

Bible Study

Enigmas, Volume I:

*Applying cultural anthropology
to general bible study topics*

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Preface

In Sunday School or from the pulpit you sometimes hear the phrase, “Scripture Only” or in Latin, “Sola scriptura”. This is the Protestant Christian doctrine that the Bible is the supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. Protestant Bible colleges and seminaries teach that there are two Bible interpretation branches: Philosophical and Historical. The former is more popular but there are some schools of thought (theologies) are built entirely on the latter.

In the last sixty plus years, many Christian authors are using a third method of biblical interpretation. They are using a subset of the science of anthropology to interpret scripture. Without using the term, they are using cultural anthropology as an interpretive tool. This third method of biblical interpretation may be thought of as “Cultural Theology”.

Biblical Cultural Anthropology is the study of the social and political environment of the biblical writers. This allows one to essentially get into the heads of both the writers and their audiences. This includes not only the Hebrews and Judeans but their pagan neighbors as well.

All culture can be described as descending from four topics from spiritual realm in order down to the mundane. These topics become the outline for any cultural study:

1. Deity Definition
2. World View
3. Belief Structure
4. Behaviors and Habits

The Deity Definition identifies their god(s) and the relationships to each other, if more than one. A World View develops from Deity Definition which indicates to what degree the god(s) interact with the physical environment and human kind. A society's World View determines their Belief Structure about how to act within their physical environment but in

compliance with the deities and their influences on the earth and their society. The Belief Structure then determines everyday Behaviors and Habits. Altogether these four topics define a culture.

This method is applied to the Hebrews, Judeans, Jesus, his apostles and their neighbors to develop a picture of the biblical writers' environment, concerns, and the reasons for their writings. Once that picture is developed, the reader can see what was originally meant by the writers and understood by their audiences. That is in effect, biblical interpretation. This method removes casual application of allegorical and philosophical approaches by allowing culture to determine when such approaches should be engaged. By employing this method of biblical interpretation, there is little room for irrational and speculative interpretations. Disagreements become areas for more study of history, facts and related writings, not fodder for more clever arguments to persuade, or shouting.

Biblical Cultural Anthropology should not be confused with what's called *Christian Anthropology*. That term refers to the study of the human and how he/she relates to God. Some definitions of this term seek to differentiate Christian Anthropology from science by saying it is about the logos of 'anthropos', a theory about mankind. Most definitions of Christian Anthropology read like openings of Ph.D. dissertations. This is definitely not what we are doing here, cultural studies are far simpler than that.

Biblical Cultural Anthropology has been a missing element from traditional biblical interpretation. What has really been missing is the thought process of the biblical writers, their Hebraic cultural philosophy.¹ Their thinking patterns and attitudes embodies their Deity Definition, World View and Belief Structure. Only a society's behaviors and habits may be physically quantified, the area of study by physical anthropologists.

1 Philosophy only means how a person thinks. It includes cultural concepts which is behind attitudes, beliefs and habits.

Enigmas² develop when the writings of one culture are being read by people of a different culture and time. In the case of modern western Christians reading the ancient eastern Hebrew writings, the culture clash is extreme. The modern West is completely alien to the ancient Middle East.

This book seeks to enlighten the modern western bible reader with insights from the ancient middle eastern culture so he/she is no longer a stranger to biblical texts. We do this by taking on some of the more difficult theological enigmas in the Bible and demonstrate how they can be understood in their original cultural context. We will engage in “Cultural Theology”.

2 Enigma: A person or thing that is mysterious, puzzling, or difficult to understand.

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Introduction

In working toward answers in scripture occasionally there crops up enigmas which need resolving. These might not come up very often but when they do, they need to be resolved for clarity.

When I was in Bible College, my theology professor told the class there were two branches of biblical interpretation or theology one could follow: Philosophical and Biblical. The former is speculative and uses the systematized argumentative methods of Greek philosophy. The latter uses a more concrete approach, allowing only scripture to interpret itself from an historical perspective. The philosophical approach is the most common. Its use has given rise to nearly all popular beliefs and statements of faith found in every Christian denomination. The speculative nature of this method of theology also gives rise to enigmas. The biblical approach is less speculative but has other problems because the ancient Hebrew culture and the fluidity of their language is often ignored, leaving some passages obscure or misunderstood.

There is a third approach biblical interpretation is cultural. This approach has always existed but has become increasingly employed since mid 20th century. This approach allows one to study scripture from the cultural perspective of the writer and his environment. To arrive at a solution for biblical enigmas, one should also consider the “fringe” teachings of cults of personality³ and the bible prophecy teachers. Sometimes, the unorthodox will come closer to the truth or spark a different line of inquiry.

This book is not an academic journey with definitive answers. Instead it is an introduction to the application of biblical cultural anthropology. Consequently, you will not find, “Thus said the Lord” here. You will find unorthodox or unique ways of understanding some of the enigmas we experience in Christianity today, “In My Humble Opinion” (IMHO).

3 A cult of Personality is an organization or ministry based solely upon one man's teachings or doctrines.

First Enigma: Who Is “Us” In Genesis?

Then God said, Let us make man [mankind] in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. (Genesis 1:26 [ESV])

The use of the plural form, “let us make”⁴, is not a bad translation, it is the text. It indicates multiple entities involved in the making of the human. God is obviously the prime mover but who else might be present and involved? There are several theories, each of which fit a particular philosophical view. It might not make much of a difference in a practical sense but the question strikes at the heart of what does it mean to be human. The common Christian view from the philosophical approach says that it means the Creator was talking to the other deities of the Holy Trinity, the Son and the Spirit. Many of that school do say man is a totally a created creature based upon the next verse.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 [ESV])

However, “created” is not the only reference to man's origin.

what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings [angels] and crowned him with glory and honor. (Psalms 8:4-5 [ESV])

Here king David refers to man as a creature made by God, made a little lower in form than the other heavenly beings but crowned him with glory and honor.⁵ Perhaps the answer is this passage:

4 “let us make” is a single Hebrew word, Strong's # 06213

5 Most commentators believe this verse to be a messianic prophecy.

then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Genesis 2:7 [ESV])

An enigma arises when apparently an “us” is involved in the making of man but then it seems to later expresses that the LORD God did it himself. Here, a bit of cultural anthropology resolves the question. There is a common feature so deeply embedded in the ancient middle eastern culture that it is never explained in the Bible, it is just assumed that the reader knows and will not stumble. That feature may be stated as the *Hebrew concept of agency*⁶ This principle states that a representative (agent) should be treated as though the principle (the one that sent him) were physically present. The agent can therefore speak in the either the third person or in the first person. The agent carries out the will of the principle exactly. You regard the agent as the principle and the agent speaks and acts as the principle, not himself.

In the ancient Hebrew culture, they believed that the Creator lives in heaven and NEVER comes to earth. HE only interacts with the physical plain through intermediaries, thought of as agents. This interaction was usually accredited to either angels or an unseen force described as the “wind or breath of God” but normally translated as “spirit”. In Hebrew thinking, holy spirit is an active agent of God. It is the agent that effects events on the earth, not the Creator himself. Spirit is a description of God’s presence and power to effect change. The ancient Hebrews would never have thought of holy spirit as a living being, only a divine force of change.

For example, in the Moses and burning bush episode,⁷ it says an angel came into the bush. This is what Moses saw, an angel appearing as a fire that did not consume the bush. But when the voice speaks out of the fire, the statements are in the first person

6 You can google this expression for many essays on the topic. Also see Fifth Enigma, “What is A God-Man Messiah?”, page 48 for a longer discussion.

7 Exodus 3:1-12

as though God and the angel switched places. However, to a Hebrew, that did not happen. Moses is still speaking to the angel but the angel is speaking as an agent of God and can therefore speak in the first person, as though God were actually present.

A clearer example of agency can be seen the book of Revelation. John is about to worship the angel who is showing him visions but the angel says he was only a servant.

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me,

but he said to me, You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God. (Revelation of John 22:8-9 [ESV])

The angel calls himself a fellow servant along with the human servants. Then the angle speaks in the first person as though it were Jesus Christ speaking the words himself:

Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. (Revelation of John 22:12-13 [ESV])

Thus, by applying cultural anthropology, any speech or activity could be in reality done by an agent, rather than the principle but still spoken of as the principle speaking and acting himself. Any speech or activity required by the principle can, in reality, be performed by an agent. The agent can speak and act as if the principle is speaking and acting. This helps explain the enigma of “let us make” versus the LORD God alone made man.

Man is both formed (made) of the elements of the earth (perhaps accomplished by angelic agents) but his life is a result of

the Creator's act of breathing into man life. That would mean that God's breath (also an agent) animated the human bodies that the angels made.

In addition to the cultural answer, there is another competing theory to explain Genesis 2:7. The approach is to say that only God and the earth were present. That would open the door to man evolving from lesser forms until he became an upright walking creature of intellect. That is a blending of secular science and scripture. However, this is only a theory which would find little acceptance in either the scientific or religious realms.

The bible prophecy teachers arrive at a cultural view without saying that's what they are doing. They see the creation of the angels at the same time as or shortly after God created the heavens. Heaven is the dwelling place of the heavenly hosts (hence the expression: Lord of Hosts), as well as other types of spirit beings⁸. It is surmised from the job of angels as "watchers"⁹ of humanity that the angels were created perhaps shortly before their home of the heavens. This means the Creator is addressing His heavenly hosts when he said "let us make man". That also suggests that the angelic host were involved in the making of the human, as agents of the Creator, which explains "let us make man".

If this is correct, then Genesis 1:26-27 paints a different picture from the one commonly held. In order to form the human body, the angels would be intimately knowledgeable of man's biology and genetics. The bible prophecy teachers arrive at the same conclusion as those using the cultural interpretation method of applying agency.

This conclusion (above) is used as a basis to explain another passage.

The Nephilim [giants] were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God

8 The Bible describes four types of denizens of the heavens: cherubs, seraphims, angles and 'living creatures'.

9 Daniel 4:7

came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. (Genesis 6:4 [ESV])

Sexual reproduction between the angelic beings and human women was possible due to the angelic knowledge of human biology, physiology, and genetics. The offspring of this union were known as “nephilim”. The word means “tyrants” and “bullies” but usually described as fallen ones and giants.

Arriving at the opinion that angels did the work of building human and animal bodies involves both literal biblical thinking and anthropological thinking. The ancient Jewish rabbis and early Christian theologians held this opinion about the origins of man and animals. It is only later western Christian commentators who came to consider man to be a wholly created creature by God alone came to a different conclusion – no extra helpers.

In the 5th century the fallen angel interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4, came under fire by critics of Christians and their wild beliefs. To defend itself, a new theory was invented by Julius Africanus, called the “Sethite Theory”. In this theory, the metaphysical angel-human hybrid idea was subdued in favor of mixing of human only blood lines between the offspring of Seth and Ham. This theory has many problems, not the least is Hebrew grammar, syntax and vocabulary. It also suffers from the notion that all, without exception, of Ham's offspring were totally irredeemably evil – which is biblically not true at all. This interpretation was picked up by St. Augustine and thus prevailed through the middle ages. It is still commonly taught in many seminaries and Bible colleges today as fact, not theory.

IMHO: The bible prophecy teachers and cultural anthropology offer a logical explanation of the “let us make” enigma. The Creator was talking to His agents, the angels.

Additionally, our form is apparently like the heavenly beings, a similar appearance or image. Angels when interacting with humans in scripture were always viewed as young men and might have been considered attractive by young women. The angels, in their original role as watchers of humanity are apparently much

more interactive in our human origin and existence than we realize. Genesis six suggest that at one time, they interacted with human kind far too much.

The New Testament says for this level of interference, the angel-agents responsible have been locked up on the deepest pit of Tartarus.¹⁰

Tartarus is a Greek concept, not Hebrew. It means the lowest, darkest, most miserable part of the underworld in Greek mythology. The Hebrews would have used the concept of abyss for this but Peter is using the Greek concept to convey the Hebrew idea. Just in the use of this word, the reader can see that the apostles used the Greek cultural ideas to convey truth. That does not mean the Hebrews thought of hell in the same terms as the Greeks. What it means is a emphasis on how far away these angel-agents are locked away.

This means that squeezing the Greek language for ultimate spiritual truth is a foolish endeavor. Greek is built upon its own philosophies and stories. Hebrew is built upon different philosophies and stories but there is no reason why the Greek language cannot convey truth as the Hebrews understood it. When necessary, the biblical writers used Greek concepts close to their way of thinking to convey Hebraic thought. Whenever that happens, the Greek view should not be taken as inspired gospel but a close approximation. “Let us make man” is most likely literally the Creator speaking to the heavenly hosts.

10 II Peter 2:4 – Only occurrence of 'tartarus' in the New Testament. Many English versions translate it 'hell'.

Second Enigma: What Is The Afterlife?

This enigma is a discrepancy between early Hebrew beliefs versus modern Christian beliefs of an immediate afterlife in heaven. In ancient Hebrew thought, man is an animated creature, a unity. In Greek thought (Platonism), man is a soul encased in a husk of a body. In the New Testament Greek text, a believer is a threefold being of body soul and spirit.¹¹ Resolving the enigma of an afterlife depends on the answer to two questions, “What is a man”, and “What part, if any, of the human continues to live after death?”.

The ancient Hebrew world view says was that when the body dies, so also does the whole man, intellect, desires, prayers, memories, everything. This view is supported by a variety of passages from the Tanakh.¹²

As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up; (Job 7:9 [ESV])

But this is a concrete view from the perspective of the remaining living humans. However, is this the final end for the human to cease to exist like any other animal? To an ancient Hebrew, yes, but he believes his God will remember him and raise him up in the far future, unlike the animals. To the Hebrew, the dead no longer have any activity or presence in this world, but he expects to become alive again in this world in the future.

Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! (Job 14:13 [ESV])

Job's concept is that God will remember him since nothing remains upon death. This comes from the Hebraic “unity view” of the human. Man is an animated body, it lives because it breaths

11 I Thessalonians 5:23

12 Tanakh means Old Testament in the Christian tradition.

and moves. When breath leaves the body, it is no longer animated, hence he is in “sheol”, the state of death.

But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah (Psalms 49:15 [ESV])

In this verse, “soul” is the Hebrew word, “nephesh” meaning breath, that which gives life. The Hebrew concept of man is that he is animated by a breath-life that originated with God.

then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Genesis 2:7 [ESV])

“Living creature”, literally translated, would be an animated body or breathing body. In the Hebrew view, when a human or animal dies, the breath ceases. But is that really the end? Does nothing of the human survive death? Can this life that originated with the eternal Creator be totally extinguished? Can the Creator's breath be extinguished? Does the spirit of man cease to exist? The Hebrews' culture described death but only from a concrete human point of view.

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. (Ecclesiastes 9:5 [ESV])

While both ancient Hebrews and modern Jews don't ascribe to an immediate afterlife, Christians do. Is this Christian concept due to the influence of Greek mythology? Or is there an ancient Hebrew basis for the survival of the human spirit (soul)?

Two passages from the Tanakh suggest the concept is Hebraic though probably embellished and extended by Greek mythology.

and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7 [ESV])

*If he should set his heart to it and gather to himself
his spirit and his breath, (Job 34:14 [ESV])*

It would seem that both the oldest book in scripture, Job, and the wisdom of Solomon agree: upon death, the spirit of man, his breath, returns to the Creator of life. Did the Hebrews ignore these passages or are most of the passages about death only spoken from a humanistic point of view? Probably both views are correct from different perspectives. The record is clear, from antiquity, there existed a belief that the spirit of a human continues to exist by returning to it's source. It's also clear from a human perspective that the dead do not participate in this life any longer.

The concept of an enduring human spirit is also reflected in the Jewish writings of Enoch and Jubilees,¹³ thought to have been written two or three centuries before the common era. There are commentators who say the belief in an immediate after life influenced Judaism after contact with the Greeks in the third century BCE. However, as we have seen, that may have only added detail to the older belief that the spirit of a man continues and is returned to the Creator upon death.

Then the next question, "Is there any consciousness of a disembodied human spirit?" A Hebraic view would say no. However, the books of Enoch and Jubilees as well as John's Revelation would suggest the opposite.

But now the giants [nephilim] who are born from the [union of] the spirits and the flesh shall be called evil spirits upon the earth, because their dwelling shall be upon the earth and inside the earth.

Evil spirits have come out of their bodies. Because from the day that they were created from the sons of God they became Watchers: their first origin is the spiritual foundation. They will become evil upon the earth and shall be called evil spirits.

13 See Appendix: Sources.

The dwelling of the spiritual beings of heaven is heaven; but the dwelling of the spirits of the earth, which are born upon the earth, is in the earth. (1 Enoch 15:8-10)

A more complete discussion of the origin of demons can be found on the Internet¹⁴ and in 1 Enoch. From those discussions, it is evident that the earthly spirits are self aware and seek a new body to inhabit. These evil spirits are the disembodied spirits of the seed of the Serpent,¹⁵ the nephilim of Genesis 6:4. It is against these creatures that the seed of the woman (Messiah) forever contends until they are judged and put away for the rest of eternity.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [seed] and her offspring [seed]; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15 [ESV])

In verse eight of Enoch, quoted above, an “animating spirit” is passed down from the father to the child, with each new birth. On one hand, there are godly derived, human spirits (spirit of man or soul) which originate from the Creator and on the other hand there are earthly spirits (also called demons) which originate with the fallen angels when they procreated with human women. Two different kinds of living spirits are generated, both with human women, one godly and the other ungodly (or earthly). One can only surmise that this human spirit or soul is carried and passed along by the male since both are products of females. In fact, the ancient Hebrew writings trace the souls of families by their male progenitors.¹⁶

Each kind of heavenly derived spirit proceeds out of the body upon death (either from the Creator or from the rebellious angels). The godly derived spirits, the spirit of man, can go to the

14 <http://www.tbm.org/origindemons.htm> and other similar essays.

15 Genesis 3:15 God addressed Satan as the serpent. This introduces the concept of Satan and his hosts having seed and thus can produce offspring.

16 Genealogies in the Bible are mostly male names, but a few female names do appear at times.

dwelling place of the Creator for safe keeping in peace until resurrection of the body to rejoin spirit and body:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

They cried out with a loud voice, O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. (Revelation of John 6:9-11 [ESV])

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (Revelation of John 20:4 [ESV])

However, the earthly derived spirits (evil spirits or demons) can only continue upon the earth, roaming about the earth without rest, seeking a body to inhabit again. They “walk upon the earth”, inhabiting persons, objects and places. They are unseen by mortal eyes but their effects are manifest when they inhabit a human. These manifestations in modern times are diagnosed as mental illness (such as phobias). That does not mean that all such ailments are demon produced! Demons can mimic any and all human ailments and afflictions. They can also produce “super human abilities as well, such as “distance seeing” or clairvoyance. Only by divine knowledge, can one ascertain if the ailment or ability is natural or a demon effect from it's presence and control on the human mind and body.

Earth spirits are aware of themselves and have personalities. They are not all knowing nor are they everywhere. These earth bound spirits only know what they have learned since their original birth. They are only clever or smart due to their longevity upon this earth, unlike humans who are comparatively short lived.

Our human spirits live in a specific place (our bodies), are aware of ourselves while we live and only know what we've learned since our birth. But how much of this is true when the human spirit is disassociated from its body? Is there a place it goes? The Revelation passages, previously quoted, suggest it as does also the Jubilees quote below.

And their bones shall rest in the earth, and their spirits shall have much joy, and they shall know that it is the Lord who executes judgment and shows mercy to hundreds and thousands and to all who love him. (Jubilees 23:31)

How much of this is figurative versus literal no one knows for sure. It is possible that in the Hebraic way of thinking, living attributes are used but the literal is not necessarily meant. Even in the quote above, the joy of the martyred spirits is described as future. In Revelation 6:11, quoted above, the spirits of the saints are held in a state of rest under the alter of Yehovah.¹⁷

God's instructions to Moses makes it clear that God's people were to have nothing to do with occult arts that involved disembodied spirits of any kind.

There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, [fire walking] anyone who practices divination

or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a wizard or a necromancer, (Deuteronomy 18:10-11 [ESV]) {emphasis added}.

17 Yehovah equals Jehovah equals God, equals YHVH, etc. The Hebrew name of God.

That is quite a list of occult practices!¹⁸ None, but NONE of these were to be found in Israel. Doing so carried a death sentence.¹⁹ In the context, these are all things practiced by the tribes living in Canaan, and constituted the religion of the nephilim, the dominant peoples of Canaan, who descended from one of four sons of Ham.²⁰

What all of these forbidden practices have in common is the power of earth spirits (demons) to produce their effects. Each of these effects are manifestations of demons inhabiting human bodies. There is nothing natural or normal about any of these so called arts. Aspiring practitioners seek out spirit possession with spirits familiar to them. In both ancient times and in modern times, possession by these spirits can result in a paying career, a choice for employment.²¹ It is not to be so among God's people.

The human already has a spirit of man, originally given by the breath of God. That breath-spirit is the ability to accept either the spirit of the living God or the spirits from the earth. Therefore, conjuring up the spirit of a dead person was a forbidden art. Why? Because a normal human's spirit after death is locked away by the originator of that breath-spirit. The only spirits available for conjuring are the evil spirits, the earth demons, of the long dead nephilim from the days of Noah. They are earth bound and whose names are not written in the book of life. Only the people animated by God's breath have their names written in the book of life. Those ancient dead nephilim's names were never written in the book of life because their breath-life didn't originate with the Creator.

So is there life immediately after death? Yes and No. The human spirit, as the breath of God originally given to Adam and Eve, continues to exist but kept by the Creator, resting and awaiting a future resurrection for rejoining to a body. Any self awareness, consciousness awaits for that future day. The only surviving spirits not locked away are earth spirits and they are

18 Leviticus 19:31, 20:6 and Isaiah 8:19 for other examples.

19 Deuteronomy 17:5

20 Canaan's brothers were Mizraim, Cush and Put.

21 Acts 16:16

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evil through and through, the disembodied spirits of the offspring of rebellious angels. They await judgment, they are totally unredeemable.

Beware of these impostor demons, faking dead humans and causing calamity. Avoid any who practice possession and claim to be spiritual. The end result is only anguish and destruction. Their fate is sealed.

But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; (Psalms 63:9 [ESV])

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. [the burning place] (Matthew 10:28 [ESV])

Let us pray like king David:

For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!

And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies, and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I am your servant. (Psalms 144:11-12 [ESV])

And as the apostle Paul says:

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, (Colossians 2:18 [KJV])

And the same passage in another Bible version:

Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, [things he has seen] puffed up without

reason by his sensuous mind, (Colossians 2:18 [ESV])

At every Christian funeral and uttered by most people is the concept that the deceased are “in a better place”. What is this better place? Are our loved ones in heaven, purgatory, hell or somewhere else? Does everyone, good and bad experience a life somewhere else upon death of the body?

Already we have seen that the human dead are “in storage” until resurrection so where does this notion of immediate life after death come from? This belief is not in scripture but yet it is pervasive in Christian circles. Scripture teaches us this:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (I Thessalonians 4:13-14 [ESV])

The dead have no more involvement in this earthly life but do they have an immediate new life somewhere else? Many Bible believing folks believe the dead are immediately conscious upon death. However, many of their “proofs” are based upon taking visions and metaphors literally as physical facts. For example, Matthew relates a vision that is taken as literal fact.

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. (Matthew 17:2-3 [ESV])

But consider a slightly larger context, a fact stated only a few sentences later:

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And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead. (Matthew 17:9 [ESV])

When the apostles saw Jesus with Moses and Elijah, it was not a literal experience of living patriarchs coming from heaven to talk with Jesus but a vision of that happening, a vision in full 3D, surround sound. Another example of not reading the full context is the common belief that the patriarch, Enoch, went directly to heaven and never died. They get this from an Old Testament passage (Genesis 5:24) and a statement in Hebrews.

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. (Hebrews 11:5 [ESV])

However, reading the full context reveals this commonly held belief to be false:

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13 [ESV])

Enoch is in the list of those who died, not having received the things promised. Enoch died! He did not immediately receive the promise of the afterlife. So, what does it mean “so that he should not see death”? Simply Enoch was relocated by God so he wouldn't see any one die. Enoch was spared the anguish and trauma of seeing a human die.

By, ignoring textual context or cultural context and common errant beliefs are invented and promulgated. The truth is that when a person dies, his spirit is kept by God until a body is resurrected (or reconstituted anew) to join with it. This is clear

from a number of passages but quoting one should be sufficient for the humble:

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, [by the word of the lord] that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-16 [ESV])

If one can accept the biblical position of “human souls” having no consciousness in the grave, there still is the question, about resurrection. If our future hope is resurrection then are we made alive again to live in heaven or somewhere else? The popular belief is that we will live in heaven. Is that real hope? Is it a biblically taught hope? All modern Christians believe in afterlife rewards and rightly so.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,

knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. (Colossians 4:23-25 [ESV])

But where do we receive these rewards, in heaven, earth, Kingdom of God or somewhere else? The key in the passage above is not “reward” but inheritance. Our reward is an inheritance. To discover our inheritance, one should turn to the Bible for a definitive answer. If Christianity is based upon the faith of Abraham and the Hebrew patriarchs, then Abraham is the starting point to discover the reward of inheritance.

J. L. Brown

Paul states in Romans 4:1-12, that Abraham is the father of all who believe. Then we read this:

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (Romans 4:13 [ESV])

The promise to Abraham is also to his offspring.

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (Romans 4:16 [ESV])

That's why our reward is called an inheritance. Believers inherit the same thing promised to Abraham. What was that? In simple terms, Abraham was promised a dwelling place. His descendants, as the children of Israel, reclaimed that land under Joshua. It is the dwelling place of Canaan, the future location of the Kingdom of God on earth. This is what Jesus was talking about during his ministry: a kingdom where he would rule, a kingdom on earth located where Canaan was. The modern state of Israel is situated in that location however, the modern state occupies only about a tenth of the promised land.

The promised land is the physical location where our rewards are to be given out, not in heaven. Heaven is a storage location of our rewards until the time comes to hand them out.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust [worm] destroy and where thieves break in and steal,

but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust [worm] destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21 [ESV])

Another aspect of the inheritance, is that once settled in the land, Abraham's offspring will enter into a rest.²² That is the final expectation and hope of all believers.

IMHO: The spirit of man, both redeemed and unredeemed exist after physical death in an unconscious state. There is a resurrection for everyone though not all at the same time. In the first, resurrection, the redeemed by Jesus are raised and rewarded for their faithfulness to hold fast to him. These people will reign with Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth for a thousand years. All others are resurrected later and judged, some to eternal life and some to eternal death.

They [the holy ones] came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. (Revelation of John 20:4b-6 [ESV])

22 Hebrews 4:1-16

Third Enigma: What Is Biblical Inspiration?

Nearly every diverse Christian group says they believe in the inspiration of the ancient Hebrew writings, that is in some way, it derives directly from Yehovah. However, how this works in detail is a matter of disagreement and often confusion. I was taught that each and every Hebrew and Greek word dropped from Yehovah via holy spirit. It was not automatic writing but a kind of “automatic thought”. This meant that at least in the original autographs or dictation, every word was of divine placement, grammatically and syntactically correct and chosen by God Himself.

The only discrepancies among copies would then be human mistakes in copying a worn out manuscripts to produce a fresh ones. Eventually I came to understand that my previous understanding was naive and shallow. How we got the sacred scriptures is both simpler and more human than the popular view. How our copies came down to us is however, more complicated. Some of the variations in manuscripts were intentional to produce a text that more clearly reflect accepted doctrines of their day or region, rather than original intent. Even the language of the original autographs is now a serious academic debate. None of this bodes well for the trust we put in the Bible, especially for the “King James Only” crowd.

The starting place to sort out this topic is in the nature of what are the mechanics of inspirational prophecy. Did the Hebrew writers get a word for word revelation or was it more like ideas that they had to express in their language and culture? Is the post-Pentecost prophecy a guide to ancient prophetic writings? Most likely yes, but this answer only serves those who have personally prophesied or heard someone do it. That is not much help for those who are foreigners to this expression of holy spirit.

However, as one who has prophesied many times myself,²³ I can answer the question but only subjectively, since no one else is in my head to experience this. However, that experience does help to understand the biblical references.

The biblical evidence is not great but sufficient to attest for some of the mechanics.

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (II Peter 1:21 [ESV])

Firstly, the prophet (any speaker or writer of prophecy) does not invent or decide himself the message. It is not pre-thought. An inspired person has no idea what the message was going to be. Not by one's own will but by holy spirit comes the content of the message. But that does not explain "carried along" by holy spirit. Another passage offers a bit more insight:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 4:16-17 [ESV])

Here, inspiration is called "breathed out by God". It is a flowing thing. The apostle Paul makes it clear that such expressions of holy spirit are to be in the common language of the congregation.²⁴ As one who has prophesied many times, this does describe the phenomena, it flows like your own pre-thought speech but the content is not pre-thought. Sometimes some words are in your mind but other times, just thoughts that the speaker must determine how to express. Either way, it's not pre-thought. The one bringing forth the message neither invents the thoughts nor pre-thinks the content but it all flows very rapidly and naturally. At no time does one prophesying use a word or phrase

23 That includes speaking in tongues, interpreting my own tongue as well as prophesying. They all work the same for every believer who manifests these gifts.

24 I Corinthians 14:2-5

that is not in his normal vocabulary or use a figure of speech foreign to his culture. If an intellectual prophesies, it sounds like an intellectual speaking. If a redneck prophesies, it sounds like a redneck speaking. The expression of the content is totally normal for that person. But the identical message could be spoken by either one. For each, it would sound a bit different due to cultural influence and education but both would be communicate the same ideas.

This would have been the case for the biblical writers. They were all native Hebrew speakers except Luke, who was a gentile physician who learned Hebrew. The apostle Paul likely was just at comfortable speaking Greek as Hebrew but Paul describes himself as a “Hebrew of the Hebrews”:

circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. (Philippians 3:5-6 [ESV])

It is most likely that the apostle Paul's preferred language was Hebrew even though he grew up on the Greek city, Tarsus, and was fathered by a Greek. Paul was truly bi-cultural and bi-lingual. However, like all people educated in Judea, Hebrew was the preferred language for all things religious and cultural. Only in Roman and Greek cities would Greek or Latin have been a dominate language. Aramaic was also commonly spoken throughout the middle east but it played a minor role in Judaism religious life. Street life of markets and gossip is another matter entirely. In that context, Aramaic was likely he dominate language.

There is also another feature of a natural language, there is always more than one way to express any thought. I have been in meetings where several people brought forth divine messages. Often they are repeats on a theme. However, no two people ever say the same thing the same way. This is always true when more than one person relates the same story. Just ask any school teacher grading essay exam questions!

So in the case of the biblical writers, choice of words is spontaneous. It comes naturally in the way that that person expresses himself on the street or in any other setting. How divine is that? Not at all but a divine message can be delivered that way. The mechanics of prophecy are so natural that dictation is the best and possibly the only way to properly preserve the message. It is believed by most theologians that the original autographs were in fact dictated to scribes who had a form of short hand.²⁵

All this means that the exact words of the text flows from the speaker's own style of expression, not given by holy spirit. That means doing detailed word studies across different writer's books is probably foolish. You are not studying words of holy spirit but instead, the vocabulary and spontaneous expression of the writer. Of course different writers will express themselves differently even if in the same language.

Only a four hundred years ago, theologians thought the biblical Greek language was a special language handed down from heaven. More recent archeology reveals it was just street talk common in all Greek speaking towns and cities in the Roman Empire. There is nothing spiritual about the New Testament's Koine Greek, it's just a language like any other western language. There is nothing special about how the specific words are used in the existing Greek manuscripts that our modern English Bibles are based on. The only legitimate word or language study one can do is to examine how any individual writer expresses himself and expresses the message content. Even then, the cultural context must be considered. Some of the New Testament books were written by Judeans for Messianic Jews. Paul wrote similar messages for both Jews and gentiles in many non-Jewish cities of the Roman Empire. However, most of the core believers in those cities were Jewish. The gentiles formed an attached body of believers to the Messianic Jews. Paul's messages were first for the

25 Some scholars believe this scribal shorthand was Aramaic which is mostly phonetic. In that way, any language could be written down and reproduced in the original language even if not a semitic language. If Greek was dictated but the scribe used phonetic Aramaic, it still could be written in Greek.

Jews and secondarily for the gentiles. What language might he have used?

Probably two copies of his letters were made and distributed, one in Hebrew and the other in Greek. So were the original dictated autographs in Greek or Hebrew? Likely Hebrew. But even if some were dictated in Greek, the thought patterns and content are predominantly Hebraic. Christianity is a middle eastern, Jewish faith. Period.

Academia well knows now, the gospel of Matthew may have been originally written in Hebrew and many others translated it. The author, Paul F. Herring, offers an excellent case for all the New Testament books being originally dictated in Hebrew and either immediately or later translated for Greek speaking Jews outside of Judea.²⁶ Academics are slowly coming around to accepting the premise of original Hebrew dictations for the New Testament. That means the oldest existing Greek manuscripts are at least a translations and copies after that. Our English Bibles are probably based on third or fourth generation manuscripts. How accurate are they? It's debated but generally considered to be very good but some corruptions do exist.

Some would argue that the lack of Hebrew or Aramaic manuscripts is evidence of Greek originals. However, a lack of evidence is not evidence, it just indicates missing pieces of the story. In the true history of the Christian church, there were political reasons to destroy any semitic biblical texts making sure nothing contrary to the opinions of local bishops remained in the hands of the populace. That included anything construed as semitic which didn't fit with the antisemitic attitude of the 3rd and 4th century Christian church. Of course they would order the destruction of Hebrew or any non-approved religious texts in any language... both historical and archeology evidence proves it did happen.²⁷

26 "The New Testament: The Hebrew Behind The Greek" by Paul F. Herring, available as a Kindle book from Amazon.com (free promotional download).

27 The discovery of the 4th century Dag Hammidi gnostic cache in an earthen jar proves the accuracy of the edict of the bishop Athanasius

If all this is true, then the traditional methods of biblical exegesis are at least untrustworthy and at worst, based upon totally false premises which would lead to errant conclusions. Gone are examining compound words to extract deeper meanings. Gone are hunting for root words to build a case for a doctrine. Gone are wide ranging word studies to decipher the holy spirit's hidden meanings of phrases. Gone are nearly all traditional methods that have lead to the current and diverse theological positions of the major branches of Christianity.

Just reading scripture in the language of a culture foreign to its writers is fraught with problems. Just in Greek, there are problems. To a Greek speaker, the normal word for God, Theos, would never bring to mind the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In its native cultural word brings to mind the origin of the word in that language: Zeus. The apostles would not be taken as duly authorized agents of Yehovah but as Greek gods come in the guise of men, gods of the Greek pantheon. In fact that is exactly what happened to Paul and Barnabas in Lystra.

And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!

Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. (Acts 14:11-13 [ESV])

What you have in the Greek New Testament is communicating the Hebrew gospel about the Hebrew Messiah in a language whose very fiber and background is pagan. Every word and phrase one might use in Greek to describe spiritual matters is

of Alexandria, to destroy all non-approved religious books to be true. In stead of destroyed, they were secretly preserved. Apparently no one came back later to retrieve them.

loaded with Greek mythological background. Is this what you would study in grammatical, syntactical and etymological²⁸ detail for spiritual truth? Hardly, if you're thinking like a honest researcher applying cultural anthropology first.

So what is a more proper method of interpreting scripture? Theologians, Bible college professors and paster should start with an honest inquiry about the culture of the writers. They should start with the background of the faith of the Hebrew patriarchs. That is exactly what the apostle Paul taught in Romans, chapter eleven.

As regards the gospel, they [Jews] are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they [Jews] are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Romans 11:28-29 [ESV])

The reality of the roots of the Christian faith being in the ancient Hebrew prophets cannot be over emphasized. Christianity is not a new thing on the block, it's an extension of the ancient Hebrew faith in Yehovah. It's not a new brand of drink nor a new religion but an upgrade to the old Hebrew faith, a fresh infusion of the faith of the Hebrew prophets. It was not born in western culture, it was not born in Greek mythology or Greek philosophy. It was birthed in the cradle of the Hebrew prophets who lived in an ancient middle eastern culture.

Modern teachers of the Christian faith should start with learning the features and nuances of the Hebrew definition of the Deity, their, Hebrew World View and Hebraic Belief Structure. That starts with learning the Hebrew's manner in which they expressed themselves. That is the foundation of proper biblical exegesis: Hebrew Cultural Anthropology.

Do any Bible teachers use this method? In recent decades a few independent and some academics in universities are doing just that. More and more books come onto the market every year that

²⁸ Grammar is parts of speech; Syntax is order of words; Etymology is historical meaning of words, their origins and development.

interpret scripture according to the ancient Hebrew culture. That's proper biblical exegesis. Better still, this form of biblical studies does not require a theological degree. Such research engages archeology and history as an interpretive tool. The book authors by and large have learned the Hebrew's language, the root of the culture, and show how various passages should be understood within the culture ... the way the original audiences would have understood them.

There is so much material available today that any honest Bible teacher and most Christians can obtain a fair understanding of scripture just by reading this new crop of authors' books and applying an understanding of the culture of the first century Judea to their Bible reading. By doing so, the Hebrew Messiah comes alive in a fresh way, when we see him in his original context, doing and saying things by holy spirit inspiration but normal for his time and place. That takes all the mystery out of Jesus' sayings and teachings. That removes the mystery that typically surrounds the teachings of the apostle Paul, such as Paul's attitude about women.

IMHO: Studying scripture by applying cultural anthropology answers many questions. The whole topic of inspiration of scripture becomes much easier once the cultural context is applied. Once applied, you come to understand that the original language is not so important but what is important is the original Hebraic thought content. Understanding that, and the nature of men of God speaking God's words through their own vocabulary and culture, you can come to an understanding of scripture as it was intended to be understood by its writers and communicated to its first audience. Applying cultural anthropology is every pew sitting Christian's answer to Bible study.

Forth Enigma: What Is “True Israel”?

This is an age old question and how it is answered determines how antisemitic you are ... or are not. There is considerable confusion and disagreement over this question in modern times and it is not likely that this offering will satisfy everyone. However, perhaps some insight can be offered from a cultural perspective to assist one in finding their own answer.

It is clear that in the first century, this was not a major question, that is until the gentiles responded to the gospel as taught by the apostle Paul. Then the question of how to incorporate gentiles into this exclusively Jewish faith came up. The Judeans saw it as a theological issue but it was more cultural than theological. The debate revolved around to what extent the Judean lifestyle should be expected of the gentiles: cultures clashed.

This question starts to come to the forefront in the 2nd century when the apostles are gone and the Jews have dispersed into the nations due to Roman oppression. The Jews became much less an identifiable nation and the gentiles had near exclusive control the Christian Faith. At that point, all the promises to Israel seem impossible to keep unless there is a new definition of Israel. Then the question arises, “Who or What is Israel?” Some say it's still Israel, as separate from Christians making two tracts of believers. Others say the Christian church replaced Israel. Yet, there is a third alternative, a cultural option, one expressed by the apostle Paul.

He dealt with this question in his great dissertation in the book of Romans. He spoke of true Israel being those who follow Abraham in believing, not just as a genetic lineage or those who follow Moses' Laws. But he did not discount the genetic lineage altogether either.

*For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly,
nor is circumcision outward and physical.*

But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. (Romans 3:28-29 [ESV])

Here, Paul defines a Jew (Israel) as one who keeps the spirit of the law, whether he be genetically Israel or not. In this passage, being an Israelite is a matter of heart. But Paul has more to say about who or what is true Israel. Paul extends from Abraham, the father of believers, a race of believers who are inheritors of the promises made to Abraham. This race are deemed Israelites, and he does so on the basis of faith in the messiah, not “law keepers” nor blood lines. Such believers are included by either looking forward to the person of the messiah or in hindsight.

Does this mean that the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are now null and void with genetic Israel disappearing? Did the Word of God fail in keeping its promises? Paul asks that very question.

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,

and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”

This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. (Romans 9:6-8 [ESV])

All this seems to support the theological position known as “replacement theology” where followers of Christ, the body of Christ or the church, has completely replaced Israel. But that is not how Paul expresses his situation. God’s original people are not rejected.

*I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.
(Romans 11:1 [ESV])*

After this, Paul explains that even when Israel was rejecting their God in Elijah's time, there were still some Israelites faithful to him, but Elijah just didn't know about them. So it was in Paul's time and today also.

The Jews have not universally rejected Christ. In every era, there have been messianic Jews. But especially in modern times we can see this. Since the 1940's there has been a rising movement of Jews turning to Christ. This was at first an outreach mission of several denominations but now it has become a movement of its own called "Messianic Judaism".

But westerners and gentiles are still foreigners to this faith since it was not originally given to gentiles, modern or ancient. The faithful descendants of Abraham by birth, genetic Israel, are natural branches but by the metaphor of grafting, foreigners can become Israel also. Hence, Paul describes the tree of Israel as both natural branches and grafted in branches. Some of the natural branches have been broken off and some foreign branches have never been grafted in. True Israel is a peculiar people of mixed heritage. This reflects the mixed multitude of the Exodus. Messianic Jews sing songs about this reality of two becoming one. The lyrics are taken from a passage in Ezekiel:

Son of man, take a stick [of wood] and write on it, For Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him; then take another stick and write on it, For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him.

And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand.

And when your people say to you, Will you not tell us what you mean by these?

say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him. And I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand. (Ezekiel 37:16-19 [ESV])

This will be a work of God to bring together all of Israel. Jesus made reference to this but due to our western ignorance of the culture we miss the point. Ephraim was one of two sons of Joseph, a son of Jacob, the one sold to the Egyptians. In later centuries, the northern ten tribes were known as either the house of Ephraim or the house of Israel, while the southern tribes were known as Judah, (which included Benjamin). When Jesus said his mission was to the lost sheep of Israel, he was speaking specifically about the northern ten tribes, not Jews in general. He intended to fulfill the Ezekiel prophecy. It was his mission to provide the ground work to reunite the tribes of Jacob by preaching the gospel to the northern ten tribes, the house of Ephraim.

However, a rejoining of the tribes didn't happen at that time. To make matters even more confusing was what happened to the Jews after Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans. In Paul's day, it was obvious who Israel was but what of the ensuing centuries? There is both historical and biblical evidence of what happened as to why this question is a major issue today.

In 70 ACE, the zealots of Judea took up arms against the Romans. It turned out to be a failed rebellion. The Jews not only lost but thousands were killed, the Temple burned and dismantled. Its stones were carted away to build the coliseum in Rome. Then a heavy tax was placed on the Jews, 10% of annual income for each member of the family over age six. Under these conditions, associating with Jews very unattractive because the Romans might consider gentile Christians subject to the tax.

Then the Jews revolted again in 135 ACE with even worse results. Only about 15% of the population escaped death at the hands of the Romans. The Jewish population along with their

religion was decimated. There were precious few Jews left alive and far fewer still of Messiah believing Jews. By mid second century, Christianity was exclusively in the hands of the gentiles with plenty of reasons to avoid acting Jewish in any way.

Things only got worse from here. If a Jew attempts to trace his ancestry back to traditional Israel there are many problems. During the first or second century, the Jews switched from tracing their families by the biblical way through males, to tracing families through females or matrilineality descent. That means that today, it is not even possible to know who is genetic Israelite according to the biblical way of tracing family history.

To further obscure lineage, many modern Jews descend from a nation which adopted Judaism, not inherited it as a family tradition. To escape Roman persecution, some Jews traveled as far as to the nations north of the Black Sea. There was an empire encompassing the north sides of both the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, known as the Khazarians.²⁹ They might not be significant except that they converted to Judaism in the 13th century. This was due to having the Ottoman empire (Islam) on their eastern side and the Byzantine Empire (Christian) on their western side. The Khazarians were traditionally pagans so both Islam and Christianity set their sights on them as potential converts – conversion by military invasion.

The only way to avoid invasion from either side was to adopt some religious ideology which both sides could respect. That was Judaism which they learned from Jews living among the and many working in the royal courts in administrative roles. The Khazarian king made converting a national event. He invited a large number of rabbis from Babylonia to convert four thousand of his nobles.

The reality of this can be traced in modern times. The language of the Khazarians is known today as “Yiddish”. There is no Hebrew in the language even though it is written with the Hebrew alphabet. Yiddish has also borrowed heavily from German and

29 See <http://www.lostisrael.com/khazars.htm> for more on the Khazarians.

from the Baltic and Slavonic languages. This fact of Khazarian ascendancy is a well kept secret in most of Europe and the Americas, but the language reveals it.

Converting to Judaism that did not save the Khazarians for very long. The Russian Empire was expanding and eventually over ran Kharzia. Once conquered, the native people were known only by their language, Yiddish. In Eastern Europe today, there are people still known as the Yiddish, though they call themselves Jews.

There is also considerable evidence to suggest that the European and American populations are descendant from the tribe of Ephraim. Many of us who consider ourselves gentiles might actually be Israelites. Only God knows the true lineages of our families and races.

So is there any way to discover a true natural Israel today? No, not a snowball's chance in the worst of global warming. So who are the citizens of the political, nation state of Israel? Most likely, nearly all of them are descendants of those who adopted Judaism at some point in history since most of their early immigrants came from eastern Europe. There are some rabbinical families in Israel who can trace their family lineage back to ancient Judea but they do it through a matrilineality line. So can that be trusted? Not if you want to find a true genetic biblical Israel.

All this leaves the apostle Paul's method of defining true Israel at the forefront as a acceptable definition. True Israel is an amalgamation of cultures and peoples, both Israelites and non Israelites, who by faith have elected to follow the Jewish Messiah. The church³⁰ did not replace Israel but was grafted into an existing tree of believers. Some of the original Israelites are not in this tree. In cultural terms, the modern gentile Christian church should think of itself as the non-Israelite branch of believers. The non-Israelite branch did not replace original Israel, it grew it larger, bringing new life to Israel. It is quite possible

30 Church is the word 'ekklesia' in Greek and only means a group or assembly with a something in common, like a labor union or craft club. The best generic translation of ekklesia would be 'community'.

that true Israel is made up of peoples descendant from Ephraim and Manasseh and all the rest of the tribes gone out into the nations ... we just don't know it.

IMHO: All that can be said is the truth of scripture. We all are either natural branches and don't know it or are grafted in wild branches thankful to be attached to the tree to whom all the promises were made. There are some who practiced Judaism and then turn to their Messiah but retain much of Judaism in their faith. They are perhaps the closest to the natural tree as can be found but it doesn't matter. God will keep His promises to Israel and that includes people from both the natural and grafted in branches ... who ever they might be. Modern European and American Jews, though descendant from the Khazarians think they are the natural branches. So also do modern Messianic Jews. Let them, there is no point to argue, nothing is provable or disprovable. We are all together as one single assembled people of God rejoicing in the Hebrew Messiah, Yeshua (Jesus), the Savior of all of mankind. We all, in spite of diverse cultures and genetic heritage, are Israel, through whom the promises of God will be fulfilled.

Fifth Enigma: What Is A God-Man Messiah?

Was Jesus, the Christian Savior and the Hebrew Messiah, a god-man or just a man? Is he a dual natured, divine-human creature or a divinely approved human representative? If the nature and person of Jesus were not an enigma, there would not be a debate lasting over twenty centuries and still going strong today. If you google any set of words from this debate question, you'll get thousands upon thousands of hits on the results pages. If the enigma of his nature were settled centuries ago, why so much fever over it yet today?

Most Christians today have not thought about this topic to any great degree ... if at all. However, in the hallowed halls of religion academia, seminaries and universities, it's a hot topic and a divisive issue with different sides flaming against the other. On one side are those who would condemn you for not believing in Jesus as the god-man and others who would condemn you if you do. Each side claims their view is straight from the Bible. Just to deepen the enigma, both views are biblical, depending on your cultural context and interpretation method employed when you read scripture. That is the real issue: what is your cultural context and method for interpretation?

The trinity camp,³¹ sees their view revealed repeatedly in scripture – over a hundred times. The opposing camp sees completely different meanings in the same passages. It is easy for the sincere believer to get lost in this morass of opinion. So let's step back, don our anthropology fedoras, and take a look at this enigma from a more scientific and objective point of view.

Culturally, the biblical writers lived within an ancient Hebrew culture. Judea and the rest of the Roman Empire, Jews and Christians lived was a mix Hebrew (Jewish), Roman and Greek and other nationalities. The biblical writers were not multicultural

31 Trinity doctrine includes three entities representing a single godhead, the Father-Creator, the Son Jesus and Holy Spirit. Jesus is thought of as being a man-god or a dual natured being, the other two are purely spiritual.

themselves in spite of these influences, they were culturally Hebrews through and through. The languages they used doesn't matter, culture ideas will dominate even if presented in some other language. Even though Paul was multicultural, (his father was Greek, his mother was a Hebrew), he billed himself as a Hebrew through and through.³²

But that culture is extinct today with only remnants existing in bits and pieces among the Arab Bedouins and some rural villages in the Iraq, Iran and Syria. You can't go and observe the the biblical writers' culture today. The greatest anthropological resource for it is the Bible, secondarily is histories and archeology.

The other culture involved in biblical interpretation is our own modern Greco-Roman culture. Our methods of organizing governments, corporations and institutions both secular and religious are purely Roman. Our language and linear manner of thinking is fundamentally Greek and Latin. The Romans organized everything into hierarchies. The Greeks were obsessed with logical systems and compartmentalizing everything into categories. To the Greeks, the world is bad but the heavenly realm is all good. Hence in Greek thinking, humans are a good spirit (soul) encased in an evil husk, a body. That is called "dualism," an idea which does not exist in the ancient Hebrew culture.

Dualism is totally the opposite of a Hebrew way of viewing reality. To the Hebrews, the world was all good, being the creation intended for man to live in. The body was not a dichotomy but a single unity, an animated breathing creature. The Hebrew's thinking was circular with all events crossing old paths repeatedly, nothing new under the sun.³³ The Hebrews shared their view with most of the rest of the middle east and are actually similar, in world view, with modern far eastern orientals.

Language is a key to understanding culture. Greek and all western language revolve around abstract words and nouns. Hebrew and all middle eastern languages revolve around verbs

32 Philippians 3:4-6

33 Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

and concrete words. These two schemes represent polar extremes in thinking and communicating. In a western language, we might say, “He is angry” but an ancient easterner would say, “His nose flares”. Anger is an abstract word to express a concrete reality. Flaring of the nose is a concrete metaphor used to express the abstract emotion. It tells us what a person looks like when he is angry and thus communicates the emotion – perhaps better than the abstract.

Another way to see this is two love chapters. One is written in the familiar abstract way, the other is written in the less familiar concrete metaphorical way. 1 Corinthians 13 is often called a love chapter by its obvious descriptions of what acting in love produces. Psalms 23, the other love chapter, love is expressed in what the shepherd does for his sheep, painting a metaphorical picture of how Jehovah cares for His people. Two culturally different ways to express the same message. Which picture conveys more? If you're an agricultural family, the Hebraic method is richer but for others who dwell in cities, the abstract works better.

We, as modern Greco-Roman people, could not be more alien to the Hebrew scriptures if we tried. Our language and manner of thinking are totally the opposite of the ancient middle east. These two worlds collide when we westerners read and study the ancient Hebrew writings we call the Bible. Few western Bible readers and even Bible teachers are aware of the depth of this clash.

Herein is why there exists the enigma about the person of Jesus Christ. Two cultures have two diametrically opposing views of the same records. It stands to reason if the differences in cultural thinking are not taken into account, there will be misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the ancient middle eastern documents. If the cultural difference is not accounted for, there can be no resolution to this enigma. This is the crux of the Jesus is a god-man versus a godly approved human debate. It's not theological nearly so much as it's cultural. Yet, no one ever considers the east west culture clash in their thousands of on line essays and their many hundreds of books. Until this culture clash is recognized and resolved, there will never be any consensus of

opinions or even honest discussions about our enigmatic Savior, Jesus.

A few examples will help demonstrate the how diverse opinions can become if culture is ignored. The vast majority of the essays, sermons and arguments, argue for Jesus' deity. This is a typical argument.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:13 [ESV])

This passage by Paul is a quote from the prophet Joel.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls. (Joel 2:32 [ESV])

The logic goes like this, “If God is called 'Lord' in the Old Testament and Jesus is called 'Lord' in the New Testament, then doesn't that mean that Jesus is God?”. That's Greco-Roman western thinking in a linear manner – like math. But is it true in the biblical culture that Lord always means deity? Let's allow the culture to speak for itself.

To start with, in the ancient culture, Lord is a title, not a name. As a title, it must be earned.³⁴ A title is conferred after one recognizes a reason to do so. If Lord always means a title of divinity then it should not have any other uses, but that is not what we find in the cultural records of the Old Testament.

So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure? (Genesis 18:12 [ESV])

³⁴ *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:36 [ESV])* If God made him Lord and Christ then he was lord not at the first but in his resurrection he definitely was.

Here, Lord is Sarah's husband, Abraham. Another reference is where Samuel's mother calls Eli, a priest, her lord.

But Hannah answered, No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. (1 Samuel 1:15 [ESV])

As translated, this passage is obscured. The first use of 'lord' is 'adon' while the second 'Lord' is Jehovah. The ESV shows the difference by use of capital letters. Translation conventions like this only make studying this topic a little easier but it still remains problematic.

Moses is referred to as lord by his brother, Aaron, when Moses came down from the mount with the tablets of stone bearing God's Laws and walked into a pagan religious mess.

And Moses said to Aaron, What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. (Exodus 32:21-22 [ESV])

Other uses of lord refers to a king, captain, father, prophet, angel and master. All of those essays ballyhooing “Lord means deity” are culturally inaccurate and plainly contradict scripture. Without the cultural context, it is easy to say lord means deity, especially whenever it seems to support your bias (especially by ignoring passages which do not use it this way).

There are a number of other culturally inaccurate arguments for Jesus' deity attempting to conclude it was original with the Hebrews and especially the apostles. However a presentation of one feature of this ancient culture will dispel several of them. The Hebrews didn't differentiate between similar things the way westerners do and sometimes what we think of as a single thing, the Hebrews had multiple meanings. An example of this is their thinking about Torah.

Torah, to the Hebrews and even modern Jews, means three things. It means the five books of Moses. It means all of the Tanakh (the Christian Old Testament). It means the instructions from God on how to live. To the Hebrews, it means all these things at once and they often didn't differentiate one from the other except by context. This can be seen in the opening of the gospel of John.

In John's gospel, we can see a bias in the translation resulting from a misunderstanding of culture. Firstly, we'll look at King James:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1-3 [KJV])

This is pure Hebrew thought. By the Word of God, *logos* in Greek, the heavens and earth were created. *Logos* occurs over three hundred times in the New Testament with varying translations but always means reason or a product of the mind like a saying or a command. But it has also been translated as book, appearance, news, matter, eloquence, reply, report and more. Never does it mean a person. But that's what the KJV translators were thinking here: Word equals person, due to cultural ignorance and theological bias. Other English translations are just as biased:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1-3 [ESV])

Here, it says, "He was in the beginning" and "all things were made by him", making sure their bias is clear: Jesus is the Creator. The ESV in other passages will translate "it" as "him" but note their alteration in a footnote. To a Hebrew, God spoke His Mind and the heavens and earth came into being by His

command alone. Not one English Bible is free of this antisemitic cultural bias.

Another verse in this passage is also has deep cultural overtones.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 [KJV])

To the Hebrew, the mind and authority of God resided in His Messiah. To a westerner, he was God in the flesh. Two different interpretations, of the same text but from two different cultures.

Another example of culture clash is how to translate and understand the name of the God of Israel expressed in what is called the “tetragrammaton”.³⁵ YHWH. The fluid nature of the Hebrew language makes translating this name very problematic. It does not have a single meaning but five meanings, all at once!

The name of God is found in Exodus 3:14 where Moses asks the angel of the Lord in the burning bush for a name to tell Israel who is sending him. The following expressions are not a choice of one or the other but all need to be included at once:

I will exist because I will exist

I exist because I exist

I am who I am

I will be who I will be

I am that which exists

This places a severe burden on the translators who need to translate YHWH as a single word or very short phrase. Most English versions use a variant of “I Am” or “I Am That I Am”. Then by the same things equal the same things logic, when Jesus

³⁵ Tetragrammaton is a Greek word meaning four letters.

says, “I AM”, translated from Greek, westerners see a self expression of deity. However, the Greek phrase translated in John 8:58 is “ego eimi” and translated as “I AM”, appears forty eight times³⁶ in the New Testament. It is normally found in English as “I am ...” with a word or phrase following, typically “he”. Mark 13:6 is an example:

Many will come in my name, saying, I am he! [ego eimi] and they will lead many astray. (Mark 13:6 [ESV])

Another example of the same Greek phrase, “ego eimi” translated is in John:

But he said to them, It is I [ego eimi]; do not be afraid. (John 6:20 [ESV])

The phrase, “I AM” in John 8:58: is not the equivalent of Exodus 3:14 but it seems so by the choices translators make, based on their understanding, based upon their theology. Yes, translators intentionally skew the English text to influence the reader toward their own personal or popular bias. Every English Bible reflects a bias which is usually based on traditions (and saleability of their version).

Even with an understanding of the cultural differences in thought and attitude, there is still major challenges in attempting to cross the cultural divide and not lose something in the process, hence the popular phrase, “lost in translation”. It is true, sometimes the cultural view is lost.

There is another argument that is often used by westerns to make the deity argument: the early church believed in Jesus' deity. These essays quote the apostolic fathers of the second and third centuries but what are they culturally? Western thinking gentiles! These authors do not include, as the early church, the messianic synagogues of Judea or the believing synagogues in the outlying provinces of the Roman Empire that Paul addressed. They quote second through fifth generation church leaders

36 Westcott-Hort with NA27/USB4 variants (1881)

starting at a time when the gentiles dominated the faith. This does not represent the first generation, the original Hebrew followers of Jesus and his apostles.

So did later gentiles get the nature of Jesus wrong? Perhaps not as far wrong as this discussion might suggest. Another part of this discussion is what the gentiles versus the Hebrews considered important. As we pointed out before, the Hebrew language revolves around verbs, words of action. This was the nature of their culture, “you are what you do”.

The Greek way of thinking is the opposite, “you are what you think”, hence churches develop statements of faith which are a requirement to get every one thinking the same as everyone else in the group. These are used by each religious group to divide themselves from other groups. Statements of faith, produce division in Christianity, not unity. To the Hebrews, Jesus was what he did, the composition of his flesh was irrelevant, not even a question. But the Greeks were first concerned with the material world fussed over his material self and cared little for his “husk”, or his actions. The Greeks needed a material, fleshly definition to incorporate Jesus into their culture. The Hebrews needed only his actions. The make up of his flesh or inner nature was not important to the Hebrews, his actions told you what he was. The Greek bishops at Nicea³⁷ argued over how much of his flesh was deity versus humanity. This would explain his actions. See the difference? Which is more important, the material being or the actions?

So what belief or faith is our salvation based on? There are some who would propound one must accept the nature of his flesh to be a Christian and flame you as a heretic or atheist if you do not. Is that really true? Consider the great modern day evangelist, Rev. Billy Graham. He preached the message that we are all sinners and must come to God's redeemer for redemption from our sinful state. He didn't preach Trinity or Jesus' Deity during his crusade sermons. He didn't preach any esoteric religious doctrines, he taught salvation by faith in Jesus. Were all his converts unredeemed because they didn't know anything

³⁷ This was the main point for calling the Nicaean Council in 325 ACE.

about the dual nature of Jesus or how much of him was God versus man? No one would lay that at the feet of Rev. Graham nor accuse him of being fraudulent and a false prophet. So is accepting Trinity and Jesus' Deity really necessary for salvation?

Consider the emphasis of typical verses used to bring a sinner to Christ.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 [ESV])

It doesn't say God loved the world so he made himself into a divine-human creature or a god-man to believe in. This verse is all about action, it's totally Hebraic thought. Consider another verse used for salvation:

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Romans 10:9-10 [ESV])

Again, it's action: you confess with your mouth ... that God raised him from the dead. It's all Hebraic, all action. Salvation is based upon the Hebraic way of thinking: confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord. Peter clearly states in the first post-Pentecost sermon, that due to his actions, God made him Lord.

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:36 [ESV])

So is believing in Jesus' deity wrong? Is Trinity wrong? Neither is original in the Hebrew culture. But when you cross cultural barriers, changes may be needed to convey the story of redemption through the son of God in the new culture.

The Greeks and Roman religions were filled with man-god deities. How could a mere man representing God be superior to the Titans and Olympians, the great man-gods of the Greeks?

After all, their gods descended from the heavenlies! Clearly, if Christianity was to conquer the pagan deities, Jesus had to be superior to them, the greater man-god from the heavenlies. The Greeks could not think any other way. Jesus' deity was necessary in that culture.

A man representing God fit perfectly in the ancient Hebrew culture, a man-god did not fit. Representation easily explains Jesus to an ancient middle easterner. We touched on this briefly before but we will expand this theme here.

Representation or agency (emissary) is embedded into the ancient Hebrew culture so deeply that it is retained in modern Jewish law today. It is know by the title of “Shaliah”, the law of agency. This is what the Jewish Virtual Library says:

“Agency: legal concept whereby the lawful acts of someone authorized by, and acting on behalf of, another are as effective as if performed by the principal; recognized in Jewish law from ancient times. A basic concept in the Talmud is that "a man's agent is as himself," i.e., that a man is bound by the acts of his duly constituted agent as if he himself had acted.”³⁸

This is how the Hebrews thought of Jesus: a first born, family agent of Yehovah, meaning his office as agent of Yehovah was natural. Jesus, as the first born, was expected to fill the shoes of his father. Jesus was expected to learn his father's trade and eventually take his father's place as patriarch of the family. This is the cultural context in which Jesus taught. The fact that he thought this way can be seen when he was only twelve years old:

*And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me?
wist ye not that I must be about my Father's
business? (Luke 2:49 [KJV])*

Jesus thought of his heavenly father not just as his God but as his natural parent. He spoke in those cultural terms when he said things like, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father”. He

38 http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0001_0_00524.html

was so attuned to his father's mind that he could say, "I and my father are one." and mean it in the cultural and family sense. There was no theology in these statements, just cultural. Indeed, in the ancient Hebrew culture, the term "son of ..." was just an expression to indicate family lineage or family association. The term "son of God" is not theological, it's cultural but interpreted as theological by westerners.

The fact that Jesus thought of himself in this role of family agent, substituting for his father can also be seen in his last act as a natural human. While dieing on the cross, he instructed the apostle John to care for his mother Mary as though she were his own mother. Historical records say John did this. Mary moved to Antioch where John lived and he cared for her until her passing in her 90's. Providing for his mother was the oldest son's responsibility.

IMHO: Different cultures need different ways to express the same things. In the original Hebrew culture, Jesus was completely human, the natural family representative of his parent, Yehovah. He was the first born son, of both Yehovah and in his earthly family, carrying out his family duty in both capacities. To the Hebrews, the concept of a man-god only existed in demon worshiping paganism. Modern Jews still consider Christians to be pagans, worshiping three gods. However, the Greek culture, needed a superior man-god to compete with the man-gods of Greek and Roman mythology. Each got what is needed within their individual cultural context. The Greek god-man was hugely successful in confronting paganism.

Continuing the man-god definition of Jesus may have out lived its usefulness since Christianity conquered paganism long ago. But adopting a unity, representative view of Jesus is very difficult for westerners for whom the total synchronization of two living entities, the principle and agent, is not a normal cultural feature.

How you think of Jesus is a cultural view. What is important to you? Do you emphasize his material being? Or do you emphasize his actions? Can you conceive of a total synchronization of two

persons, the Father and the son? If not, stick with the tradition, it is the most popular view of Jesus, a definition of his material self.

So, what do we do today? Do we condemn one who do not believe in Jesus' deity or believe in Trinity? NO! Should Unity people condemn and ridicule Trinitarians as polytheistic pagans? NO! Each is an expression of Jesus Christ in different cultures. In spite of theological or cultural differences, we are still all one in Christ, of one body, of one family with Jesus as our redeemer and head of this wonderful family tree of believers, no matter what you might think of the composition of his material flesh.

For Further Study:

For more on alternative interpretations from a cultural perspective on this issue, there is a website which combines culture and language studies focusing on biblical passages often thought of as supporting trinity. Comparing discussions there with popular theology, one can see the two different cultural ways of understanding scripture. This is not an endorsement of the Biblical Unitarian website but offered for interest for budding amateur biblical anthropologists.

URL <http://www.biblicalunitarian.com/verses>

Appendix: Sources

The **Bible** is the original and most trusted source for ancient Hebrew culture. This can be read effectively in English. It is not necessary to study biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew to pick up much of their culture if you combine it with a little thinking about the situation described. Hebrew names of persons, tribes, cities and other places are words with meanings and on line dictionaries of Hebrew name meanings are also helpful to glean cultural context that is not immediately obvious.

There are also many authors who have published books with cultural insights. Most of them also have websites, blogs and Youtube channels. Just by googling some names and topics and engaging with their on line material, one can enrich his Bible studies with Hebraic cultural insight. Most of the recently published authors also provide their books in electronic form, such as PDF's, Kindle and Nook, and can be purchased for very little money. Some on line resources can be downloaded free of charge. Below are a few names to use for search terms to locate some on line sources and books:

Jeff A. Benner, Nehemia Gordon, Lois Tverberg, Sir Anthony Buzzard, Dr. Ron Moseley, Kenneth E. Bailey, Bart D. Ehrman, Greg S. Deuble, Gary M. Burge. These names will lead you to many other sources as you search.

Another source of anthropological information is ancient Jewish historical texts which have been translated and printed in both paper and electronic forms. These texts are only available because of archeology, linguists and manuscript research – the stuff of anthropology. Several of these books predate the common era. Two were commonly read in by the first century by the apostles and their followers. They are also referenced in the writings of the Pharisees, and even by the apostle Paul. They are also quoted by the Christian leaders, in the 2nd through the 4th centuries – called “the apostolic fathers”. These books disappeared in the 5th century when the canon of scripture was established and their use discouraged but they were discovered

again in the 20th century. We'll list them since they are available in both paperback and in Kindle formats through Amazon.com, often very inexpensively.

Enoch: This book is quoted twice in the New Testament. It was widely read by Christians and Jews in the first through 4th centuries and thought of as inspired writings. The best scholarship says it is a compilation of Pharisee traditions all written between 150 BCE and 64 BCE. This book represents common knowledge of first century Christians and Jews. It's a history of Genesis but focuses on the heavenly realm of angelic beings, their jobs and interactions with humankind. The translation most commonly read is from the Coptic Bible and designated as "1 Enoch" to differentiate it from another version found elsewhere later and to differentiate it from middle ages forgeries. It was originally written in Hebrew but the most complete version exists only in the Coptic churches native language, Ge'ez, which they say is a translation from Greek. The original Hebrew version is long lost. The book opens in its first two verses with these words:

1. The words of the blessing of Enoch, wherewith he blessed the elect righteous, who will be living in the day of tribulation when all wicked are to be removed.

2. And he took up his parable and said – Enoch a righteous man, whose eyes were opened by God, saw the vision of the Holy One in the heavens, which the angels showed me, and from them I heard everything, and from them I understood as I saw, but not for this generation, but for a remote one which is for to come.
[emphasis added]

Remember: this book was completed prior to Jesus' birth but intended for the "end times", an era many believe is just around the corner. 1 Enoch predates John's revelation by at least two centuries. It contains the only real explanation of the "days of Noah"³⁹ and the origin of demons. Consequently, it is a very good

39 See Mathew 24:37 "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

source to back up and add detail to Genesis for the Bible Cultural Anthropologist.

Jubilees: This history book was written between 155 BCE and 105 BCE by a Pharisee. It's a chronicle of ancient Hebrew history and reads like a rewrite of Genesis and the first part of Exodus. It also parallels some of the books Samuel and Kings. It's called Jubilees because it divides its time line into fifty year segments or jubilees according to the commandments of Moses. It's very focused on chronology.

The book also seems to have been written to argue against Hellenizing Judea and Hellenizing the Temple priesthood (the Sadducee's), an influence introduced by the conquering Greek armies of Alexander the great and the occupation following. This occurred only a generation before its writing. The book has been also known by other titles: "Little Genesis", "The Apocalypse of Moses", "Book of Adam's Daughters" and "Life of Adam".

This book has been quoted by Justin Martyr, Origen, Diodorus of Antioch, Isidor of Alexandria and many other apostolic fathers. The book seems to have been written by one author but compiled from a number of sources. As a history and chronology it serves well for the Biblical Cultural Anthropologist.

Jasher: The name literally means, "The Book of the Upright". It is mentioned twice in the Old Testament.⁴⁰ The apostle Paul reveals his knowledge of it in II Timothy 3:8 when he brings up two names of Egyptian magicians whose names are found in Jasher.⁴¹

The modern version is thought by many to be a forgery which is the opinion of the researchers at Wikipedia. However, the Wikipedia researchers miss the fact that it is a foundational document for historical information in the Babylonian Talmud compiled around 200 ACE.⁴² It was also extensively quoted by the 1st century Jewish sage, Eliezer, thus lending authenticity to the existing modern version.

40 Joshua 10:13 and II Samuel 1:18 (spelled Jashar in some versions).

41 Jannes and Jambres; Jasher 79:27

42 Ancient Post-Flood History, by Dr. Ken Johnson, page 10.

Jasher is considered to be an accurate history of the Hebrews. It's chronology lines up perfectly with scripture while dates from other documents including the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, often do not. For historical dating and extra detailed information, it is a good source for the Biblical Cultural Anthropologist.

Seder Olam: The name means “Order of Eternity” in Hebrew.⁴³ Scholars believe this book was assembled around 169 ACE. It adds historical material missing from Genesis and Jasher. But it goes farther than Jewish canon by chronicling the history of the Hebrews up to the destruction of the second temple in 70 ACE, a period not familiar to Christians, even though the Catholic Bible retains some historical books from this period.

Seder Olam is significant because it shows that the ancient rabbis believed the messiah was expected to come into historical play around 30 to 40 ACE based on the Daniel 9 prophecy. That, as we well know, was about the time of Jesus' ministry.

This book has one major value to the biblical researcher. It reveals a Jewish cover up done to avoid any Jew thinking Jesus was their messiah. The rabbis falsified their own history by deleting 167 years. The Seder Olam not only reveals the method used by the rabbis that did this, by calling three Persian kings the same man, but also goes on to name the rabbi who did it! To confuse matters even more, the Talmud misquotes the Seder Olam to emphasize the point and compound the error.⁴⁴ This book is available from Amazon.com but it is not cheap. It may not be of much interest to the Biblical Cultural Anthropologist beyond these comments.

Josephus: This man was a Jewish historian who wrote a major history entitled, “The Antiquity of the Jews” in the 1st century. He makes only a fleeting reference to Jesus once but spends considerable effort on ancient Jewish history. Joseph is held in high esteem by the both Jews and Christians. His work is well known in universities, seminaries, Bible Colleges, and even by

43 *Ibib*, page 11.

44 *Ibib*, page 11

regular pew sitters. My parents, Mennonites by background, even had a copy. I attempted to read it as a teenager but got lost, knowing very little of Jewish history.

For the amateur Biblical Cultural Anthropologist, the books of reference are firstly the Old Testament. Secondly, the modern writers who apply culture to the study of scripture. Thirdly one should acquire the modern translations of the ancient Jewish writings. Going beyond these stages is to get into biblical languages and the histories written in the Talmud.

If you want to work at the Ph.D level, consider studying biblical languages, ancient eastern languages, secular histories and mythologies of other middle eastern cultures. That is the stuff of professional anthropologists, university professors and advanced academicians who argue nuances of names, dates and contrasting mythologies of ancient peoples. Some of that advanced work can be found and learned by regular folks by accessing the Amazon.com books and Youtube videos produced by the bible prophecy teachers. Start with googling Rob Skiba, Steve Quayle, Chuck Missler, Trey Smith, Brein Forrester, just to name a few.

Fortunately, for amateur Biblical Cultural Anthropologists, there are many sources for study. Most can be accessed on line for free through blogs, essays and videos. Electronic books can often be purchased for very little money. Many out of print books are available on archive.com to read on line or downloaded as a PDF file, if the book is in the public domain. Sometimes these books are available in electronic book format for reading on Kindle or Nook readers.

The only limit to one's quest to get into Biblical Cultural Anthropology is how much time is available for reading and study. I can't help you with that one. Selah.

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