

BIBLE WORDS: WORDS THAT HAVE SPECIAL MEANINGS IN THE BIBLE

- Accursed** This means the same thing as “cursed” (see “Curse”), i.e. under a curse, so “accursed” means either (1) experiencing something so bad that it looks as though someone has cursed you and had their wish fulfilled, or (2) under God’s displeasure so that God has cursed you.
- Adultery** This means being unfaithful to your spouse and breaking your marriage vows by having sex with someone else besides your spouse. Jesus uses it as a metaphor for people being unfaithful to God (see Mt. 12:39; 16:4).
- Alabaster** A pearly-white soft stone that can be carved or turned on a lathe to create beautiful bottles and vases.
- Anoint** “Anointing” is pouring/putting olive oil on someone. Sometimes it is for healing (e.g. Jas 5:14), and sometimes it is to symbolize that they are being given a special empowerment by the Holy Spirit for ministry or leadership. For example, Israel’s kings were always anointed. See “Messiah”.
- Antichrist** A person who falsely claims to be, or is falsely claimed to be, Jesus Christ returned to the earth. Or, a person who falsely claims to be a great savior and leader sent from God: a false Messiah. They claim to be specially anointed by the Spirit, but the things they do prove that they do not have the Spirit at all. See the entries under “Anoint,” “Christ,” and “Messiah”.
- Apostle** This means “someone sent,” or an emissary: a person who is sent out with a mission to accomplish on behalf of, and representing, the person that sent them. For the Christians, an apostle was someone specifically sent by God to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. “Missionary” would also be a possible translation of the Greek word *apostolos*, which is transliterated into English as “apostle”. This word was also a title given by Jesus to twelve of his closest followers, whom he sent out with his message (see Mk 3:13-19; Lk. 6:12-16; 9:1-6). They were understood by the first Christians as those appointed by Jesus to be the foundation (see Mt. 16:13-19) and the authoritative high council for his spiritual community after his resurrection (e.g. observe their role in Acts 6:1-7; 15:1-21; Gal. 2:6-10). James, Jesus’ brother, was also an acknowledged member of this circle (see Gal. 1:17-19).

- Apostleship The commission or office of being an apostle (see e.g. Acts 1:25; Rom. 1:5; 1 Cor. 9:2; Gal. 2:8 “Apostle”).
- Ark A large wooden ship that Noah built in the book of Genesis in order to preserve human beings and animals from a universal flood (Gen. 6–8).
- Ark of the Covenant This is a wooden box about 45” long by 27” wide by 27” tall, overlaid with gold. It has a solid gold lid with two gold “cherub” creatures (see “Cherub”) sculpted on it. See Exod. 25:10-22. The Hebrew people carried it with them when they traveled around the desert of Sinai, and it finally found a home in the Temple in Jerusalem.
- Asia In the New Testament, Asia refers to the western portion of what is now Asia Minor, i.e. Turkey. It includes the large cities of Ephesus (where Paul worked to build a Christian community) and Pergamum, and the other cities addressed in the letters to “the seven communities in Asia” in Rev. 2–3.
- Barbarian Someone from a country regarded (by whoever uses the word) as uncivilized.
- Bear Fruit This is a metaphor for displaying, in actions, your inner character or intention. Jesus says that a bad tree can’t bear good fruit, meaning that a person who has a bad inner character will not do good things.
- Beelzebul Prn. *beb-el-zubul*. This is appears to be an insulting name for the devil, meaning “The Lord of Dung”. Another interpretation is “The Lord of the Flies”.
- Behold The Greek word traditionally translated as “behold” typically draws attention to something remarkable, or simply intensifies the sense of the moment in narrative writing. I often use the word “suddenly” to stand in for “behold,” because it has a similar function in English oral narration, usually carrying more dramatic than temporal force.
- Blaspeme, Blasphemy To blaspeme is to say something insulting, and in particular, something insulting to God. Blasphemy refers to the act of blaspheming or to the words you say when you blaspeme.
- Baptism This is a ritual of transformation or initiation that involves water. The Greek word *baptizo*, from which the English word comes, means to dunk or plunge something in water. It appears that the baptism that John the Baptizer prescribed was metaphorical for washing or cleansing from sins; in the apostle Paul’s writings, baptism becomes metaphorical for a person dying in relation to their old way of life and rising to a new, resurrected life with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). Paul also sees baptism as a ritual of Christian initiation (1 Cor. 10:2; 12:13; Gal. 3:26-28).
- Bench See “Judgment Bench”.

- Bless** To express a wish or prayer that someone will prosper—either generally or in some specific way. In the Bible, blessings are often seen as having a special, almost prophetic power. Blessing is the opposite of cursing (see “Curse”).
- Blessed** This word is shorthand for “blessed by God” (see “Bless”). The idea is that when God wants you to prosper or says that you will prosper, you will definitely prosper. The word “blessed” also comes to mean “in a desirable, fortunate position.” “Blessed” is the opposite of “cursed” or “accursed” (see “Curse”).
- Caesar** The official title of the Roman emperor, the head of the Roman Empire.
- Centurion** A captain in the Roman occupation force, typically responsible for one hundred men.
- Chaff** The part of the grain that is inedible for human beings, for example the outer husk of a wheat berry. The chaff has to be removed in order for wheat or other grains to be ready for cooking, crushing or grinding for flour. “Separating the wheat from the chaff” is separating what is good and wholesome and useful from what is useless. For more on this process, see “Thresh” and “Winnow”.
- Cherub** Cherubs, or “cherubim,” as the Hebrew language pluralizes it, appear to be mysterious angelic beings that represent to the human imagination the presence and power of God, while at the same time hinting of the infinite and therefore inaccessible grandeur of God. They hold out their wings like veils so that no one imagines that he or she sees God “directly.” See Rev. 4:1-8; Exod. 25:10-22; Ezek. 1:1-28; 10:1-22. In Isa. 6:1-3, beings similar to cherubim are called “seraphim”.
- Christ** The Greek word usually rendered “Christ” literally translates the Hebrew word *mashiah*, transliterated into English as “Messiah.” Both mean “the one who has had olive oil poured on him,” i.e. the anointed one. See “Messiah” and “Anoint.”
- Children of** Expressions such as “children of the light,” “children of the kingdom,” and “children of darkness” indicate that groups of people somehow belong by their own inner nature to a certain ethical, spiritual, or characterological type. See, e.g., Mt. 8:12; 9:15; 13:38; Mk 3:28; Rom. 9:8; Eph. 2:2; 3:5; 1 Jn 3:10. Referring to people as “children of light,” for example, suggests that these people metaphorically prefer to be out in the open light of day, living honest and sincere lives in front of God with nothing to hide.
- Circumcision (the verb is to Circumcise)** A ritual operation in which the loose skin that covers the end of a boy’s or a man’s sex part is removed. The Jewish religion requires all males to have this ritual operation, as a sign that they are members of God’s covenant with Israel (see Gen. 17:10-14; Lev. 12:3, and see “Covenant”). Newborn baby boys were normally circumcised on the eighth day (e.g. Lk. 2:21), and male converts to Judaism were strictly required to be circumcised.

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| Clean | This means free from any contamination that would disqualify a person from carrying out their religious duties, such as going to the Temple. Touching an animal or person that died on their own, touching blood, having certain diseases, or touching people with certain diseases, were common ways to become “unclean” (see “Unclean”). To get clean again after such contamination required doing rituals and/or going through prescribed waiting periods. |
| Covenant | This was a special agreement or contract of mutual loyalty and responsibility between individuals or between people and God. |
| Covet | To covet is to wish that you had something that somebody else has, and that they didn't have it. To covet is to indulge the temptation that leads to stealing something. “I wish I had one too” is not a covetous thought. |
| Curse | A curse is a spoken wish for something bad to happen to someone or some thing. To curse is to express such a wish. Damning things and people is one familiar modern form of cursing. |
| Deacon | In the NT, a deacon, or “server” (lit. a table waiter), is a person entrusted with arranging provision for the practical needs of the spiritual community and its members. |
| Diaspora | Jewish people living in countries outside of Israel. |
| Disciple | A student or trainee. Philosophers and religious teachers in Jesus' day used to have groups of followers or students who went everywhere with them and listened to (and often memorized) their teachings. They gave their teachers complete authority in their lives. I have translated the word traditionally rendered as “disciple” as “follower,” because the word is used in the NT gospels not only to refer to Jesus' full-time students and spiritual trainees, but also to people who agree with his teachings. |
| Elect, Election | To elect someone, in biblical language, means to choose them. Many NT authors express the belief that people respond to the Christian good news because God has already chosen them to receive eternal life. But they would also say that if a Christian consistently acts in a manner incompatible with God's life, that calls into question their election, that is, their chosenness. “The elect” means “those who have been chosen,” i.e. chosen by God. |
| Eternal | Eternal means “having the character of permanence.” “Eternal” can also mean “having the character of the age to come,” or “lasting for the whole age.” When God is called “eternal,” the sense is different. It focuses on the idea that God has always existed, more than on the equally valid idea that God lives forever into the future. |
| Fast, Fasting | To fast is to go without food for a certain period of time in order to concentrate on God better. Ancient Jews commonly fasted for one day, but sometimes for much longer. |

- Fornication** This word refers to forbidden sexual relationships, especially sex with someone when neither of you is married, sex with a prostitute, or promiscuous sex. See “Adultery”.
- Fulfill, Fulfillment** Prophecies and promises are “fulfilled” when what is predicted or promised comes to pass. Sometimes NT authors also talk about “fulfillment” of scriptures that don’t seem to be either specific prophetic predictions or promises. In those cases “fulfillment” refers to the idea that the scripture refers ahead to people or events in the future in a way designed to become clear only in the later context.
- Fruit** See “Bear Fruit”.
- Gehenna** Thought to be one of the main garbage dumps outside of the walls of Jerusalem, where trash was burned. It is metaphorical for a final, complete, and unending state of destruction.
- Genealogy** This is a list of ancestors, like a family tree.
- Genealogies** I think this term in 1 Tim. 1:4 and Tit. 3:9 refers to the speculative idea that God and the physical world are almost infinitely far apart, because God is “pure spirit” (which the composers of “genealogies” think is good), and our world is physical (which they think is bad). The people accused of being fascinated by “genealogies” probably believed that the current physical creation must stand in relation to God in a way similar to how a distant descendant stands in relation to their original ancestor. Such thinkers would create long and complicated lists of all the intermediary beings that must supposedly stand between the spiritual and the physical realms. Finally, a relatively low-status angelic being would be seen as responsible for bringing the current physical world into being. That way God wouldn’t have to be considered responsible for or touched by the supposedly ugly, defective physical world.
- Generation** This is a very multi-faceted word in the NT. It can mean the adults alive right now, or the Jewish people as an ethnic group, or a certain kind or type of person. I think Jesus most often uses it to talk about a certain type of people who have no true loyalty to God.
- Gentiles** This often simply means “non-Jews”. But in the languages of the Bible, it also means, “nations”. So “the Gentiles” also often means “nations other than Israel”. Jewish people regarded the Gentiles as outsiders to God’s chosen community. The first Christians (who were Jews) deeply shocked their fellow Jews by proclaiming the message, “God has chosen the Gentiles too!”
- Glory, Glorify** In the Bible, glory means the public manifestation of the presence and character of God. “Glorify” means to make public what God is like—whether by words or actions. Older Bible translations also use the word “glory” as a verb, meaning “to boast”.

- Good News Often translated “gospel”. Gospel is an old English word meaning good news. In the Bible, “the good news” connotes life-changing good news, such as the announcement that a war or exile has come to an end (see, e.g., Isa. 52:7ff. LXX). The four “gospels” are four accounts of the good news of Jesus Christ, concentrating on his teachings and miracles, and on the events leading up to and including his arrest, trial, death, and resurrection.
- Hades Prn. *hay-deez*. The cavernous underworld, where the spirits of dead people are pictured as imprisoned. In resurrection, people are pictured as being released from there (see e.g. Rev. 1:18; 20:13-14).
- Hallelujah This is combined from two Hebrew words: “praise,” and “Yah,” short for the divine name YHWH. So it means “Praise YHWH!” (see “YHWH”).
- Heaven, Heavens In the ancient biblical conception of the world, the creation is pictured as composed of a number of layers. Heaven is the top layer. It is God’s throne room, from which God sees and judges the whole earth. The transparent floor of heaven is pictured as the ceiling of the sky above us, a kind of glassy or icy dome. Under the sky stands the earth, and under the earth stands the abyss of the underworld. God’s dwelling above the dome, the dome itself, and the atmosphere under the dome can each be referred to as “heaven” or “the heavens”.
- Heir Someone who inherits property from someone else, usually but not always from a parent. Our authors also use the word “heir” and the concept of “inheritance” in a metaphorical way—to talk about people who are in line to participate in the coming age of resurrection and renewal of the creation. Heirs sometimes received their inheritance when they came into their adulthood, and that is probably the NT concept: the resurrection is being seen as the coming of age of the children of God.
- High Priest A special priest who had unique duties of offering sacrifices for the whole nation every year In Israel. See Lev. 16.
- Holy Holy means two things especially: 1. Pure and free from the slightest injustice or sin, and 2. Specially dedicated to God’s service.
- Horrible See “Woe.”
- Hypocrite SENT uses the expression “play-actor” to translate the Greek word *hypokrites*, traditionally rendered as “hypocrite,” for two reasons. First, because *hypokrites* literally means “play-actor,” and secondly, because in the mouth of Jesus the word connotes a person whose only focus is on maintaining the outward appearance of being religiously or spiritually sound. A *hypokrites*, in other words, is a person who habitually puts on an act. The English word “hypocrite” itself no longer connotes this. In today’s English it connotes a person whose actions are inconsistent with their professed values and beliefs. Lacking ethical consistency and putting on an act are closely related, but they are not identical.

- Hyssop Prn. *hiss-up*. A plant that was used to brush the blood of the Passover lamb onto the Israelite door frames (Exod. 12:22; see “Passover”). Hyssop was used in certain purification ceremonies. In Ps. 51:7 the psalmist refers to hyssop as a metaphorical wand for spiritual cleansing.
- Idol
Idolatry An idol was a carving or image of a deity, which people used in their worship of that deity. The God of the Hebrews did not allow the worship of other gods or the making of any images (see the second commandment, Exod. 20:4-6). NT authors broaden the concept of idolatry to include dependence or fixation on anything that distracts you from single-minded loyalty to God (see, e.g., Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:6; 1 Jn 5:21).
- Jews “Jews” is the typical rendering of the Greek word *ioudaioi*, which can mean “Jews,” “Judeans” (i.e. residents of Judea), or “religious/political leaders of the nation of Israel”. Use in the gospels of the expression “the Jews” has led to a great deal of misunderstanding over the centuries. When the author of the Gospel of John uses this term, it’s usually obvious that he means the Jewish *leaders*, whose center of religious and political power was Jerusalem, not Judeans in general or Jewish people in general (see Jn 11:31, 36, 45 for probable exceptions). I would argue that John’s use of the term is parallel to the case of someone saying that “the Israelis” have done something, meaning that the Israeli political leaders have done it.
- Justify,
Justification A judge “justifies” a party in a lawsuit by ruling that they are the party that is in the right. To be justified means to be vindicated, to be found innocent, or to be proven to be in the right (esp. by God). Because God is the ultimate judge of human beings, “justified” comes to mean “right with God”.
- Judgment
Bench This is the official seat where a ruler, governor or judge sits to hear cases and render verdicts. Contemporary judges still tell attorneys to “approach the bench”.
- Leper A person who suffered from any one of a number of chronic skin diseases that caused problems such as whitening, thickening, or scaliness of the skin. See “Leprosy”.
- Leprosy The biblical descriptions of leprosy make it clear that it is a general category of skin problems that cause whitening, thickening, and/or scaliness of the skin (see Lev. 13–14). What is currently called leprosy (i.e. Hansen’s disease, which involves the destruction of nerves and a loss of sensation) is one sub-category of the ancient disease.
- Levite A person from the Israelite tribe of Levi. Levites had the special duty of helping the Jewish priests in the Temple at Jerusalem.
- Locust Another name for various kinds of grasshopper. Locusts are famous in the Middle East for appearing in huge numbers to eat everything in sight.
- LXX See “Septuagint”.

- Masoretic Text (MT)** The Hebrew Old Testament manuscript tradition that was standardized by Jewish copyists and editors known as the Masoretes (prn. *mass-o-reets*) between the seventh the tenth centuries CE. The key feature of the MT is its inclusion of accents and special dots that supply vowels, and so tell the reader exactly how to pronounce the text.
- Messiah** This is a Hebrew word that means “the one who has had olive oil poured on him,” i.e. the Anointed One. In Hebrew theology, the king needs a special portion of God’s Holy Spirit to do the work of leading the nation. In 1 Sam. 16:1-13 we see a ritual of pouring olive oil on a person’s head as a symbol of empowerment by the Spirit for leadership. By the time of the events of the New Testament, the territory of the former kingdom of Israel had been occupied by a succession of foreign powers^a for many centuries. They had no real, independent king. But they took hope from many Old Testament predictions that a king like David, their most famous king, would someday appear. They hoped that this person, whom they called “the Messiah,” would be used by God to rescue them from their enemies and establish peace and justice on the earth (e.g. Ezek. 37:15-28; Lk. 1:67-79). See “Christ”.
- Ministry** Service, or administration of a service role. In the NT, ministry can refer both to practical service and spiritual service.
- Miracle** A dramatic event, such as a spectacular healing or display of authority in relation to the natural world, that is understood as evidence that God is present and active in a particular place or through a particular person. See “Sign”.
- Name** The Bible has very many instances of talking about a person’s name as a way of talking about, or evoking, their personhood or their authority. For example, to pray or do something “in the name of Jesus” means to pray or do that thing in conscious dependence on the divine authority of Jesus. In biblical thinking, there is often the assumption of a deep relationship between words and the things they stand for, and between names and the people they stand for.
- Parable** This is Jesus’ favorite teaching device. It’s an illustration of a spiritual or ethical truth drawn from common experience—in other words, a simile or analogy (e.g. “God’s reign is like a mustard seed...”). Jesus’ parables also include proverbs framed as metaphors, and brief stories that express insights about the relationship between God and human beings.

^a Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome.

- Passover The ritual meal commemorating the Israelites' miraculous rescue from Egypt, during which a "destroying angel" killed the firstborn sons of the Egyptians but spared (i.e. passed over) the firstborn of the Israelites. The Israelite families were told to eat a lamb in each household, and to smear some of its blood on the doorframes, to warn the "destroying angel" not to come in, but to "pass over" that house (see Exod. 12:1–13:17). Familiar elements of the Passover meal were bread baked without yeast (cracker bread), cups of wine, lamb, salt water, and bitter herbs. In the time of Jesus, each family offered a lamb at the Jerusalem Temple and then ate it at the Passover meal. Most modern Jews do not eat lamb at the Passover (also known as the Seder, *prn. say-der*), because the Temple is no longer standing. Jesus' last meal was a Passover meal. He reinterpreted it to commemorate his death as the basis a new covenant of forgiveness (see "Covenant") between God and human beings.
- Pharisees *Prn. ferr-a-seez*. These were highly educated Jews who formed one of the main religious sects in Israel in the time of Jesus. They were also a political party, since Israel was a country based on religious laws. Pharisees were known for their passionate quest to obey all of God's laws perfectly. In addition, Pharisees were known for their belief in angels and in the resurrection of the dead.
- Play-Actor See "Hypocrite".
- Prophecy *Prn. proff-a-see*. A message from God to human beings, or the act of conveying a message from God to human beings. Prophecies in the Bible often claim to give God's perspective on current events, and include predictions of what is going to happen in the future if people do or don't change their ways. Some prophecies are understood to be divine revelations of future events so that the participants in those events will understand what they are experiencing.
- Prophecy *Prn. proff-a-sye*. To give a prophecy (see "Prophecy").
- Prophet A person who is known for giving prophecies (see "Prophecy"). People in Jesus' day were looking for "The Prophet," a mysterious person with a ministry like Moses, that Moses predicted God would someday raise up from among the people of Israel (Deut. 18:15).
- Propitiation A propitiation is a gift that makes amends for a wrong (or perceived wrong) that one party in a relationship has done to the other. For the classical biblical example of propitiation, see Gen. 32:3–33:4. To "propitiate" someone is to gain or regain their favor, by doing something that clearly demonstrates your good intention and good faith towards them.
- Proselyte *Prn. pross-a-lyte*. In the NT, this refers to a Gentile (see "Gentile") person who converts to Judaism and essentially becomes a Jew in adulthood. In Christian writings after the NT, it comes to mean a person who is in the process of converting to Christianity.

- Redemption** Literally, the act of buying someone out of captivity, or the process of being purchased out of captivity. Metaphorically it often means divine rescue from captivity in the NT, especially rescue from the captivity of sin and its consequences. The metaphor comes from the familiar business of slavery and imprisonment. Redemption could be accomplished by buying a slave, or by paying a jailed person's fines or debts. A kidnapped person could also be redeemed by paying a ransom.
- Remnant** In the Bible, this refers to a small proportion of a larger group that stays faithful when the group as a whole seems to be forsaking God. It's seen as a manifestation of the grace and providence of God that God determines to choose out and save a remnant. Although the term "remnant" does not appear there, 1 Kgs 19:1-18 is a classic story of God's preservation of a remnant.
- Repent** To determine that you have done wrong and to embrace a new ethical attitude and course of action that is in harmony with God's will. In SENT, the words traditionally rendered as "repent" are typically rendered as "change your heart" and "change your ways".
- Repentance** The act of repenting, or the attitude of one who has repented. See "Repent".
- Resurrection** Being brought alive again by God after you have died. NT authors believe that at the end of history, people will be resurrected either for judgment and punishment for their doings in mortal life, or for participation in a glorious restoration and renewal of the creation. Resurrection also becomes a metaphor for entering on a completely new life through conversion to Jesus Christ.
- Righteous, Righteousness** This traditional word connotes being just and having ethical and spiritual integrity. In relation to human beings, it also tends to connote being a law-abiding person. "Righteousness" connotes justice, fairness, and integrity.
- Sabbath** The fourth of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21) given to the Israelites by God on Mount Sinai was the Sabbath command, the command to rest completely from work on the seventh day of every week. By making weekly rest a sacred duty for all levels of society—including working animals—the Sabbath command created a fundamental protection for all who work.
- Sadducees** Prn. *sadd-yoo-seez*. These were educated and relatively wealthy Jews who formed one of the main religious sects in Israel in the time of Jesus. They were also a political party, since Israel was a country based on religious laws. The Sadducees were known for regarding only the Pentateuch, the first five books of the OT, as scripture, and for disbelieving in angels and resurrection of the dead. See "Pharisees".
- Sanhedrin** Prn. *san-heed-run*. This was the Jewish law-making body and high court of the land of Israel under the Roman occupation.

- Scroll** Ancient books were usually made in the form of scrolls, which are long rolls of paper or fine animal skin. Instead of individual pages, a scroll has blocks of writing side by side that are like its pages. You roll a scroll from one wooden spindle to another in order to write or read the next block in it.
- Seal** Think of an impressed wax seal that seals, i.e. holds tightly closed, a contract document. The seal both proves the genuineness of the contract and protects the sealed contract from being opened and tampered with.
- Scepter** Prn. *sep-ter*. A monarch's ceremonial staff, which symbolizes authority to make commands and enforce laws.
- Scripture** A writing agreed to be inspired by God, or, as in the case of the OT as a whole, the whole collection of writings agreed to be inspired. "Scripture says" can be shorthand for "in one of the inspired writings of Scripture it is found written".
- Scripture Experts** In Jesus' day the whole Jewish society had its legal foundation in Israel's scriptures. The Greek word *grammateus* is traditionally translated into English as "scribe," and in some more recent translations as "teacher of the law". But this word means more than a scribe—which suggests something like a notary public—and it means more than simply a teacher of the law. These people certainly did teach, but they also were official interpreters of the law. They were like lawyers and legislators. They had a lot of political power, and probably constituted both a powerful guild and a political party.
- Septuagint** Prn. *sep-too-a-jint*. This is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that most New Testament authors used as their Bible. It got its name from the tradition that an original team of seventy (or seventy-two) translators worked on translating the first five books of the OT, known as the Pentateuch. It is usually abbreviated as LXX (the number 70 in Roman numerals). The LXX includes not only the 39 books of the OT that Protestant Christians find familiar, but also the books of what is commonly known as the Apocrypha, which Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians regard as scripture, but Protestants and Jews do not.
- Sign** A dramatic happening that is taken to be evidence that God is present and actively at work. Moderns would probably call this a "miracle." The ancient Jews also looked on strange phenomena in the natural world (such as comets, eclipses, meteor showers, volcanos, earthquakes, plagues) as possible signs that God might be about to intervene and bring about an end to human history.
- Sons of** See "Children of".
- Spikenard** Expensive, high-quality scented oil.
- Synagogue** Prn. *sinn-a-gogg*. A local Jewish worshipping community, and, by extension, the building the community used as a place for worship and the study of the Scriptures.

- Tent of Witness** See Exod. 40:34-35. The Tent of Witness was a portable version of what was to become the core of the Jerusalem Temple. It had a table on which were kept twelve loaves of bread symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel (see below under “twelve tribes”), a seven-branched lampstand, an incense altar, and, in its innermost compartment called the “holiest place” or “holy of holies,” it housed the “ark of the covenant” (also see that entry, above).
- Tetrarch** Ruler of one fourth of a territory. During Jesus’ lifetime, the Jewish vassal king died, and each of his four sons received a fourth of his original kingdom. Each was called a “tetrarch”.
- Thresh** To break loose the edible parts of harvested grain from the inedible parts, typically by mechanical processes such as trampling, beating, or crushing with wheels or a sledge. Once the grain was threshed, it then had to be winnowed (see “Winnow”).
- Tithe** A tenth, or (as a verb) to give a tenth. The Pharisees (see “Pharisees”) were passionate about following God’s law to the ultimate degree. According to Jesus, they used to tithe (following Deut.14:22-27) even the produce of their little potted kitchen herb plants.
- Twelve Tribes** The twelve tribes refer to the twelve traditional clans that make up the nation of Israel. They see themselves as the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, whom God renamed Israel. Jacob was Abraham’s grandson. See Gen. 25–49.
- Winnow** To toss threshed grain up in the air in a breeze. That way the (lighter) inedible parts get swept sideways, and the edible kernels fall almost straight down and can be collected for storage. If not enough of a breeze can be found, fans can be used for winnowing. Winnowing becomes a metaphor for God’s separation of wicked people from people of integrity. See “Thresh”.
- Unclean** Literally speaking, “unclean” in the Bible means affected by disease or some other unhygienic condition—often the uncleanness is something that risks the health of anyone who has it or comes in contact with it. The OT has many rules regarding “clean” and “unclean” foods, substances, creatures, and health states. “Unclean” people cannot participate in religious duties, and sometimes cannot have contact with other people at all. In the NT, demonic spirits are often called “unclean spirits,” as though their presence constitutes a kind of spiritual disease.
- Woe** This traditional word can be an expression of grief and distress for one’s own suffering or an expression of severe warning that major grief and distress are coming for another person or group. SENT renders it as “How horrible!” in the first instance, and “It’s going to be bad” in the second instance.
- Works** This traditional word means the things you do, your activities, your behavior, your achievements. In the NT, “works” also often means your activities of a religious nature, such as the things you might do to obey and please God. A

belief consistently stated in the NT writings is that God is going to evaluate all people on the basis of what they have done in their mortal lives, not what they have believed or the opinions they have held.

- YHWH This is the Hebrew name for God, sometimes rendered as “the LORD,” but more accurately rendered as “I AM” (see Exod. 3:13-15). It’s traditional among the Jews to leave the vowels out, and never to pronounce YHWH, also known as “the Name,” because in Jewish belief, to name a being is to have some power over it. In the case of God, that was seen as highly presumptuous, so “the Name” was never pronounced, but was always replaced in prayers and readings of scripture by various substitute expressions, such as “the Name,” “the Lord,” and so on. In Revelation in the NT, John renders this name of God in rather free poetic form as “The Is, the Was, and the Coming One” (Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8).
- Zion The name of a hill (either the hill known as the Temple Mount or a different hill just outside the walls of the ancient city of Jerusalem) which came to be treated as symbolic for Jerusalem as a whole and for the faithful people of God.

