



Welcome to the final lesson. This is the culmination of everything we've been building toward this entire course. We now be able to see the historical transition of the New Testament period in a realistic way. By studying the diachronic linguistics of the contemporary texts right after the fall of the temple in 70CE it becomes so very clear why Christianity looks so different from the primal nascent church of Christ.



So what we are going to do in this lesson is trace the transformation of Christianity from the small Duras Europos gatherings of oppressed priesthood in individual homes which taught the temple through simple individual and small groups sacred meal lessons to the institutional Christian empire of Constantine. We will dive into the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Scrolls of Qumran. Hopefully by this point in the course, especially after the last lesson we can see how there us not good versus bad, right versus wrong here in history. We should move beyond those absolutes and see how all of these materials help us create a realistic and informed narrative. So we will dive into the Context of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the community of Qumran. We will explore the mysticism of Thomas and examine the most popular scripture of the early Christian church after the fall of the temple in 70CE. We will see the role of women in the early church we will see the origins of Christmas rooted in the Mother. And we will see the transformation and survival of the temple tokens, signs and symbols move inward whole under oppression.



After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD under the Roman general Titus, early Christians were caught in a prolonged period of instability, marginalization, and at times severe persecution under Roman authority. Between roughly 70 and 313 AD, before the Edict of Milan legalized Christianity under Constantine, believers gathered in private homes in small groups, if they met out of home it was still in small groups at inconspicuous locations like catacombs or hidden communal spaces where their worship was centered around shared meals, covenant fellowship, Scripture reading, prayer, and the Eucharist. All of which was easily written off as parole gathering for a meal. These gatherings were what preserved temple memory but required it to be in a transformed way. Focusing on a the covenant community as the dwelling place of God, the Ekklesia (ἐκκλησία) or the called out ones, those that have gathered, echoing passages such as 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 2:19–22, and 1 Peter 2:5. Early sources such as the *Didache* (ca. 70–120 AD), Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110 AD), Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (ca. 155 AD), and *The Shepherd of Hermas* (ca. 90–140 AD) show us how communities were attempting to maintain their covenant identity, and try to engage the divine in-dwelling presence of God while living under this political suspicion and intermittent persecution.

Modern scholarship recognizes that these early Christian meal traditions were not ideal symbolic memorials, but required sacred covenant acts and motions connected to temple theology, communal embodiment, and divine indwelling. Larry Hurtado, Andrew McGowan, Margaret Barker, and Everett Ferguson that the Eucharist preserved patterns of sacred participation inherited from their Jewish liturgical traditions and the Second Temple covenant meals of the Holy Room of the Temple. The family table became a micro sanctuary where believers would wash themselves pray and reenacted the presence of Christ through bread, wine, prayer, and communal unity. Archaeological evidence from early house churches like the Dura Europos in Syria, dated to roughly 232 AD, prove how these domestic spaces were being adapted into the modified temples long before the great basilicas emerged from Constantine. The temple was not abandoned by early Christianity as modern Christianity assumed. It was reframed in oppression.

Readings:

Didache (Early Christian Worship)

<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>

Justin Martyr, First Apology 65–67 (Eucharist and House Church Worship)

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm>

Ignatius of Antioch (Unity and Eucharist)

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0109.htm>

The Shepherd of Hermas

<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/shepherd.html>

Dura Europos House Church Overview

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-rome/dura-europos-house-church/>

Andrew McGowan on Early Christian Meals and Eucharist

<https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/3221>

New Advent Church Fathers Collection

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>

Early Christian Writings Database

<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/>

THE TEMPLE WAS THE PATTERN

The same sacred architecture repeated across time, space, and revelation.

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE
1 Kings 6–8

Most Holy Place
Holy Place
Altar
Courtyard

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built!"
— 1 Kings 8:27

QUMRAN COMMUNITY
1QS – Community Rule

1 Entrance
2 Assembly Hall
3 Dining Hall
4 Kitchens
5 Gateways
6 Scripatorium
7 Living Quarters

"And all the congregation shall be in one place and there shall be no divisions among them."
— 1QS 6:2

EARLY CHRISTIAN BASILICA
House Churches to Basilicas

Apsē – Sanctuary
Nave – People
Baptistry – New Birth
Altar – Sacrifice
Ambulatory – Path of Procession

"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"
— 1 Corinthians 3:16

THE HUMAN BODY
1 Corinthians 6:19

Mind – Holy of Holies (Union with God)
Heart – Holy Place (Throne of Christ)
Will – Altar (Sacrifice)
Body – Court (Living Sanctuary)

"Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you."
— 1 Corinthians 6:19

THE PATTERN REMAINS. THE LOCATION CHANGES. THE PURPOSE ENDURES.
From stone to community, from building to body, the Temple lives wherever God's presence dwells among His people.

KEY LINGUISTIC FOCUS

Ναός
(naós)
Greek for "temple, sanctuary"
Used of buildings, but also of the body and the community (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19)

היכל
(hetikhal)
Hebrew for "palace, temple, sanctuary"
Refers to the inner sanctuary and the dwelling place of the Divine Presence

Body as Temple
The human person is the dwelling place of God's Spirit and the seat of worship.

Church as Living Sanctuary
A people set apart, built together as a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5)

CONTINUITY OF SACRED ARCHITECTURE

Israelite Temple Cosmology
Heaven mirrored on earth.

Qumran Sacred Community
Covenant community as a temple in the wilderness.

New Testament Ecclesiology
Christ and the believers as the true temple.

Living Sanctuary Today
The Spirit dwells in His people and among them.

SOURCES

- Acts 2–4 The early community and shared life
- Didache Early Christian instruction and order
- Shepherd of Hermas Vision of the Church as a tower
- Gospel of Thomas Sayings on the Kingdom within
- 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 Believers as God's temple
- Margaret Barker Temple themes in early Christianity
- Larry Hurtado *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*
- Geza Vermes *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*
- Florentino García Martínez *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*

As these early Christian communities continued adapting temple theology inward during the second and third centuries AD, the meaning of the temple itself increasingly became associated with the transformation of humanity into the dwelling place of divine presence. Rather than viewing the temple as merely a sacred building in Jerusalem, early Christians increasingly understood it as a symbolic pattern teaching covenant ascent, sacred participation, purification, and union with God through Christ. This is why passages such as John 2:19–21, Hebrews 8–10, 1 Corinthians 3:16–17, 1 Corinthians 6:19, Ephesians 2:19–22, and Revelation 21:22 become so important because the temple is progressively relocated from sacred geography into Christ, the covenant community, and eventually the transformed human soul itself. Paul's use of the Greek word ναός (*naos*), pronounced nah OSS, referring specifically to the indwelling sanctuary rather than the larger temple complex, becomes extremely significant because believers themselves increasingly become identified as the sacred dwelling place of God. Scholars such as Margaret Barker, G. K. Beale, Larry Hurtado, N. T. Wright, Crispin Fletcher Louis, and Jonathan Pageau note that early Christianity preserved ancient temple cosmology while reframing it around divine indwelling and transformed covenant identity. The outer court, holy place, and most holy place increasingly functioned as symbolic representations of humanity's movement from chaos toward holiness and from mortality toward divine life. By the time we reach Revelation 21:22, the trajectory reaches its culmination when John states, "I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." The final temple was no longer merely architecture. The temple becomes transformed humanity fully dwelling in the presence of God.

Readings:

G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*

<https://www.ivpress.com/the-temple-and-the-church-s-mission>

Jonathan Pageau on Temple Symbolism

<https://thesymbolicworld.com/>

Hebrews 8 Interlinear Greek

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/hebrews/8.htm>

1 Corinthians 3 Interlinear Greek

https://biblehub.com/interlinear/1_corinthians/3.htm

Revelation 21 Interlinear Greek

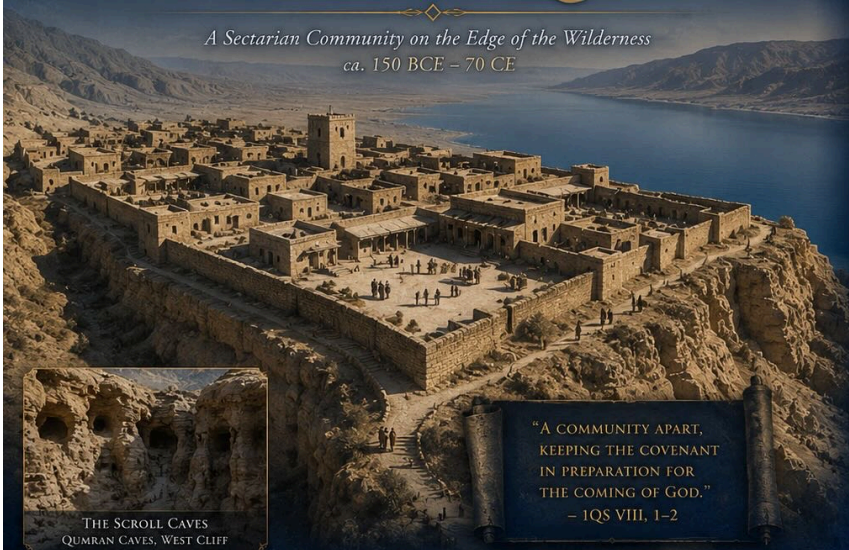
<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/revelation/21.htm>

SECTION II

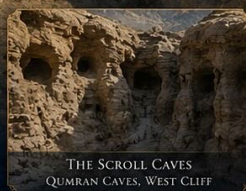
QUMRAN AND THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

THE CITY OF QUMRAN

A Sectarian Community on the Edge of the Wilderness
ca. 150 BCE – 70 CE



"A COMMUNITY APART,
KEEPING THE COVENANT
IN PREPARATION FOR
THE COMING OF GOD."
– 1QS VIII, 1-2



THE SCROLL CAVES
QUMRAN CAVES, WEST CLIFF

SOURCES



JOSEPHUS
Jewish War 2.119–161
Antiquities 18.18–23
Describes the Essenes and their way of life.



COMMUNITY RULE (1QS)
The foundational text of the Qumran community. Outlines covenant, purity, and community structure.



WAR SCROLL (1QM)
Apocalyptic vision of the final battle between the sons of light and the sons of darkness.



ARCHAEOLOGY OF QUMRAN
Excavations reveal a planned community with *mikva'ot*, scriptoria, storerooms, and a unique way of life.

TEACHING POINTS



Sectarian Jewish Community
A covenantal community separated from the corrupt temple system.



Apocalyptic Worldview
Expectation of final judgment and the coming Kingdom of God.



Ritual Purity
Strict laws of purity in thought, word, and deed.



Solar Calendar
A 364-day calendar aligned with cosmic order and light.



Covenant Community
Living in obedience to the covenant while awaiting divine intervention.

The discovery of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 completely transformed modern scholarship surrounding Second Temple Judaism and the Christian world. Prior to the scroll discoveries, scholars imagined Judaism during the first century as unified, but the scrolls proved a world with competing interpretations on covenant identity, temple legitimacy, ritual purity, sacred calendars, messianic expectation, and the coming kingdom of God. Imagine if records were found of Christianity today. The most prevalent writings would certainly not represent the true takings of Christ. The Qumran settlement is located northwest of the Dead Sea along the edge of the Judean wilderness, it was an organized covenant community from 150 BC until around 68–70 AD when Roman campaigns during the First Jewish Revolt likely destroyed or forced abandonment of the settlement shortly before the fall of Jerusalem under Titus in 70 AD. Archaeological excavations revealed a very intentional religious society complete with assembly rooms, ritual immersion pools of chaotic living waters (*mikva'ot*), storage facilities, water systems, communal dining areas, and scribal workspaces where many of the scrolls were likely copied and preserved. They are thought to be of the Essenes, though scholars still debate the exact relationship between the Essenes and the Qumran community. What makes Qumran so important for us is understanding how strongly its theology parallels themes later found throughout early Christianity. The Community Rule (1QS), the War Scroll, the Damascus Document, and other sectarian texts reveal a covenant community that believed the Jerusalem priesthood had become corrupted during the Hasmonean period and that true covenant fidelity now required withdrawal into the wilderness in preparation for divine intervention and restoration. Their worldview was apocalyptic, as they were expecting an imminent cosmic conflict between the “Sons of Light” and the “Sons of Darkness,” language that closely parallels themes later found in John, Paul, and other New Testament writings. Ritual purity, sacred meals, covenant hierarchy, initiation rituals, communal ownership, and strict interpretations of holiness all shaped life at Qumran, while their adoption of a 364 day solar calendar demonstrates how they connected sacred time, the notion of balanced heavenly order, and covenant identity together. The wilderness was symbolic temple space where a renewed Israel would be prepared for the coming kingdom of God outside what they viewed as compromised

institutional systems in Jerusalem. Christianity is located in this same theological category. The Dead Sea Scrolls help us see the exact atmosphere that produces the New Testament.

Readings:

Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library

<https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/>

Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*

<https://brill.com/display/title/680>

The Community Rule (1QS) Translation

<https://www.essene.com/History&Essenes/md.htm>

Biblical Archaeology Society, Qumran Overview

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/dead-sea-scrolls/the-dead-sea-scrolls-and-the-essenes/>

Israel Museum Qumran and Dead Sea Scrolls

<https://www.imj.org.il/en/wings/shrine-book/dead-sea-scrolls>

Josephus on the Essenes

<https://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/war-2.html>

Philo on the Essenes

<https://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book36.html>

1QS
THE COMMUNITY RULE

THE COMMUNITY RULE
1QS – THE RULE OF THE YAHAD

A COVENANT COMMUNITY SET APART FOR GOD
AT QUMRAN, CA. 150 BCE – 70 CE

1QS VI, 23–26

לְבָרְכָה לְעוֹלָם צִיּוֹן
לְבָרְכָה לְעוֹלָם צִיּוֹן
לְבָרְכָה לְעוֹלָם צִיּוֹן
לְבָרְכָה לְעוֹלָם צִיּוֹן
לְבָרְכָה לְעוֹלָם צִיּוֹן
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לְבָרְכָה לְעוֹלָם צִיּוֹן
לְבָרְכָה לְעוֹלָם צִיּוֹן
לְבָרְכָה לְעוֹלָם צִיּוֹן

מִיִּכְלֵי הָרִיזֹר וְהַגִּיטָה
מִיִּכְלֵי הָרִיזֹר וְהַגִּיטָה
מִיִּכְלֵי הָרִיזֹר וְהַגִּיטָה
מִיִּכְלֵי הָרִיזֹר וְהַגִּיטָה
מִיִּכְלֵי הָרִיזֹר וְהַגִּיטָה
מִיִּכְלֵי הָרִיזֹר וְהַגִּיטָה
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מִיִּכְלֵי הָרִיזֹר וְהַגִּיטָה
מִיִּכְלֵי הָרִיזֹר וְהַגִּיטָה
מִיִּכְלֵי הָרִיזֹר וְהַגִּיטָה

"All who join the community shall be in one place and there shall be no divisions among them."
– 1QS VI, 2

KEY CONCEPTS

- COVENANT RENEWAL**
The community continually renews its covenant with God through confession, commitment, and obedience to His instructions.
- RITUAL PURITY**
Purity is required in thought, word, deed, and dwelling. Separation from impurity marks the community as holy.
- SACRED HIERARCHY**
A divinely ordained structure of roles and responsibilities maintains order, teaching, and discipline.
- TEMPLE REPLACEMENT IDEOLOGY**
The community sees itself as the true Israel, replacing the corrupt Jerusalem priesthood as the dwelling place of God on earth.

SOURCES

- DEAD SEA SCROLLS TRANSLATIONS**
See E. Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Brill, 2006) and the Official DSS Translations (Dead Sea Scrolls Publication Project).
- GEZA VERMES**
The Dead Sea Scrolls in English (Penguin Classics, 1997)
- FLORENTINO GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ**
The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated (Eerdmans, 1996–2018)

LINGUISTIC NOTES

יָהָד
(yahad) means "together," "united," "community," or "unity."
It appears over 100 times in the Community Rule.

The covenant terminology mirrors Sinai:

- Covenant
- Law
- Holiness
- Blessing and Curse
- Communal Responsibility

THE COMMUNITY AT QUMRAN SAW ITSELF AS THE TRUE TEMPLE OF GOD, A HOLY PEOPLE PREPARING THE WAY FOR HIS KINGDOM.

וְהָאֵלֹהִים כָּל
הַנִּכְנָסִים בְּיָחִיד
לְעֵדָה אֶחָת

And all who join the community shall be in one place and there shall be no divisions among them.
– 1QS VI, 2

The *Community Rule* (1QS), also called the *Serekh ha Yahad* (סֵרֶךְ הַיָּהָד), meaning "Rule of the Covenant Community," is one of the most important texts discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls because it provides us a direct window into how the Qumran community organized itself spiritually, socially, ritually, and politically

between this critical time of Christ in 150 BC and 70 AD. The Hebrew term *יָהָד* (*yahad*), pronounced yah KHAD, means “unity,” “togetherness,” or “covenant community,” and the text repeatedly emphasizes that holiness was achieved through participation in an ordered covenant society preparing for the coming kingdom of God. The Community Rule shows their initiation rituals, covenant oaths, sacred meals, ritual immersion practices (*mikva’ot*), communal property systems, leadership hierarchy, disciplinary structures, purity regulations, and apocalyptic expectations surrounding the final conflict between light and darkness. The Qumran community saw itself as the true remnant of Israel after what they believed was the corruption of the Jerusalem priesthood during the Hasmonean period, which caused them to withdraw into the wilderness as a renewed covenant society awaiting divine restoration. They practiced similar Christian rituals like sacred community, ritual purity, covenant meals, messianic expectation, “children of light,” wilderness preparation, and communal holiness which later appear throughout the New Testament world because Christianity is born from this broader Second Temple theological pattern. This Zion mentality is key to the community of Qumran. We see it clearly with consistent comments like “And all who join the community shall be in one place and there shall be no divisions among them” (1QS VI, 2) and their emphasis on how unity itself is the mirrored architecture where the covenant people collectively became the dwelling place of God’s presence.

Readings:

Community Rule (1QS) Translation

<https://www.essene.com/History&Essenes/md.htm>

THE RAISED ARM TO THE SQUARE

COVENANT GESTURES AND SACRED RESPONSIBILITY



ANCIENT COVENANT
OATH GESTURE
(ASSYRIAN RELIEF)

“I will lift up my eyes to the mountains;
From where shall my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.”
— PSALM 121:1–2

TEACHING FOCUS



RAISED HAND RITUALS IN COVENANT SETTINGS
Across the ancient Near East, raising the hand signified calling heaven and earth as witnesses to one’s words and entering into binding agreement.



OATH GESTURES IN SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM
Jewish texts and practices reflect oath-taking with uplifted hands as a sign of truth, dedication, and appeal to God as witness.

1QS VIII, 14–15

... וכל איש מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל
יִתֵּן אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר
יִבְקֹשׁ לֹו מִעֲשׂוֹת
... כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִוְדֶּה ...

“... and every man of Israel shall *yahad* with all that they command him to do, as they shall direct ...”

A SACRED GESTURE OF COMMITMENT,
WITNESS, AND RESPONSIBILITY
BEFORE GOD AND THE COMMUNITY.

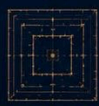
SACRED RESPONSIBILITY BEFORE GOD
The raised arm expresses readiness to obey, to act justly, and to bear consequences under divine authority.

COMPARE CAREFULLY

While gestures of oath and dedication share common elements across cultures, we avoid claiming direct continuity. Rather, we observe meaningful patterns of sacred symbolism, communal identity, and divine witness that illuminate the worldview of Qumran and early Judaism.

VISUALIZING THE SQUARE

QUMRAN’S COMMUNITY SAW THEMSELVES AS A HOLY ORDER.
A SPIRITUAL TEMPLE BUILT ON COVENANT FIDELITY.





THE TEMPLE
Built of Stone

THE COMMUNITY
Built of Covenant

THE INDIVIDUAL
Built as a Living Stone

CONNECTING THE PATTERN



Acting in representation of the covenant community



Bearing divine responsibility before God and others

SOURCES

1QS – Community Rule (1QS VIII, 14–15)
Psalm 141:2 – “Let my prayer be set forth in Your sight as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”
Temple Liturgical Studies – J. T. Milik, Jacob Neusner, Lawrence Schiffman
Comparative ANE Oath Rituals – K. Lawson Younger Jr., Mark S. Smith, Michael S. Heiser

“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT.”
AND THESE WORDS ... SHALL BE ON YOUR HAND AS A SIGN AND ON YOUR FOREHEAD AS A MEMORIAL.” – DEUTERONOMY 6:5–8



The *Community Rule* (1QS), also called the *Serekh ha Yahad* (סֵרֶךְ הַיָּהָד), meaning “Rule of the Covenant Community,” also shows us how the Qumran community understood itself as a living covenant body preparing the way for the coming kingdom of God between during these times of transition, 150 BC to 70 AD. Members

entered into a sacred communal order where the divine presence was experienced collectively through the *yahad* (יְהָדָה), pronounced yah KHAD, meaning “unity,” “togetherness,” or “covenant community.” It was the sacred symbol of the messiah carried through many different Jewish traditions. The Community Rule describes initiation rites, communal voting systems, covenant oaths, ritual immersion, sacred meals, hierarchical leadership, and public commitments where members symbolically entered into the ordered life of the covenant body through the communal sign of yahad. In several passages, communal decisions is connected to the raising of hands or this sign of yahad the visible acts of covenant assent in God and the assembly, the broader ancient Near Eastern oath gestures where uplifted hands invoking the divine witness and communal accountability. We see this in 1QS VIII, 14–15 where each member of Israel must *yahad* with the community “according to all that has been commanded,” this creates a system where the covenant people themselves acted as representatives of Yahweh in yahad becoming responsible for preserving others on behalf of the whole body. Raising the arm or hand was your sign of willingness to bear covenant responsibility for the success, purity, and endurance of the community before God. This linguistically connects why later Christian language is surrounding “one body,” “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5), communal indwelling (1 Corinthians 3:16), and covenant unity from the Second Temple world. Qumran shows how long before Christianity, Jewish covenant groups were already exploring how sacred presence could move from temple geography into transformed covenant communities preparing for divine restoration.

Readings:

Community Rule (1QS) Translation

<https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/manuscript/1Q25-1>

Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library

<https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/>



The Qumran solar calendar, preserved in texts such as *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and the calendrical fragments discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, is one of the clearest examples of how Second Temple Jewish communities connected sacred mathematics, covenant identity, temple symbolism, and cosmic order into a unified theological system. The Qumran community rejected the lunar calendar used by the Jerusalem priesthood and instead followed a perfectly structured 364 day solar calendar composed of 52 weeks of 7 days each, divided into four equal quarters. This is enormously important because in the ancient world the lunar calendar was reflecting the sacred time and sacred order to come. The Qumran community believed the heavenly bodies moved according to divine precision established by God at creation, placing themselves in a perceived higher heaven from the heaven of the moon, echoing Genesis 1:14, Psalm 104:19, and Psalm 148:4. Their calendar ensured that festivals, Sabbaths, priestly rotations, and covenant assemblies always occurred on the same appointed days each year without interruption from shifting lunar cycles. Numbers were the theological language of precision. The number 364 symbolized cosmic completeness and harmony, while patterns of 7, 12, and 70 reflected creation cycles, covenant structure, tribal order, priestly governance, and apocalyptic chronology such as Daniel's "seventy weeks" in Daniel 9:24. Sacha Stern, Jonathan Ben Dov, James VanderKam, and Michael Wise argue that the Qumran calendar was how ancient Jewish communities viewed the temple as a microcosm of heaven, where the temple architecture, temple ritual, and sacred temple teachings on time all mirrored divine cosmic order. This also helps explain why early Jewish apocalyptic movements, including Christianity, connected heavenly signs, appointed times, sacred feasts, and covenant identity all together. Time itself was a big aspect of the temple system. To live according to the correct calendar was to live in harmony with heaven.

Readings:

Dead Sea Scrolls Calendar Texts Overview

<https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/learn-about-the-scrolls/calendars>

1 Enoch Calendar Sections Translation

<https://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/boe/>

Book of Jubilees Translation

<https://www.pseudepigrapha.com/jubilees/>

Article: The Qumran Calendar and Sacred Time

<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/calendar-at-qumran/>

Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library

<https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/>

THOMAS
THE HIDDEN SAYINGS

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

HIDDEN SAYINGS AND INNER AWAKENING

A SAYINGS GOSPEL FROM THE EARLY CHRISTIAN WORLD
CA. LATE 1ST – MID 2ND CENTURY AD

THE KINGDOM OF
THE FATHER IS
SPREAD UPON THE
EARTH, AND MEN
DO NOT SEE IT.
– THOMAS 113

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

DISCOVERED AT NAG HAMMADI, EGYPT
Found in 1945 as part of Codex II in the Nag Hammadi library. A cache of over 50 early Christian texts.

DATE
Usually dated between the late 1st and mid 2nd century AD. Some sayings may reflect earlier traditions.

NOT A NARRATIVE GOSPEL
Contains 114 sayings of Jesus. No birth, miracles, crucifixion, or resurrection stories. Focus is on hidden wisdom and awakening.

A DIVERSE EARLY CHURCH
Thomas reflects one stream of early Christianity that emphasized inner knowledge, spiritual transformation, and direct experience of the divine.

OPENING LINE
"These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down."
– GOSPEL OF THOMAS, PROLOGUE

KEY THEMES IN THOMAS

INNER KINGDOM
The kingdom is within and around you. Realize it, and you will see.

HIDDEN WISDOM
Spiritual truth is hidden in plain sight. Understanding comes through insight and interpretation.

TRANSFORMATION
Salvation is awakening to your true nature and union with the divine.

NO CRUCIFIXION EMPHASIS
Thomas does not center on atonement or the cross, but on wisdom and spiritual realization.

SEEING THE REALITY
"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have become believers."
– THOMAS 37

THEOLOGICAL TRAJECTORY

QUMRAN
Community as Covenant

→

PAUL
Believers as the Temple

→

HERMAS
Living Stones (Tower)

→

REVELATION
God Dwells Among His People

→

THOMAS
The Kingdom Within

WHY THOMAS MATTERS

- Shows the diversity of early Christianity
- Reflects Jewish mystical and apocalyptic roots
- Pushes temple symbolism inward even further
- Focuses on perception, awakening, and divine presence already here

THE KINGDOM IS ALREADY HERE.
THE PROBLEM IS PERCEPTION. THE SOLUTION IS AWAKENING.

The *Gospel of Thomas*, discovered near Nag Hammadi Egypt in 1945 as part of Codex II, is one of the most important discoveries in modern biblical scholarship for understanding the mysticism of early Christianity in the first and second centuries AD. Unlike the canonical gospels, Thomas contains no birth narrative, miracle cycles, crucifixion account, or resurrection appearances. Instead, it preserves 114 sayings attributed to Jesus, many centered on the mysteries of God in the hidden Wisdom and the inner awakening. Most scholars date the composition somewhere between the late first century and mid second century AD, much older than most texts though many believe certain sayings may preserve traditions that are even earlier and potentially independent of the Synoptic Gospels. The opening line describes the work as “the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke,” immediately shifting the focus away from narrative history and toward revelation through interpersonal interpretation and understanding. In sayings like Thomas 3 and Thomas 113, the kingdom of God becomes internalized: “The kingdom of the Father is spread upon the earth, and men do not see it.” This mystic text is less apocalyptic intervention, as Thomas frames salvation as awakening to divine reality already present within and around humanity through the body temple and sacred convent motions in the tabernacle of life. Elaine Pagels, April DeConick, Bentley Layton, Marvin Meyer, and James Robinson push how Thomas reflects a genuine stream of early Christian mystical and Wisdom traditions rooted within the broader world of Second Temple Judaism, apocalyptic expectation, and temple symbolism. This is so important when viewed alongside movements already discussed throughout this course. Qumran internalized sacred covenant community, Paul described believers as the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16), Hermas portrayed the church as a tower of living stones, and Revelation culminates with God dwelling directly among humanity in a physical temple (Revelation 21:22). Thomas pushes that movement inward. The inner sanctuary is consciousness itself. The kingdom is already present. The problem is perception. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi library forced

scholars to rethink assumptions about early Christianity as a single unified movement and revealed instead a diverse religious world wrestling with questions surrounding divine indwelling of the Feminine spirit of God, transformation, sacred knowledge, covenant identity, and humanity's reunification with God.

Readings:

The Gospel of Thomas Translation

<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas.html>

Early Christian Writings Database

<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/>



THE KINGDOM IS ALREADY HERE

AN INNER REALITY, HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

"The kingdom of the Father is spread upon the earth and men do not see it."
— GOSPEL OF THOMAS 113

THE KINGDOM WITHIN

The Gospel of Thomas reveals a wisdom tradition in which the kingdom is not a future event, but a present reality available to those who seek, see, and know themselves.

The journey is from outer religion to inner realization.

KEY TEACHING

The kingdom is not built by institutions. It is revealed through inner awakening and transformed consciousness.

CONTRASTING PATHS

INSTITUTIONAL SALVATION	VS.	MYSTICAL TRANSFORMATION
 • External authority • Hierarchy and control • Faith in systems • Future reward • Salvation granted		 • Inner awakening • Direct experience • Knowing the Self • Present reality • Transformation lived

LINGUISTIC THEMES

HIDDENNESS	REVELATION	SEEING	KNOWING
 The kingdom is present but veiled from ordinary sight.	 It is revealed to those who seek with a sincere heart.	 True seeing comes from inner sight, not the eyes.	 To know is to experience the truth within yourself.

SOURCES

 NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY The Gospel of Thomas is part of the Nag Hammadi Library, discovered in 1945 in Egypt. — Robinson, J. M. <i>The Nag Hammadi Library in English</i> (HarperOne, 2012)	 ELAINE PAGELS The Gospel of Thomas offers a radically different vision of Jesus—one focused on inner knowledge and the discovery of the divine within. — Pagels, Elaine. <i>The Gnostic Gospels</i> (Random House, 1979)	 APRIL D. DECONICK Thomas presents a spiritual path of self-discovery. It reflects a form of Christianity centered on the interior journey rather than external belief. — DeConick, April D. <i>The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation</i> (Polebridge, 2006)
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Thomas pushes this trajectory we have already been tracing further inward. The problem becomes perception itself. Transformation comes through awakening to the divine reality that is already here on earth but you are unable to see. Something already present around and within humanity. That is important historically as it develops directly alongside the same movements we already see emerging in Qumran, Paul, Revelation, and later Hermas, where sacred space progressively moves inward and through physical space in temple architecture until you come into covenant embodiment and divine indwelling that is already here on the earth but you cannot see. Elaine Pagels and April DeConick do a great job showing that Thomas preserves these esoteric traditions centered on Lady Wisdom, inner realization, and participation in divine presence through understanding and transformation. This is one of the major conceptual bridges into *The Shepherd of Hermas*,

where the covenant people themselves are portrayed as the living structure God is building upon the earth to be able to meet the Gods of this earth.

Readings:

The Gospel of Thomas Translation

<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas.html>

Nag Hammadi Library Overview

<https://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html>

THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS

THE CHURCH AS A LIVING TOWER

TEACHING POINTS



CHURCH AS LIVING TOWER
Hermas sees the church as a tower being built, not of wood or stone, but of the souls of righteous people.



TEMPLE SYMBOLISM
The imagery reflects the continuity of temple language—God dwells in a spiritual sanctuary made of His people.



REPENTANCE AND PURIFICATION
Visions emphasize repentance, purity, and washing as the foundation for building in the tower.



SPIRITUAL ASCENT
The virgins carrying stones represent the soul's journey upward through obedience, faith, and holiness.

"You are the tower which is being built, not with wood or stone, but with living stones—righteous men and women."
— SHEPHERD OF HERMAS, SIMILITUDE IX, 16

KEY THEME



THE CHURCH IS NOT A BUILDING.
THE CHURCH IS TRANSFORMED PEOPLE.



SOURCES

- SHEPHERD OF HERMAS
Similitudes V, VIII–IX
- EARLY CHURCH FATHERS
Clement of Rome
Tertullian
Origen



"LIKE LIVING STONES, YOU ALSO ARE BEING BUILT INTO A SPIRITUAL HOUSE, A HOLY PRIESTHOOD, TO OFFER SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES ACCEPTABLE TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST." — 1 PETER 2:5





"I saw a tower being built, not with wood or stone, but with living stones—righteous men and women."
— SHEPHERD OF HERMAS, SIMILITUDE IX, 16

The *Shepherd of Hermas*, is composed in Rome certainly between 90 and 140 AD, but most likely much earlier but later than 70 AD and preserves one of the clearest examples of how early Christianity reframed temple theology after the destruction of Jerusalem. Hermas presents the covenant community itself as a living temple under construction in the decoration of the temple. In the famous Tower Visions, like the *Similitude IX*, righteous men and women become “living stones” carried upward and fitted together into a holy structure where the Feminine God dwells among transformed people in this world. This imagery directly echoes passages in the canonical texts like 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 2:19–22, 1 Peter 2:5, and Revelation 21:22, where temple architecture is internalized into covenant identity and communal readiness. The text comes from this period when Christianity was still decentralized, visionary, and heavily shaped by persecution, repentance theology, ritual purity, and apocalyptic visions. Early Christians valued Hermas so highly that it was included in

Codex Sinaiticus alongside New Testament writings, and respected by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. Historically, Hermas is the favored scripture of this transitional stage of Christianity where the believers understood themselves as followers attending temple space, only under the oppressive rule where the participants being shaped had to create their homes as the temporary symbolic temples and best learned how they themselves were the final transformed temples. The architecture changes, but the symbolic pattern continues in their oppression.

Readings:

The Shepherd of Hermas

<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/shepherd.html>

Codex Sinaiticus Overview

<https://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>

Early Christian Writings Database

<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/>

THE LIVING TEMPLE

THE PEOPLE BECOME THE SANCTUARY

A DIVINE PATTERN ACROSS SCRIPTURE

From Qumran to the New Testament and Revelation, a consistent vision emerges:

God dwells not in buildings made with hands, but in transformed people.

COMPARATIVE WITNESS

HERMAS <i>The Shepherd of Hermas</i>  The church is a tower built of living stones. The virgins carry stones—the souls of the righteous—who become part of the structure. Similitude IX: The Tower	PAUL New Testament  Believers are God's temple. <i>"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"</i> 1 Corinthians 3:16 Ephesians 2:19–22	QUMRAN <i>Community Rule (1QS)</i>  The community is the true sanctuary. They are a holy house, built on the foundation of God's covenant. 1QS VIII, 15–16 IX, 9–10	REVELATION <i>The New Jerusalem</i>  The city has no temple, for the Lord God and the Lamb are its temple. The glory of God gives it light, and its people are the dwelling place. Revelation 21:22–23 Revelation 21:3
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SHARED PATTERN

PEOPLE BECOME THE SANCTUARY

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FROM STONE TO SOUL
Stones in Hermas symbolize individuals who are shaped and placed by God.
- 

INDWELT BY THE DIVINE
Paul teaches that God's Spirit dwells within believers—they are the temple.
- 

COVENANT COMMUNITY
Qumran saw the community as the holy dwelling of God's presence on earth.
- 

ETERNAL DWELLING
Revelation reveals the ultimate fulfillment: God dwells with His people, and they are His dwelling.



THIS IS THE LIVING TEMPLE
NOT BUILT BY HANDS, BUT FORMED BY GRACE.
GOD'S PRESENCE DWELLS IN A PEOPLE MADE HOLY.

SOURCES

 SHEPHERD OF HERMAS Similitudes V, VIII–IX Early Christian text (c. 2nd century) on the church as a tower built of living stones.	 NEW TESTAMENT 1 Corinthians 3:16 Ephesians 2:19–22 Believers are God's temple, built together as a dwelling for His Spirit.	 DEAD SEA SCROLLS 1QS (Community Rule) VIII, 15–16; IX, 9–10 The community is the sanctuary of the Most High, built on righteousness and covenant.	 BOOK OF REVELATION 21:22–23; 21:3 The New Jerusalem has no temple because God Himself and the Lamb are its temple.
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From the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran to Paul, Hermas, and the Book of Revelation, one of the most consistent symbolic trajectories in ancient Judaism and early Christianity is the relocation of temple space from large external edifices into transformed covenant people in their homes. The Qumran community viewed the Yahad, pronounced yah HAHD, or “the united covenant community,” as the true preserved sanctuary of God while the Jerusalem priesthood was seen as corrupted. Paul radicalizes this concept in passages like 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 2:19–22, and Romans 8 by teaching that believers themselves become the ναός (naos), pronounced nah OSS, the indwelling sanctuary where the Feminine Divine resides. Hermas continues this exact symbolic pattern in the second century by describing righteous men and women as “living stones” being assembled into a great tower, where transformed souls become the architecture of temple space. What emerges is a layered cosmology where the Kingdom of God already exists around and among humanity as a higher ordered reality overlapping the visible world. The problem is humanity’s inability to perceive and embody it fully. This is why texts like Luke 17:20–21, the Gospel of Thomas 113, Ephesians 4:13, and Revelation 21 repeatedly connect transformation, sanctification, and perception all together. Ancient temple theology becomes polysemous. The temple is simultaneously cosmic order, sacred community, transformed consciousness, covenant embodiment, and the meeting place between heaven and earth. The final temple is humanity restored into the image of divine order itself. In this framework, the coming Kingdom is future and already present, hidden beneath ordinary perception until individuals and communities become aligned with its image. Christianity internalized it into the process of human transformation.

Readings:

1 Corinthians 3:16 Interlinear and Greek Notes

https://biblehub.com/interlinear/1_corinthians/3-16.htm

Ephesians 2:19–22 Interlinear

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/ephesians/2-22.htm>

1 Peter 2:5 Interlinear

https://biblehub.com/interlinear/1_peter/2-5.htm

Revelation 21 Interlinear

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/revelation/21.htm>

The Shepherd of Hermas

<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/shepherd.html>

Community Rule (1QS) Translation

<https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/manuscript/1Q27-1>

G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*

<https://www.ivpress.com/the-temple-and-the-church-s-mission>

FROM MOVEMENT TO EMPIRE

THE IMPERIAL TURN IN CHRISTIANITY

TEACHING POINTS



**EDICT OF MILAN
313 AD**
Constantine issues the Edict of Milan, granting religious tolerance and legal status to Christianity throughout the empire.



IMPERIAL SPONSORSHIP
The emperor funds churches, clergy, and missions. Christianity gains resources and influence through imperial support.



CHRISTIANITY BECOMES STATE RELIGION
Under Theodosius I (380 AD), Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire.



SHIFT IN POWER STRUCTURES
Authority moves from the community of faith to the alliance of throne and altar.



HISTORICAL IMPACT

- The church transitions from a marginal movement to an imperial institution.
- Persecution ends, but new challenges emerge.
- Doctrinal unity becomes a political priority.
- Dissent is now seen as a threat to empire.

KEY EVENTS



313 AD
Edict of Milan



325 AD
Council of Nicaea



380 AD
Edict of Thessalonica



392 AD
Paganism restricted throughout the empire

SOURCES



EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA
In his work *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius presents Constantine as divinely chosen to bring peace and unity through Christianity.
– Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*



CONSTANTINE RECORDS
Inscriptions and imperial edicts reveal Constantine's role in shaping religious policy and promoting Christian unity.
– *Res Gestae Divi Constantini*



COUNCIL HISTORIES
Works by Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, and Theodoret record the imperial role in councils and doctrinal decisions.
– Ecclesiastical History

“THUS BY THE FAVOR OF GOD AND BY THINE EXCELLENT POLICY, THE WAY IS OPENED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD THAT THE NAME OF CHRIST IS MAGNIFIED.”

– EUSEBIUS, *VITA CONSTANTINI*, I.28

After the Edict of Milan in 313 AD under Constantine, Christianity rapidly transitioned from a persecuted covenant movement into an increasingly imperial institution tied to Roman political power. What had once existed primarily through decentralized house churches, communal meals, martyr traditions, and localized covenant communities now began moving into public basilicas, state sponsored councils, imperial funding systems, and centralized doctrinal authority. The Council of Nicaea in 325 AD became one of the clearest examples of this shift as theological unity increasingly became connected to imperial stability and political cohesion. Under Theodosius I, Christianity was formally established as the religion of the empire in 380 AD through the Edict of Thessalonica, and by 392 AD many traditional pagan practices had been restricted throughout the Roman world. Historians such as Eusebius of Caesarea describe Constantine almost as a divinely chosen ruler who unified empire and church together, while later historians like Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen preserve records of how doctrinal disputes increasingly became matters of imperial concern. Christianity did not simply disappear into empire, but its relationship with power fundamentally changed. The movement that once survived through hidden communal sanctuaries and covenant identity now began building sacred architecture openly across the empire itself.

Readings:

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2502.htm>

Edict of Milan Overview

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Edict-of-Milan>

Council of Nicaea Overview

<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11044a.htm>

CHRISTMAS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SACRED MEMORY

SLIDE 15

THE ORIGINAL DATE OF CHRIST'S BIRTH

TRADITIONS AND EVIDENCE SUGGEST EARLY CHRISTIANS ASSOCIATED CHRIST'S BIRTH WITH SPRING, NOT WINTER.

There is scholarly disagreement.

EARLY TRADITIONS POINT TO SPRING
Life, renewal, and creation themes



DECEMBER 25 EMERGENCE
Adopted by the Church in the 4th century



APRIL DATING TRADITIONS

Several early writers suggest Christ was born in April, during Passover season, linking His birth to the time of deliverance and new life.

SOURCES AND WITNESS

HIPPOLYTUS (c. 170–235)
In his *Commentary on Daniel*, Hippolytus states that Christ was born on April 2.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (c. 150–215)
References traditions placing the Incarnation in relation to the spring equinox.

MARCH 25 CONCEPTION TRADITIONS

By the 2nd–3rd centuries, March 25 became widely held as the date of the Annunciation and conception of Christ.

MARCH 25 CONCEPTION → ~9 MONTHS LATER → DECEMBER 25 BIRTH EMERGES

"We know that on the same day (March 25) the Word of God began to exist in the womb."
— CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *STROMATA* 1.21

CHRONOGRAPHY OF 354 (CALEDARIUS)

Lists prominent historical events and includes a reference to the birth of Christ on December 25 in Rome, marking one of the earliest known such records.

DECEMBER 25 EMERGENCE

In the 4th century, December 25 began to be observed in Rome, possibly influenced by existing winter solstice festivals.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- No New Testament date for Jesus' birth
- Early Christians focused on His death and resurrection, not birth
- December 25 appears in Rome around the mid-4th century
- Likely a strategic Christianization of popular pagan festivals

SCHOLARLY DISAGREEMENT REMAINS

Some scholars affirm early spring traditions. Others argue for liturgical development leading to December 25. The evidence is complex and open to interpretation.

PRIMARY SOURCES

HIPPOLYTUS
Commentary on Daniel

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA
Stromata 1.21

CHRONOGRAPHY OF 354 (CALEDARIUS)

By the second through fourth centuries AD, Christianity was layering the story of Christ onto temple symbols and festivals that already existed throughout the Roman world. The New Testament never gives a birth date for Jesus, and early Christians were originally much more focused on Christ's death, resurrection, and return than on celebrating His birth. Some of the earliest Christian traditions preserved by writers like Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 AD) and Hippolytus (ca. 170–235 AD) actually connect Christ more closely with springtime symbolism, Passover imagery, creation themes, lamb symbolism, and the season of new life. But by the late third and fourth centuries, after Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 AD, the church existed inside the ritual and symbolic world of the Roman Empire itself. December 25 already carried meaning throughout Roman society through Saturnalia, winter solstice celebrations, fertility festivals, sacred lights, and especially Sol Invictus, the "Unconquered Sun," promoted under Emperor Aurelian around 274 AD. What begins happening historically is not simply replacement, but reinterpretation. Light overcoming darkness, sacred rebirth, eternal life, cosmic renewal, evergreen symbolism, and heavenly kingship all become absorbed into a new Christ centered narrative. The symbols survive, but their theological meaning becomes reframed through Christianity as the faith moves from persecuted movement into imperial religion within the late Roman and Byzantine world.

Readings:

Chronography of 354 Overview

https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chronography_of_354_06_calendar.htm

Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*
<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02105.htm>

Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*
<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0502.htm>

Sol Invictus Overview
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sol-Invictus>

Saturnalia Overview
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Saturnalia-Roman-festival>

SOL INVICTUS AND THE WINTER SUN

THE CONVERGENCE OF SOLAR WORSHIP AND CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM

SLIDE 16

AURELIAN AND SOL INVICTUS



Emperor Aurelian (270–275 AD) officially promoted Sol Invictus as the supreme deity of the Roman Empire.

SOL INVICTUS THE UNCONQUERED SUN



Sol Invictus (“the Unconquered Sun”) symbolized victory, protection, and the eternal return of light.

THE WINTER SOLSTICE



The birthday of Sol Invictus was celebrated on December 25, coinciding with the winter solstice.

KEY IDEA



As the sun returns from darkness, so too does hope, life, and renewal.

FROM IMPERIAL SUN TO DIVINE LIGHT

The imagery, timing, and theology of the unconquered sun found new expression in Christian devotion.

“CHRIST IS THE TRUE LIGHT, WHO ENLIGHTENS EVERYONE COMING INTO THE WORLD.”

— JOHN 1:9

SOURCES

AURELIAN COINAGE



Coins from the 3rd century depict Sol Invictus with radiate crown and legend SOLI INVICTO COMITI.

ANCIENT HISTORIANS



Zosimus (1.68.3) and other sources record Aurelian’s establishment of the temple of Sol in Rome.

CHRISTIAN WRITERS



Lactantius, Eusebius, and others speak of Christ as the true light that dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin.

LIGHT RETURNING FROM DARKNESS



The winter solstice marks the turning point when light overcomes darkness—a powerful symbol of rebirth.

CHRIST AS COSMIC LIGHT



Christian writers began to describe Christ as the true Light of the world, the eternal Sun of Righteousness.

FROM SUN TO SON



Solar language and imagery were reinterpreted to proclaim Jesus as the divine source of light and life.

KEY CONCEPT



Christ becomes framed as the *Cosmic Light*, fulfilling and transcending the ancient hope of the returning sun.

By the late third century AD, especially under the emperor Aurelian around 270 to 275 AD, Sol Invictus became one of the most important symbols of imperial unity throughout the Roman world. Rome had just survived decades of civil war, military collapse, political instability, and fragmentation, and emperors increasingly used shared cosmic religion to restore social cohesion across the empire. Sol Invictus, meaning “the unconquered sun,” symbolized victory, divine authority, protection, and the eternal return of light after darkness. December 25 became associated with the rebirth of the sun after the winter solstice as daylight slowly began returning to the world. Long before Constantine, Christianity already possessed deeply

developed light symbolism through passages such as John 1:4–9, John 8:12, Malachi 4:2, and Ephesians 5:8 where Christ is repeatedly associated with divine light overcoming darkness, chaos, death, and spiritual blindness. What begins happening in the third and fourth centuries is not simple imitation, but symbolic overlap and recontextualization as Christianity moves deeper into the Roman imperial world. Solar imagery, radiant halos, cosmic kingship, sacred light, and heavenly victory increasingly become centered around Christological meaning rather than imperial solar worship itself. Historians such as Lactantius and Eusebius describe Christ through cosmic light imagery while Roman coinage, imperial art, and late antique mosaics preserve the visual language of radiant divine kingship throughout the empire. The symbols survive, but the theological center shifts. The unconquered sun becomes the victorious Christ. Light returning after darkness becomes resurrection and renewal. The heavens themselves become part of the symbolic language through which Christianity explains divine order, sacred kingship, and the hope of eternal life.

Readings:

John 1 Interlinear

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/john/1.htm>

Sol Invictus Overview

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sol-Invictus>

Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0701.htm>

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250>

EVERGREEN RITUALS AND THE MOTHER

SACRED TREES, FEMININE DIVINE, AND WINTER REBIRTH SYMBOLISM

SLIDE 17

TEACHING POINTS

- FERTILITY SYMBOLISM**
Evergreen trees represent enduring life, fertility, and the cycle of renewal.
- EVERGREEN LIFE IMAGERY**
Evergreens remain vibrant in winter, symbolizing life that persists through darkness.
- ANCIENT SACRED TREES**
Cultures worldwide honored sacred trees as dwelling places of the divine.
- ASHERAH POLE TRADITIONS**
Asherah poles and sacred trees were associated with the Divine Feminine in ancient Israel.
- WINTER REBIRTH SYMBOLISM**
Winter festivals celebrate the dying sun's rebirth and the return of light.

CONTEXT AND CARE

While symbolic parallels exist between ancient practices and modern traditions, the historical record does not support a direct lineage from Asherah worship to the Christmas tree.

IMPORTANT NUANCE

Avoid overstating direct historical continuity between Asherah worship and modern Christmas trees.

SHARED SYMBOLIC PATTERNS

Many cultures express similar themes through trees, light, and renewal.

SACRED TREE CONTINUITY

The veneration of trees as holy is an ancient and widespread human practice.

RITUAL ADAPTATION

Religious symbols often adapt across time and cultural contexts.

KEY THEMES

- Life in the midst of death
- The Divine Feminine
- Sacred presence in nature
- Light returning from darkness
- Hope and renewal

RITUAL ADAPTATION THROUGH TIME

Religious traditions often absorb and transform existing symbols, reinterpreting them within new theological frameworks.

SOURCES AND EVIDENCE

DEUTERONOMISTIC REFORMS

Texts describe the removal of Asherah poles and sacred trees from Israelite worship sites (2 Kings 23:6; Deut. 16:21).

ARCHAEOLOGY OF ASHERAH

Archaeological evidence confirms the widespread presence of Asherah figures and poles in ancient Israel and Judah.

WINTER SOLSTICE TRADITIONS

Cultures across Europe and the Near East celebrated the returning sun with tree rituals and light festivals.

SATURNALIA CUSTOMS

Roman Saturnalia (Dec. 17–23) included greenery, gift-giving, feasting, and decorations in honor of renewal and abundance.

★ Sacred symbols endure because they speak to timeless human experience. UNDERSTANDING PATTERNS ENRICHES, IT DOES NOT DIMINISH FAITH. ★

By the fourth century AD, especially after Christianity became legalized under Constantine following the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, older winter symbolism from across the Roman and Near Eastern world increasingly became absorbed into Christian sacred memory surrounding the birth of Christ. Winter festivals connected to Saturnalia, Sol Invictus, evergreen rituals, sacred light ceremonies, and fertility symbolism had long celebrated life continuing through darkness, the rebirth of light after the solstice, communal feasting, gift giving, candles, sacred greenery, and cosmic renewal. In older West Semitic traditions, sacred trees and wooden poles associated with Asherah often symbolized divine motherhood, fertility, wisdom, life, and heavenly presence, with archaeological evidence from sites such as Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el Qom confirming that tree and mother imagery were deeply embedded within parts of ancient Israelite religious culture before the Deuteronomistic reforms of the seventh century BC. Over time, many of these symbolic systems continued evolving rather than disappearing. The evergreen tree increasingly became associated with life enduring through winter death, candles symbolized divine light and sacred wisdom entering darkness, and gifts reflected heavenly blessings and hidden spiritual gifts revealed to humanity. Early Christians already associated Christ, the Spirit, and divine wisdom with light imagery through passages such as John 1:4–9 and John 14–16 where the Paraclete becomes the divine presence dwelling among humanity. By the time Constantine died in 337 AD, Christianity had fully entered the symbolic world of empire, increasingly reinterpreting older cosmic and seasonal imagery through Christological theology rather than erasing it outright. The symbols survived because they spoke to recurring human experiences of hope, rebirth, divine presence, sacred motherhood, and light overcoming darkness. Christianity reframed those symbols into a new sacred story centered on Christ, the Spirit, eternal life, and the restoration of divine order.

Readings:

Mark S. Smith on Asherah and Israelite Religion

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/hebrew-bible/asherah-goddess-canaan/>

John 1 Interlinear

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/john/1.htm>

John 14 Interlinear (Paraclete Traditions)

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/john/14.htm>

Saturnalia Overview

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Saturnalia-Roman-festival>

SACRIFICE OF THE PREGNANT GOAT

A RITUAL REPORTED UNDER ROMAN RULE

TEACHING POINTS



ROMAN DOMINATION

Judea was under the political and military control of the Roman Empire.



RITUAL ATTESTED

Ancient sources report a ritual in which a pregnant goat was sacrificed.



SYMBOLIC PURPOSE

The ritual was believed to bring misfortune upon the enemy—a form of imprecatory magic.



JEWISH PRACTICE UNDER ROME

These records indicate that some Jewish groups practiced this ritual while living under Roman rule.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Such practices existed within the broader world of Second Temple Judaism and were not unique to one sect.



THE KINGDOM OF ROME IMPERATOR CAESAR

RULER OF JUDEA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

JOSEPHUS, JEWISH WAR 2.267–268

"Some... under the notion of sending a curse upon those who were Romans, did bring a pregnant goat, and having cut it open, offered the fruit that was in its womb." Josephus reports that some Jews performed a ritual to invoke harm on the Romans by sacrificing a pregnant goat.

ANCIENT RECORDS



JOSEPHUS (1ST CENTURY)

"Some... did bring a pregnant goat, and having cut it open, offered the fruit that was in its womb."
— *Jewish War* 2.267–268

BABYLONIAN TALMUD (GITTIN 57A)

"They would bring a goat that was with young, and cut it open and offer the young for the destruction of the government."

SUETONIUS (2ND CENTURY)

"The Jews... at the instigation of Chrestus, were in a constant state of rebellion."
— *Life of Claudius* 25

THE RITUAL

The sacrifice of the pregnant goat was intended to invoke judgment upon the enemy and bring about their downfall. This practice is attested in Jewish sources from the Second Temple period and occurred while Judea was under the authority of Rome.

SOURCES



JOSEPHUS (37–100 AD)

Jewish historian who records Jewish practices during the Roman period.
Jewish War 2.267–268



BABYLONIAN TALMUD (3RD–5TH CENTURY)

Rabbinic discussions preserve references to this ritual practice.
Gittin 57a



SUETONIUS (69–122 AD)

Roman historian who describes the Jewish unrest in Rome's provinces.
Life of Claudius 25



SECOND TEMPLE CONTEXT (516 BC–70 AD)

Rituals of curse and imprecation were part of the religious landscape of the period.

One of the strangest things you begin noticing as you study the ancient world carefully is that traces of older mother traditions never fully disappear. Even after reform movements, imperial Christianity, and later ecumenical councils begin standardizing theology, fragments of these much older symbolic systems still survive underneath the text and ritual world of late Judaism and early Christianity. Symbols connected to motherhood, fertility, sacrifice, birth, covenant inheritance, and divine protection continue appearing in distorted, transformed, and sometimes even rejected forms all the way into the Roman period. Josephus, writing after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, preserves one of the darker examples in *Jewish War* 2.267–268 where he describes a ritual involving a pregnant goat used as a curse ritual against Rome during the chaos of occupation and revolt. Later rabbinic traditions in *Gittin* 57a remember similar practices negatively, which matters because by this period many of these older ritual systems were already being viewed as dangerous or corrupted remnants rather than legitimate covenant worship. But even in rejection the symbolism survives. The sacrificed mother. The unborn child. The destruction of future inheritance. The longing for divine reversal against empire. These ideas remain embedded inside the symbolic world Christianity emerges from. Rome ruled Judea politically, but it also shaped the psychological and religious imagination of the people living under oppression, and that is why themes surrounding mother, son, sacrifice, kingdom, judgment, and restoration still carry so much symbolic weight throughout the New Testament world.

Readings:

Josephus, *Jewish War* Book 2

<https://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/war-2.html>



What makes this period so historically fascinating is that Christianity does not erase the symbolic world that came before it. It absorbs it, reframes it, and gives it new theological meaning. Some things are lost in this process but others are gained. By the late Roman and Byzantine periods, older winter festivals tied to cosmic light, sacred trees, fertility symbolism, divine motherhood, and the return of life after darkness were already embedded throughout the Mediterranean world. Saturnalia preserved feasting, candles, gift giving, greenery, and communal celebration during the darkest part of winter, while Sol Invictus celebrated the return of the unconquered sun after the solstice. Christianity already possessed this exact symbolic language internally through texts like John 1, John 8:12, Malachi 4:2, Revelation 12, and Revelation 22 where Christ becomes the true light entering darkness and the source of eternal life. At the same time, older sacred tree and mother symbolism never fully disappeared from cultural memory. Sacred trees connected to life, wisdom, fertility, divine presence, and heavenly motherhood had existed for centuries throughout Israelite and Near Eastern traditions, including the Asherah traditions later condemned during the reforms of Josiah. Over time these symbols were preserved, but transformed into new sacred narratives. The evergreen became enduring life through winter death. Candles became divine light entering darkness. Gifts symbolized heavenly inheritance

and hidden spiritual gifts. The mother symbolism increasingly gathered around Mary and the language of divine compassion, protection, wisdom, and sacred birth. Christianity became extraordinarily successful because it could take older human longings already attached to light, rebirth, motherhood, sacred meals, and cosmic renewal and redirect them toward Christological meaning. The symbols survived because the human longing underneath them never disappeared.

Readings:

John 1 Interlinear

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/john/1.htm>

Revelation 22 Interlinear

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/revelation/22.htm>

Mark S. Smith on Asherah and Israelite Religion

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/hebrew-bible/asherah-goddess-canaan/>

Steven Hijmans on Sol Invictus

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20430501>

GEMATRIA AND SACRED NUMBERS

THE LANGUAGE OF NUMBERS IN ANCIENT SCRIPTURE AND COSMIC ORDER

TEACHING POINTS

- NUMERICAL SYMBOLISM**
Numbers in Scripture are never random. They carry spiritual meaning and reveal divine patterns.
- HEBREW LETTERS AS NUMBERS**
Each Hebrew letter represents a number. Words contain hidden numerical dimensions.
- COSMIC STRUCTURE**
Numbers reflect the order of creation, the movements of the heavens, and the design of the spiritual realm.
- TEMPLE MATHEMATICS**
The Temple and its measurements embody sacred geometry and divine proportion.

HEBREW LETTERS BECOME NUMBERS

א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ
1	2	3	4	5	6	10	20	30	40	50	100	200	200	300	400		

18 חיים
CHAYIM
LIFE

“ALL IS NUMBER.”
— PYTHAGORAS (ADAPTED)

KEY EXAMPLES

- 18 חיים** (Chayim)
The value of חיים (Chayim) means “Life.” Symbolizes vitality, blessing, and the presence of God.
- 7**
Number of completion and divine perfection. Seen in Creation, Sabbath, and sacred ritual cycles.
- 12**
Number of divine government and order. The 12 tribes, 12 apostles, 12 gates of the New Jerusalem.
- 40**
Period of testing, preparation, and transformation. Present in the flood, Exodus, and wilderness.
- 70**
Number of nations (Genesis 10). Represents the scope of divine revelation to all the earth.

TEMPLE MATHEMATICS: HEAVEN ON EARTH

The Temple in Jerusalem was built using precise measurements and ratios that reflect cosmic harmony and divine blueprint.

MEASURE, NUMBER, AND WEIGHT WERE ESTABLISHED BY GOD.
— WISDOM OF SOLOMON 11:20

“NUMBERS RULE THE UNIVERSE.”
WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE OF NUMBERS,
WE BEGIN TO SEE THE PATTERN OF THE DIVINE.”

Part of the way early Christianity survives persecution, temple destruction, dispersion, and later disagreement with the consolidation of the church inside the Roman Empire is through the polysemic nature of the older

Hebrew worldview. Ancient Hebrew thought layers meaning on top of meaning. Symbols remain alive because they are not locked into one singular interpretation. Temple becomes community. Community becomes body. Body becomes cosmos. Sacred patterns survive because the meanings can expand and recontextualize across generations. Find the balance of chaos and order, emotion and law has always been the goal. One of the clearest places you begin seeing this polysemic symbolic system survive is through sacred numbers. In the ancient Near East, and continuing within Second Temple Judaism, numbers had theological, cosmic, and covenant meaning. The Hebrew alphabet was numerically layered, meaning words could carry symbolic mathematical relationships through gematria. Seven reflected sacred completion and covenant wholeness. Twelve reflected divine government and covenant structure. Forty reflected transformation through trial and renewal. Seventy reflected fullness among the nations. Even the Qumran calendar reflects this worldview because its perfect mathematical symmetry mirrors the belief that time was sacred architecture established by divine order. Temple measurements, apocalyptic timelines, sacred calendars, and Revelation's New Jerusalem all preserve this same worldview where creation reflects patterned intelligence established by God. The ancient world did not separate mathematics from theology. Numbers became part of the language of temple truths.

Readings:

Qumran Calendar Texts Overview

<https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/manuscript/4Q319-1>

Revelation 21 Interlinear Greek

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/revelation/21.htm>

Wisdom of Solomon 11

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Wisdom+11&version=NRSVA>

MAZAL AND COSMIC IDENTITY

HEAVENLY ORDER, DIVINE TIMING, AND IDENTITY IN THE COSMIC PATTERN

WHAT IS מזל (MAZAL)?

מזל (mazel)
The Hebrew word mazel means "fortune," "destiny," or "star influence." It refers to the association between celestial bodies and human life.

CONSTELLATIONS
Ancient cultures observed the stars and identified patterns that formed the zodiac. The 12 signs of the zodiac reflect the sun's path through the heavens.

HEAVENLY ORDER
The stars follow precise cycles and seasons. The heavens declare order, authority, and intelligence.

DIVINE TIMING
Mazel reveals the timing of seasons, festivals, and life events. God works in harmony with the appointed times written in the stars.

SLIDE 20

KEY CONCEPTS

- מזל (mazel) – destiny, fortune, cosmic influence
- Constellations – divine patterns in the heavens
- Heavenly order – the universe is not random but designed
- Divine timing – God reveals His plan through appointed times

KEY NUMBERS

- 12 Tribes / Zodiac Signs
- 7 Days / Planetary Cycles
- 360 Degrees in a Circle – Completeness
- 70 Nations (Genesis 10) – Under heaven

SOURCES

- Hebrew Scriptures
- Talmud (Berachot 55b)
- Josephus (Antiquities 1.6.2)
- Temple Scroll (11QTempl)
- Ancient Near Eastern Astronomy Texts

TEMPLE COSMOLOGY MIRRORS HEAVENLY STRUCTURE

The Temple was built according to precise measurements that reflect the order of the cosmos.

The Holy of Holies represents the center of the universe.

Priestly service aligns with celestial cycles and appointed times.

The layout, feasts, and sacrifices reflect heavenly order.

As above, so below. Heaven and earth are connected.

"THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD; THE SKIES PROCLAIM THE WORK OF HIS HANDS." – PSALM 19:1

Part of the reason these polysemic elements of ancient Hebrew thought become so powerful in early Christianity is because they allow sacred patterns to survive even as the outward structure changes. The temple can simultaneously mean a building, a covenant community, the human body, the cosmos, and the individual soul moving through transformation. Ancient Jews and early Christians were constantly reading reality through layered symbolic structure. That is why the tabernacle and temple were so important. They were maps of divine order and humanity's journey back into sacred presence. The heavens reflected the temple. The temple reflected creation. Humanity reflected the temple. And life became a part of the living temple procession through covenant stages toward divine fulfillment. This is also where ideas of foreordination and divine calling begin fitting into the symbolic world of the ancient temple. Just as every object in the tabernacle had an appointed place, function, and sacred purpose, humanity itself was understood as participating inside a larger cosmic pattern established by God. Paul picks up this exact language repeatedly when he speaks about gifts, callings, members of one body, and believers being "built together" into a dwelling place for God. The New Testament preserves this older Hebrew worldview where identity is tied to divine order, sacred timing, covenant participation, and becoming aligned with the heavenly pattern. The temple becomes the pattern of life itself.

Readings:

Exodus 25 Interlinear

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/exodus/25.htm>

1 Corinthians 12 Interlinear

https://biblehub.com/interlinear/1_corinthians/12.htm

Ephesians 2 Interlinear

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/ephesians/2.htm>

Hebrews 8 Interlinear

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/hebrews/8.htm>



Here is the culmination of the entire course because it shows us the final polysemic transformation of the temple tradition across Jewish and Christian history. The temple never actually disappears. The architecture changes, but the symbolic pattern survives. First the temple exists as sacred geography in Jerusalem. Then after corruption, exile, occupation, and destruction, communities like Qumran begin internalizing the temple into covenant identity itself. House churches continue the same movement by relocating sacred presence into gathered believers. Hermas then pushes the symbolism even further by describing the church as a living tower built from transformed people. Later cathedrals attempt to externalize heaven architecturally again through sacred geometry, light, height, and cosmic symbolism. But underneath all of those developments, the deeper Hebrew pattern remains the same. The final temple becomes humanity itself. The body becomes the outer court. The soul becomes the holy place. The heart becomes the holy of holies where divine presence dwells. This is why the polysemic nature of Hebrew thought can expand without disappearing. Temple simultaneously means cosmos, covenant, body, kingdom, community, ascent, transformation, and divine indwelling all at once. Early Christians preserved the temple under persecution precisely because they no longer could worship in temple space. The heavenly pattern could survive anywhere covenant people carried it. That is also why foreordination, gifts, and divine calling become so central in later Christian thought. Humanity itself becomes living sacred architecture laid out according to a heavenly pattern. The tabernacle becomes the pattern of life itself.

Readings:

1 Corinthians 3 Interlinear

https://biblehub.com/interlinear/1_corinthians/3.htm

1 Peter 2 Interlinear

https://biblehub.com/interlinear/1_peter/2.htm

Shepherd of Hermas Translation

<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/shepherd-lightfoot.html>

Hebrews 8 Interlinear

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/hebrews/8.htm>