city, and stoned him. And the witnesses **laid down their garments** at the feet of a young man named Saul.



SAUL
standing by and
consenting
(participating)

NET BIBLE NOTE (tn)

The witnesses laid aside their outer garments (cloaks) at Saul's feet to free their arms for throwing stones. This shows Saul's **involvement** in the stoning.

TEACHING POINT

The man who **participates** in the death of the first martyr will become the man who carries the witness of Christ to the nations.

*Stephen, the crowned witness, dies.
Saul, the small one, is transformed.
Stephen's mission is imbued in Paul.*

LINGUISTIC EMPHASIS: PARTICIPATION PATTERN



ἔβαλον
(*ebalon*)
"they cast / threw"

Active participation in the act of violence.



κατέθεντο
(*katethento*)
"they laid down"

A deliberate action to enable participation.



παρὰ τοὺς πόδας
(*para tous podas*)
"at the feet"

Close proximity and alignment.



STEPHANOS
(ΣΤΕΦΑΝΟΣ)

Means "crown" or "wreath."



PAULOS
(ΠΑΥΛΟΣ)

Means "small," "humble," "lesser."

Saul at Stephen's Stoning

In Acts 7:58 we are introduced to Saul in the New Testament narrative through a scene that linguistically emphasizes his witness, covenant testimony, violence, and judgment during the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Luke intentionally places Saul inside the stoning scene, and does so as an active participant who is consenting to, facilitating, if not outright throwing the stones in the execution, but in the very least as the witness who has garments laid at his feet. The linguistic structure pushes his participation, alignment, and shared responsibility, presenting Saul as a zealous witness trapped within his own certainty, believing he is defending God while participating in the destruction of God's servant. This becomes the bitter birthplace of Paul's transformation narrative, because the future apostle is born out of this bitter realization that his religious zeal without true understanding led him into violence killing Christians while convincing himself he acted righteously. The witnesses lay their cloaks at Saul's feet, which the NET Bible Notes on Acts 7 refers to outer garments being removed to free their arms for throwing stones, this puts Saul directly inside the execution. Linguistically, this scene uses the Greek word repeated throughout Acts for "witness" martyrs (μάρτυς), which originally means witness or legal testifier before eventually becoming the later Christian term "martyr." There Stephen stands as a martyr or the covenant witness of Christ before the Sanhedrin and seals that witness with his blood. Later, in Acts 22:20, Paul himself refers back to "the blood of Stephen thy witness playing on the then popularized word martyr [martyrs]," this witness tradition was what Saul once persecuted now is the identity he himself inherits. Luke intensifies this linguistic inversion even further by repeating the emphasis on standing. Stephen sees Christ "standing" at the right hand of God in Acts 7:55–56, which many scholars note is highly unusual because Christ is normally described as seated at the right hand of the Father. Craig Keener and N. T. Wright also note the judicial and covenantal implications of this linguistic tool. Craig S. Keener notes that Christ standing at the right hand of God in Acts 7 reflects imagery of heavenly

vindication and witness within a judicial setting, contrasting with the more common New Testament depiction of Christ seated in heavenly authority (Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 2 [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013], 1392–1394). N. T. Wright similarly connects Stephen’s vision to themes of vindication, exaltation, and covenant witness surrounding the Son of Man imagery in Acts 7 (N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, Part One [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], 128–130). As it is almost as if Christ rises to receive and vindicate Stephen as a faithful witness before heaven itself. Simultaneously, Saul is described as standing by and consenting to Stephen’s death, creating two witnesses standing in opposition and in radically different covenant relationships to Stephen. One stands vindicated before heaven while the other stands aligned with earthly violence in the ironic belief that he is defending God. This linguistic imagery is Luke’s most important theological warning regarding prophetic humanity as Saul is not acting in hatred or ignorance. Saul’s violence is born from his zealous certainty and righteous indignation that has become trapped within a rigid paradigm incapable of recognizing God standing before him. Luke intentionally allows us to watch a man become so convinced that he is protecting truth that he participates in the destruction of God’s own witness. That pattern becomes the dramatic foundation for Paul’s later transformation and is a warning about the danger of becoming spiritually self assured to the point that zeal itself becomes destructive. The linguistic structure surrounding Stephen’s name Stephanos means “crown,” “wreath,” or “victory garland,” associated with victorious athletes, rulers, and faithful endurance. This then creates an extraordinary literary motif as Stephen, who is described as the crowned witness, dies while Saul watches, yet later Paul repeatedly fills his own writings with the same crown imagery connected to endurance, righteousness, and faithful suffering. In 1 Corinthians 9:25 Paul contrasts corruptible crowns with incorruptible crowns, and in 2 Timothy 4:8 he speaks of the “crown of righteousness” awaiting the faithful. Linguistically and narratively, Luke introduces Saul beneath the shadow of the crown motif, Paul is born in that painful lesson which never leaves him. Even the garment imagery becomes symbolically important as Saul first appears surrounded by the garments of violent witnesses, while later Paul’s theology repeatedly emphasizes putting on Christ, putting off the old man, and covenantal transformation through this reputation language of clothing imagery. Luke’s introduction of Saul is a linguistically beautiful theological setup for one of scripture’s greatest transformation narratives, teaching us that prophetic identity in scripture is from the humanity in ask of us that must be confronted, humbled, and transformed in bitterness through our own encounter with Christ.

Readings:

- [NET Bible Notes on Acts 7](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Acts 22](#)
- [Craig Keener on Acts Commentary Series](#)
- [N. T. Wright on Paul and Early Christianity](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Martyrs \(μάρτυς\)](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Stephanos \(στέφανος\)](#)

SAUL'S CALLING AND THE BEARING OF THE NAME

— ACTS 9:1–16 —

“Jesus addressed him as
“Saul, Saul.”
*The key line is not name change.
 The key line is vocation.*

“This man is my
 chosen instrument
 to carry my name
 before Gentiles and
 kings and the people
 of Israel.”
 ACTS 9:15

ONOMA (ὄνομα)
 “Name”
 Represents authority,
 presence, reputation,
 and covenant identity.

Saul once fought
 against those who
 bore the Name.
 Christ now sends him
 to bear the Name.

ZELOS (ζήλος)
 “Zeal”
 Philippians 3:6 –
 “concerning zeal,
 persecuting the church.”

THE TRANSFORMATION
 ACTS 9:1–16
 From
 ATTACKING
 THE NAME
 To
 CARRYING
 THE NAME
*That is the real
 transformation
 in Acts.*

THE PATTERN OF HUMBLING AND REVELATION

He thought he saw
 clearly (Acts 26:9).
 Now he is blinded
 (Acts 9:8–9).

He once led others
 to prison (Acts 8:3).
 Now he is led by the
 hand (Acts 9:8).

He once shouted
 threats (Acts 9:1).
 Now he is silent and
 waits (Acts 9:9).

Certain in his own
 righteousness.
 Confronted by Christ
 and made humble.

GOD DOES NOT ERASE SAUL'S ZEAL—HE REDEEMS AND REDIRECTS IT.
 The persecutor becomes the apostle. The destroyer becomes the builder.
 The man who breathed threats becomes the chosen instrument carrying Christ's Name.

READ AND STUDY:
 • NET Bible Notes on Acts 9
 • NET Bible Notes on Acts 26
 • NET Bible Notes on Philippians 3
 • Craig Keener – Acts Commentary
 • N. T. Wright on Paul
 • BibleHub: Onoma (ὄνομα)
 • BibleHub: Zealos (ζήλος) • BibleHub: Typhlos (τυφλός)

Saul's Divine Calling and the Bearing of the Name Acts 9

In Acts 9:1–16 Luke continues Saul's transformation narrative through one of the most linguistically and theologically dense scenes in the New Testament, yet the emphasis of the text is often misunderstood because the focus is not on Saul receiving a dramatic new name, but on Saul receiving a new vocation and covenant relationship to the Name itself. The risen Christ still addresses him as “Saul, Saul,” preserving the very identity connected to the violence and zealotry of the previous narrative while simultaneously beginning its transformation. Linguistically, Luke intentionally preserves Saul's old identity at the exact moment Christ begins redirecting it, showing that the transformation taking place is not the erasure of Saul but the confrontation, humbling, and sanctification of Saul's humanity itself. The central line of the passage becomes Acts 9:15 where Christ declares, “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel.” This becomes one of the most important covenant reversals in Acts because Saul moves from attacking the Name to carrying the Name. The same man who once violently pursued those bearing witness of Christ now becomes the vessel through which Christ's witness will move into the nations. Luke carefully intensifies this reversal through blindness imagery, because Saul who believed he could see clearly enough to judge, condemn, and destroy now becomes physically blind and must be led by the hand into Damascus. The persecutor who once acted in certainty is reduced into dependence, darkness, silence, and waiting before receiving understanding. This blindness motif becomes one of Luke's greatest theological commentaries on prophetic humanity because Saul's problem was never simple wickedness or hatred of God. Saul's tragedy was that he was absolutely convinced he was defending God while remaining spiritually incapable of recognizing God standing before him. Luke therefore transforms Saul through the collapse of his certainty itself. The same zeal that once fueled persecution is not destroyed but redirected, sanctified, and transformed into apostleship. This is why Paul later repeatedly describes his former life through language of zeal, ignorance, blindness, and misplaced righteousness. In Philippians 3:6 he describes himself as “concerning zeal, persecuting the church,” while in Acts 26:9 he declares, “I thought within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus.” That phrase becomes

linguistically important because it reveals that Saul's violence emerged from sincere but fractured covenant perception. Luke is warning the reader that religious certainty disconnected from true divine understanding can become destructive while still convincing itself it is righteous. The theological transformation in Acts 9 therefore becomes much deeper than a simple conversion story. Saul is not merely changing beliefs. Saul is being taught how to truly see. This also explains why Luke preserves the phrase "Saul, Saul" during the divine encounter itself. The old identity remains present because God is not annihilating Saul's humanity, passion, intellect, or zeal, but transforming and redirecting them toward covenant witness. The persecutor becomes the apostle. The destroyer becomes the builder. The man once breathing threats and slaughter now becomes the chosen instrument carrying Christ's name before the world. Linguistically and narratively, Acts presents one of scripture's most profound transformation patterns, teaching us that prophetic identity is not born from perfect humanity but from humanity confronted by Christ, humbled through painful revelation, and ultimately transformed into covenant witness.

Readings:

- [NET Bible Notes on Acts 9](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Acts 26](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Philippians 3](#)
- [Craig Keener on Acts Commentary Series](#)
- [N. T. Wright on Paul and Early Christianity](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Onoma \(ὄνομα, "name"\)](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Zelos \(ζῆλος, "zeal"\)](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Typhlos \(τυφλός, "blind"\)](#)

SAUL BECOMES PUBLICLY KNOWN AS PAUL

→ ACTS 13:6-12 ←

“ Luke begins using the name “Paul” in a Gentile and Roman setting. *Sergius Paulus is present. Elymas has multiple names and titles.*

“Saul, who is also called Paul.”

ACTS 13:9

TEACHING POINT

The shift from Saul to Paul happens in a Roman Gentile mission context. *Saul moves from attacking the Name to carrying the Name.*

SERGIUS PAULUS
Roman Proconsul

SAUL
(also called PAUL)

ELYMAS
(multiple names and titles)

TWO NAMES, ONE MISSION

Scholars widely agree Saul likely had both a Jewish and a Roman name. This was common in the Greco-Roman world.

SAUL (שָׁאוּל)

Hebrew name “asked for” or “prayed for” Deeply rooted in Israel and the covenant story.

PAUL (ΠΑΥΛΟΣ)

Latin name *Paulus* means “small,” “little,” or “lesser.” A name used in the Roman world.

THE NAME THAT RESONATES WITH HIS THEOLOGY

“I am the least of the apostles.”
1 CORINTHIANS 15:9

“I am less than the least of all the saints.”
EPHESIANS 3:8

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”
2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

→ A LITERARY AND THEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION ←

Once he pursued those who bore the Name.

Once he breathed threats and violence.

Now he is blinded, humbled, and led by the hand.

Now he carries the Name to the nations.

The persecutor becomes the apostle. The powerful become the small. The destroyer becomes the builder.

Paul's name does not prove humility, but it beautifully resonates with the theology he later lives and teaches.

READ AND STUDY:

NET Bible Notes on Acts 13

NET Bible Notes on 1 Corinthians 15

NET Bible Notes on Ephesians 3

NET Bible Notes on 2 Corinthians 12

BDAG Lexicon: Paulos (Παῦλος)

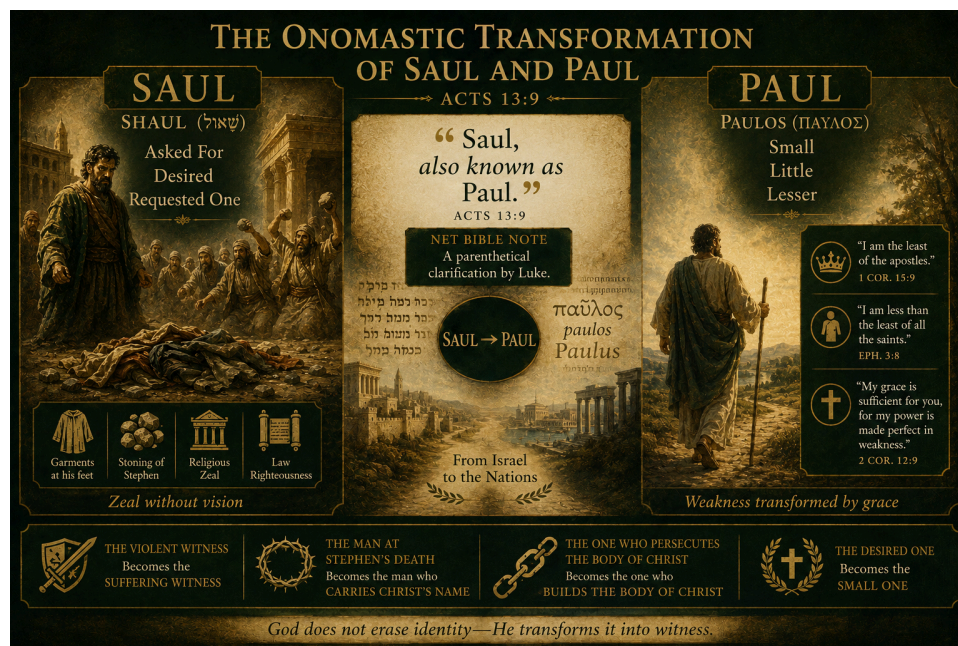
Craig Keener on Acts
N. T. Wright on Paul

Saul Becomes Publicly Known as Paul

In Acts 13:6–12 Luke introduces one of the most important narrative shifts in the entire book of Acts as Saul begins to become publicly identified as Paul within an explicitly Gentile and Roman missionary setting. The scene itself is saturated with Roman political and linguistic imagery because Sergius Paulus, a Roman proconsul, is present while Elymas is simultaneously identified through multiple names and titles, preparing the reader for Luke's own parenthetical clarification that "Saul, also known as Paul," now enters the narrative foreground. This becomes extremely important linguistically because Luke does not present this moment as a dramatic divine renaming scene similar to Abram becoming Abraham or Jacob becoming Israel. Instead, the NET Bible notes identify the phrase as a narrative clarification from Luke himself, strongly suggesting that Saul likely possessed both a Jewish and Roman name simultaneously, which was extremely common throughout the Greco Roman world, especially among diaspora Jews and Roman citizens. Saul therefore remains connected to his Jewish covenant identity while Paul increasingly becomes the public apostolic identity through which his mission moves outward into the Gentile nations. The literary beauty of this shift becomes even more profound when we examine the meaning of the Latin name Paulus, which carries the meaning of "small," "little," or "lesser." While the name itself does not prove humility or weakness as a theological theme, it resonates extraordinarily well with the theology Paul later develops throughout his own writings. In 1 Corinthians 15:9 Paul declares, "I am the least of the apostles." In Ephesians 3:8 he describes himself as "less than the least of all the saints." Then in 2 Corinthians 12:9 Paul presents one of the central theological reversals of his ministry when Christ declares, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Luke's narrative structure therefore becomes remarkably powerful because the man first introduced in Acts through violent certainty, persecution, and religious zeal slowly becomes publicly known through a name that linguistically resonates with humility, weakness, dependency upon grace, and covenant transformation. The persecutor becomes the apostle. The powerful become the small. The man once certain in his own righteousness becomes the man who spends the rest of his ministry teaching that divine power is perfected through weakness and surrender before Christ. This also becomes one of Luke's clearest teachings regarding prophetic humanity because Saul is not transformed by losing his past identity, but by allowing his fractured humanity, zeal, ambition, and certainty to be confronted, humbled, and redirected toward covenant witness. The movement from Saul to Paul therefore becomes far more than a simple naming detail. It becomes a literary and theological symbol of the gospel itself, where true greatness emerges through humility, grace, suffering, and submission before God.

Readings:

- [NET Bible Notes on Acts 13](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on 1 Corinthians 15](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Ephesians 3](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on 2 Corinthians 12](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Paulos \(Παῦλος\)](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Asthenia \(ἀσθένεια, "weakness"\)](#)
- [Craig Keener on Acts Commentary Series](#)
- [N. T. Wright on Paul and Early Christianity](#)



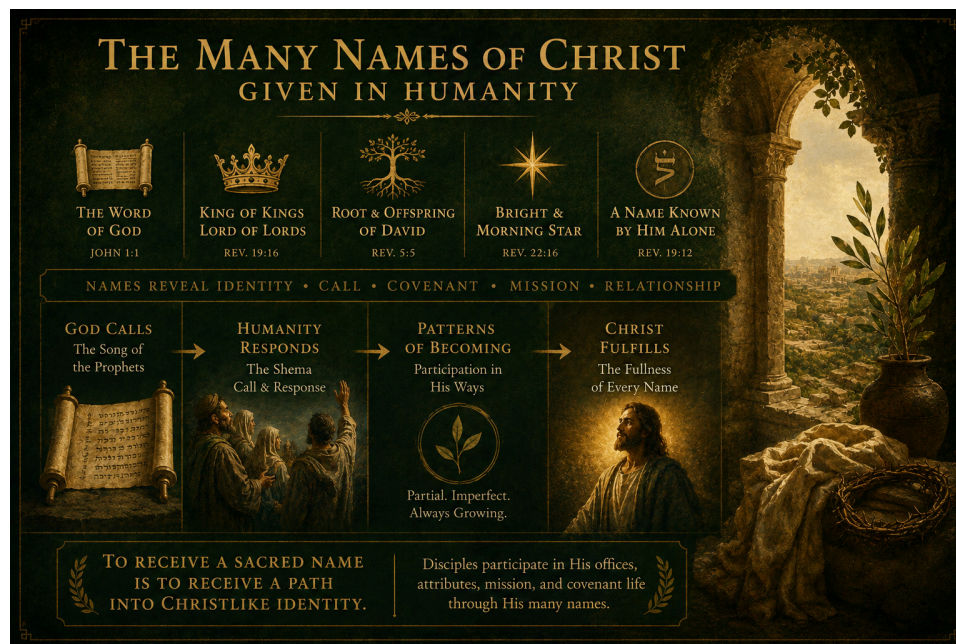
The Onomastic Pattern of Saul and Paul

The linguistic and narrative movement from Saul to Paul becomes even more powerful when we examine the onomastic meanings attached to both names and allow Luke's literary structure to unfold naturally through the text. The Hebrew name Saul carries the meaning of "asked for," "requested," or "desired," deeply connected to Israel's covenant history through King Saul, the king the people themselves desired and requested. The name therefore carries associations of human expectation, zeal, authority, ambition, and the desire to defend and preserve covenant identity. By contrast, the Latin name Paulus means "small," "little," or "lesser," creating a profound literary and theological resonance with the life and teachings Paul later develops throughout his ministry. Luke's narrative structure therefore creates a remarkable transformation arc where the desired one becomes the small one, the violent witness becomes the suffering witness, the man present at Stephen's death becomes the man carrying Christ's name before nations and kings, and the one who once persecuted the body of Christ becomes the one who spends the remainder of his life building, defending, and suffering for the body of Christ. This becomes especially important because Acts never presents Saul's transformation as the destruction of his humanity, passion, zeal, intellect, or covenant devotion. Instead, Luke shows those same characteristics being confronted, humbled, sanctified, and redirected through encounter with Christ. The same zeal that once fueled persecution later fuels apostleship, missionary endurance, covenant sacrifice, and witness before the nations. Paul's name therefore does not prove humility hidden inside the text as some secret code, but it resonates beautifully with the theological pattern both Luke and Paul construct throughout the New Testament where divine power emerges through weakness, suffering, humility, and dependence upon grace. In 1 Corinthians 15:9 Paul calls himself "the least of the apostles." In Ephesians 3:8 he becomes "less than the least of all saints." Then in 2 Corinthians 12:9 Christ declares, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Linguistically, narratively, and theologically, the movement from Saul to Paul becomes one of scripture's clearest examples of prophetic humanity transformed through painful confrontation with Christ, teaching us that covenant transformation does not erase identity but reshapes it into witness.

Readings:

- [NET Bible Notes on Acts 13](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on 1 Corinthians 15](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Ephesians 3](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on 2 Corinthians 12](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Paulos \(Παῦλος\)](#)
- [BibleHub Hebrew Study of Shaul \(שאול\)](#)
- [BDAG Greek Lexicon Overview](#)
- [Craig Keener on Acts Commentary Series](#)
- [N. T. Wright on Paul and Early Christianity](#)



The Many Names of Christ Given in Humanity

One of the most important onomastic patterns throughout scripture is that Christ himself is continually revealed through names, titles, and covenant identifiers that each unveil different dimensions of his identity, mission, authority, and saving relationship to humanity. What is not commonly understood is that these names are sourced through humanity and exemplify the call of God or song of the prophets in the Shema the call and response patterns for each and everyone one of us. See, scripture almost never presents the names of Christ as labels or interchangeable titles. Instead, each name is used as a theological window into a particular office, covenant role, or relationship. In Revelation especially, Christ becomes linguistically surrounded by names that reveal the fullness of his calling and covenant identity.

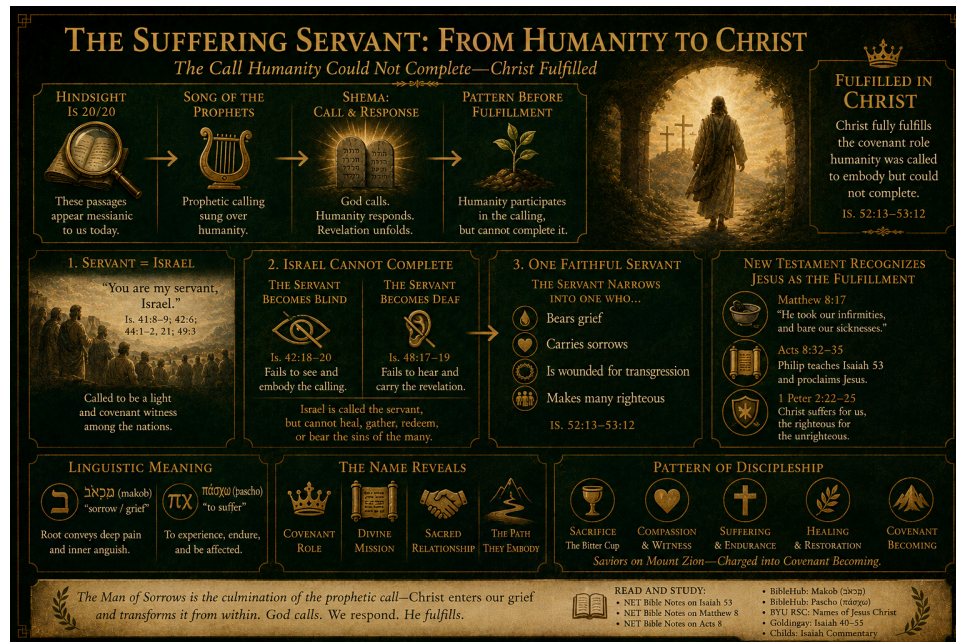
He is called “The Word of God,” identifying him as the expression from the breath of God that gives life and the revelatory presence through whom creation, covenant, and truth enter the world (John 1:1–14; Revelation 19:13; Genesis 1:3; Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 1:1–3; He is “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lords,” sources in His sovereignty and covenant kingship over all earthly powers and dominions (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:2–3; Daniel 2:47; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:16; He is the “Root and Offspring of David,” simultaneously existing before David while also entering David’s covenant lineage, creating a theological paradox for many where Christ becomes both the source and fulfillment of covenant kingship itself (Isaiah 11:1–10; Matthew 22:41–46; Mark 12:35–37; Revelation 5:5; Revelation 22:16; He is the “Bright and Morning Star,” imagery deeply connected to light, divine guidance, kingship, resurrection, and the dawn of new creation emerging from darkness (Numbers 24:17; Isaiah 14:12; Malachi 4:2; 2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 2:28; Revelation 22:16; Revelation also presents Christ bearing “a name written, that no man knew, but he himself,” where even for Christ there is an internal narrative driver reserved just for Him. Linguistically, the many names of Christ teach us how covenant identity in scripture is layered, relational, and transformative. Christ is revealed through names because names in the ancient world often communicated source, authority, covenant belonging, mission, and relationship. This is important for discipleship as the scriptural pattern shows us how sacred names are there to teach us covenant purpose and relationship through God. The names of Christ therefore become patterns of becoming that each and every one of us must experience. These names are the charges given in the temple of Solomon by the weavers weaving the narratives of life (chavah). To receive a sacred name in scripture is to receive a path into Christlike identity, where disciples slowly participate in the offices, attributes, mission, and covenant life revealed through Christ’s many names.

Readings:

- [NET Bible Notes on Revelation 19](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Revelation 22](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Revelation 2](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Logos \(Λόγος, “Word”\)](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Onoma \(ὄνομα, “Name”\)](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Aster \(ἀστήρ, “Star”\)](#)
- [Jesus the Christ by James E. Talmage](#)
- [Guide to the Scriptures: Names and Titles of Jesus Christ](#)



Let's look at one name of Christ like the title “Man of Sorrows,” which comes from Isaiah 53:3 describing the suffering servant who is “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” What becomes important for us linguistically and theologically is understanding that these names and titles begin through the song of the prophets, the Shema, the covenant call and response pattern between God and humanity where revelation descends from God and humanity responds, embodies, struggles with, and defines that revelation through lived covenant experience. In many ways, this is how prophetic revelation always functions throughout scripture. God calls, humanity responds, and that response becomes the living narrative through which revelation unfolds into history itself. The suffering servant in Isaiah therefore first functions as a prophetic and covenant pattern being sung into Israel before it ever reaches its complete fulfillment in Christ. As a diachronic linguist I think that people fail to understand this properly. History is Isaiah is calling humanity into the pattern of covenant suffering, faithful witness, redemptive sacrifice, and participation in the grief and healing of the world itself. Humanity can participate in that calling, embody aspects of it, and move toward it, but the pattern ultimately culminates fully and perfectly only in Christ. This is why the New Testament authors immediately recognize Jesus within Isaiah's servant framework. Matthew explicitly identifies Christ's healing ministry with Isaiah 53 by declaring that Christ “took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matthew 8:17; Isaiah 53:4), while Acts 8:32–35 presents Philip teaching the Ethiopian eunuch directly from Isaiah 53 and proclaiming Jesus as the fulfillment of the suffering servant prophecy itself. Early Christians therefore were not randomly assigning poetic messianic titles to Jesus. They were tracing covenant patterns already embedded within the song of scripture and identifying Christ as the fullness and completion of those prophetic trajectories.



Hindsight is 20/20, and to our modern eyes these passages seem obviously and exclusively messianic, but linguistically and covenantally the suffering servant in Isaiah is first presented as a prophetic calling sung over humanity before it is ever fully realized in Christ. Isaiah itself proves this pattern because the “servant” is first explicitly identified as Israel: “You are my servant, Israel,” the chosen seed called to be a light and covenant witness among the nations (Isaiah 41:8–9; 42:6; 44:1–2, 21; 49:3). Yet Isaiah also shows that this servant people cannot fully complete the calling because the servant becomes “blind” and “deaf,” failing to hear and embody the very revelation they were called to carry (Isaiah 42:18–20; 48:17–19). This creates the linguistic and theological bitterness of humanity inside Isaiah itself. Israel is called the servant, but Israel cannot fully heal, gather, redeem, or bear the sins of the many. Then the servant language narrows into one faithful figure who bears grief, carries sorrows, is wounded for transgression, and makes many righteous (Isaiah 52:13–53:12). Christ therefore does not replace Isaiah’s servant pattern from the outside. He fulfills the covenant role Israel and humanity were called to embody but could not complete, which is why the New Testament directly reads Isaiah 53 through Jesus’ healing, suffering, death, and redemptive mission (Matthew 8:17; Acts 8:32–35; 1 Peter 2:22–25). Linguistically, “Man of Sorrows” becomes the culmination of that entire prophetic trajectory because Christ fully enters humanity’s grief, pain, rejection, exile, injustice, and death in order to redeem and transform it from within, succeeding where covenant humanity continually fractures beneath the weight of the calling itself (Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Matthew 8:17; Acts 8:32–35). This is one of the clearest examples of how the names of Christ function throughout scripture and is found in the narratives of life and the new names given to the children of God. Each title reveals the covenant role, mission, relationship, and path they embody. Theologically, this also becomes the pattern of discipleship itself as to receive sacred identity through Christ means participating in those same covenant trajectories of sacrifice, compassion, witness, suffering the bitter cup, endurance, healing, and transformation. Being saviors on Mount Zion is the charge into covenant becoming, prophetic participation, and the slow transformation of humanity into the image of the Son through the ongoing call and response pattern between God and His children.

Readings:

- [NET Bible Notes on Isaiah 53](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Matthew 8](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Acts 8](#)
- [BibleHub Hebrew Study of Makob \(מַכּוֹב, “sorrow/grief”\)](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Study of Pascho \(πάσχω, “to suffer”\)](#)



Gnostic and Mandaean Comparison

Before we finish our study of sacred names, covenant identity, and transformation traditions in the ancient world, it becomes important to define Gnosticism carefully because the term itself is a modern scholarly umbrella category used to describe a wide range of diverse religious movements and theological systems that existed throughout the early Christian and late antique world. Modern scholarship recognizes that the groups we’ve labeled “gnostic” were actually a collection of overlapping traditions, texts, cosmologies, and communities that often differed significantly from one another in doctrine, ritual practice, and theology. As it is very natural to over simplify what we don’t understand. As even Encyclopedia Britannica notes that the category itself remains debated among scholars for how broad and varied these traditions actually were. However, what becomes historically important for our study is that some of the currents later labeled “gnostic” were much closer to the center of early Christian theological than many modern readers realize. People like Valentinus established influential schools in Rome and Alexandria, and Valentinian Christianity became one of the most significant intellectual and theological competitors to emerging orthodox Christianity during the second and third centuries. This is really important to understand as the earliest traditions show how Christian’s knew

there was more to the gospel, lost sacred knowledge, covenant identity, ascent traditions, ritual transformation, hidden names, heavenly journeys, and symbolic rebirth were part of this larger religious organization. The Mandaeans give us another example as their religious traditions show strong connections to ritual washings, baptismal identity, sacred naming practices, esoteric knowledge, heavenly ascent, and covenant transformation rooted within late antique Mesopotamian religious culture. Their traditions include ritual names, water rites, priestly initiations, symbolic garments, seals, and hidden knowledge connected to salvation and divine ascent. These key parallels are valuable for our study as they help modern readers recover how seriously the ancient world treated ritual identity, sacred naming, covenant transformation, and hidden knowledge. In these traditions we find the same echoes of a world where names were understood as revelations of identity, vocation, authority, covenant belonging, and divine relationship.

Readings:

- [Encyclopaedia Britannica: Gnosticism](#)
- [The Gnostic Society Library](#)
- [Mandaean Association Overview](#)
- [Early Christian Writings: Gospel of Thomas](#)
- [BYU Studies on Early Christianity and Gnostic Texts](#)
- [NET Bible Notes on Revelation 2](#)