



THE  
BIBLE

# Interpreting in Light of Culture

# *What to Do?*

- 1. Which practices in Acts and the rest of the NT should we do today? Please take the quiz.**



# PERMANENT or temporary?

131e

New Testament Survey: Acts

## Permanent or Temporary?

Ralph Covell & Marshall Shelly, *Wherever* magazine (Spring 1982)

Which of the specific practices and commands that appear in the New Testament are to apply to all times in all places? Which are merely temporary, needed at one particular time in one particular place, but not necessarily applicable at other times and in other places?

To get a handle on the problem, try this self-think exercise we've adapted from some material put together by Mont Smith, a former missionary in Ethiopia. We've listed 50 practices and commands that appear in the New Testament. In a sense, all are "scriptural." The question is: Which are meant to be permanent (P)? Which are merely temporary (T)? Think about each one, then circle the appropriate response.

- |  |     |   |     |
|--|-----|---|-----|
| 1. Greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16).                              | P T | 25. Drink communion from a single cup (Mark 14:23).                   | P T |
| 2. Abstain from meat that has been sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:29).             | P T | 26. Take formal religious vows (Acts 18:18).                          | P T |
| 3. Be baptized (Acts 2:38).  | P T | 27. Avoid praying in public (Mt. 6:5, 6).                             | P T |
| 4. A woman ought to have a veil on her head (1 Cor. 11:10).                      | P T | 28. Speak in tongues and prophesy (1 Cor. 14:5).                      | P T |
| 5. Wash one another's feet (John 13:14).   | P T | 29. Meet in homes for church (Col. 4:15).                             | P T |
| 6. Extend the right hand (left hand?) of fellowship (Gal. 2:9).                  | P T | 30. Work with your hands (1 Thess. 4:11).                             | P T |
| 7. Ordain by the "laying on of hands" (Acts 13:3).                               | P T | 31. Lift your hands when praying (1 Tim. 2:8).                        | P T |
| 8. "It is indecent for a woman to speak in an assembly" (1 Cor. 14:35).          | P T | 32. Give to those who beg from you (Mt. 5:42).                        | P T |
| 9. Have fixed hours of prayer (Acts 3:1).  | P T | 33. Pray before meals (Lk. 24:30).                                    | P T |
| 10. Sing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16).                          | P T | 34. Support no widow under 60 years old (1 Tim. 5:9).                 | P T |
| 11. Abstain from eating blood (Acts 15:29).                                      | P T | 35. Say "Amen" at the end of prayers (1 Cor. 14:16).                  | P T |
| 11. Slaves, obey your earthly masters (Eph. 6:5).                                | P T | 36. Fast in connection with ordination (Acts 13:3).                   | P T |
| 13. Observe the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:24).                                    | P T | 37. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic (Mark 6:9).                   | P T |
| 14. Do not make any oaths (James 5:12).  | P T | 38. Wives, submit to your husbands (Col. 3:18).                       | P T |
| 15. Anoint the sick with oil (James 5:14).                                       | P T | 39. Show no favoritism to the rich (James 2:1-7).                     | P T |
| 16. Permit no woman to teach men (1 Tim. 2:12).                                  | P T | 40. Use unleavened bread for communion (Lk. 22:13, 19).               | P T |
| 17. Preach two by two (Mark 6:7).  | P T | 41. Cast lots for church officers (Acts 1:26).                        | P T |
| 18. Go into Jewish synagogues to preach (Acts 14:1).                             | P T | 42. Owe no man anything (Rom. 13:8).                                  | P T |
| 19. Eat what is set before you asking no questions of conscience (1 Cor. 10:27). | P T | 43. Have seven deacons in the church (Acts 6:3).                      | P T |
| 20. Prohibit women from wearing braided hair, gold, or pearls (1 Tim. 2:9).      | P T | 44. Don't eat meat from animals killed by strangulation (Acts 15:29). | P T |
| 21. Abstain from fornication (Acts 15:29).                                       | P T | 45. If anyone will not work, don't let him eat (2 Thess. 3:10).       | P T |
| 22. Do not seek marriage (1 Cor. 7:27).  | P T | 46. Worship on Saturday (Acts 13:14, 42, 44).                         | P T |
| 23. Be circumcised (Acts 15:5).  | P T | 47. Give up personal property (Acts 2:44, 45).                        | P T |
| 24. Women should pray with their heads covered (1 Cor. 11:5).                    | P T | 48. Have self-employed clergy (2 Thess. 3:7, 8).                      | P T |
|  |     | 49. Take collections in church for the poor (1 Cor. 16:1).            | P T |
|  |     | 50. Long hair on a man is a disgrace (1 Cor. 11:14).                  | P T |

Now for the hard part...

When you're finished, get ready for the hard part. What principle did you use to decide which were permanent and which were temporary and cultural? Since you made a separation, you must have used some standard. What was it? Remember that your principle must be one that can apply to every example in the above list.

Write your principles here. Then, just to keep yourself honest, have a friend examine your categories for a moment on how well you held to your principles.

Rick

\_\_\_\_\_ 's Principles of Biblical Interpretation. \_\_\_\_\_  
 (your name)

# *For example...*

- 1. Which practices in Acts should we expect today? For example...**
  - **Elders?**
  - **Tongues?**
  - **Give property to the church?**
- 2. Why or why not do these things?**



# *What to Do?*

- 1. Which practices in Acts and the rest of the NT should we do today? Please take the quiz.**
- 2. Why or why not do these things? (In other words, what principle did you follow to make sure you are consistent in application?)**



# *My Interpretation Principle*

The practice must be:

- *universally applied to all NT churches* the best we can tell
- *but not tied to the cultural context* so closely that its underlying principle is lost in another culture



# Hermeneutical Considerations: Normative or Descriptive?

## 1. Author's intent

- Is the author trying to teach something, or is he only describing an event (e.g., drawing lots in Acts 1)?

## 2. Support from other clearer biblical passages

- Is the underlying principle clearly taught elsewhere (when the Spirit comes in Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19)?

## 3. Repeatable “patterns”

- Although it may not have been the author's intent to teach, some things should be repeated (e.g., elders).
- However, we must also consider cultural norms when trying to reproduce such “patterns.”

# Elders led from the time of Moses

**Elders  
led with  
Moses  
1400 BC**

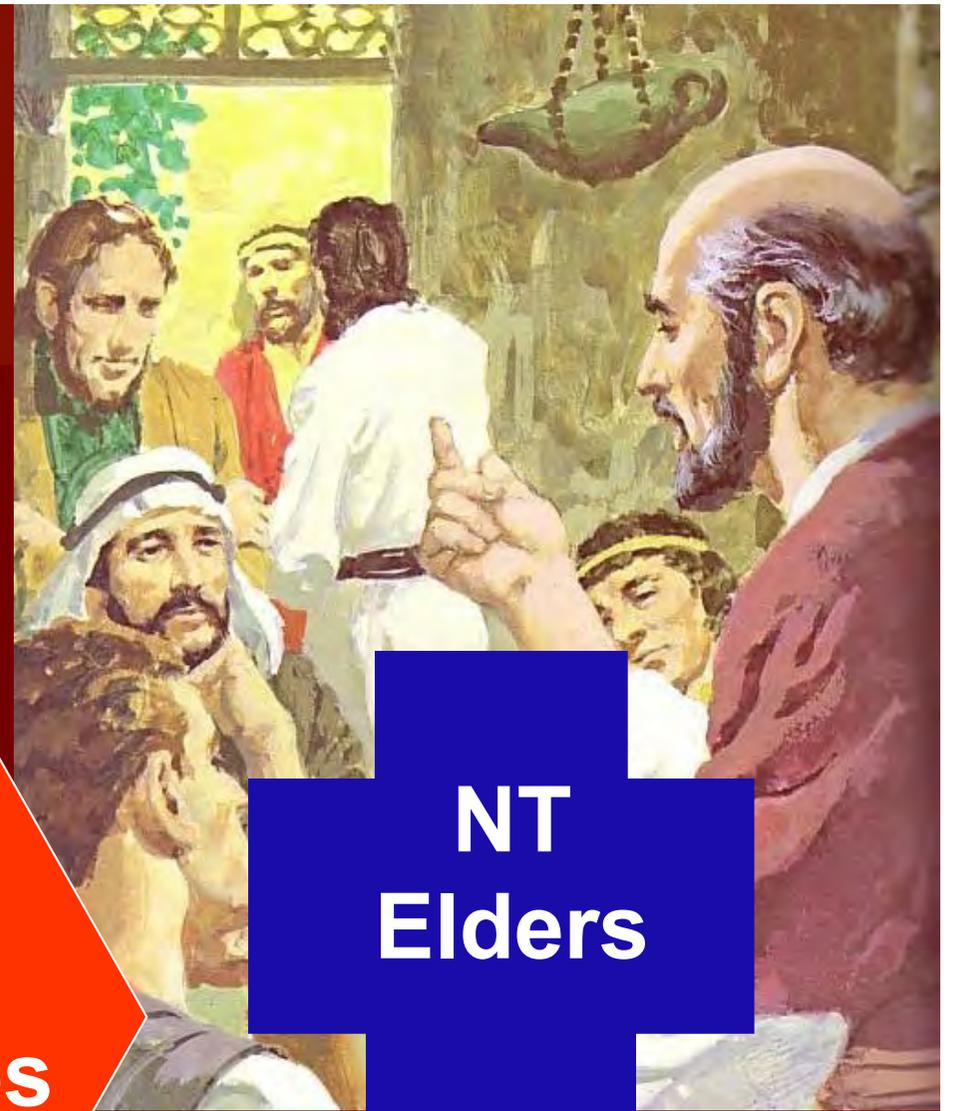
**“Go, assemble the  
elders of Israel and  
say to them...” (Exod.  
3:16)**

# Who Led the Synagogue?

**Elders  
led with  
Moses  
1400 BC**

**Elders  
led  
Synagogues  
600 BC**

# God has advocated group leadership through the ages



**Elders  
led with  
Moses  
1400 BC**

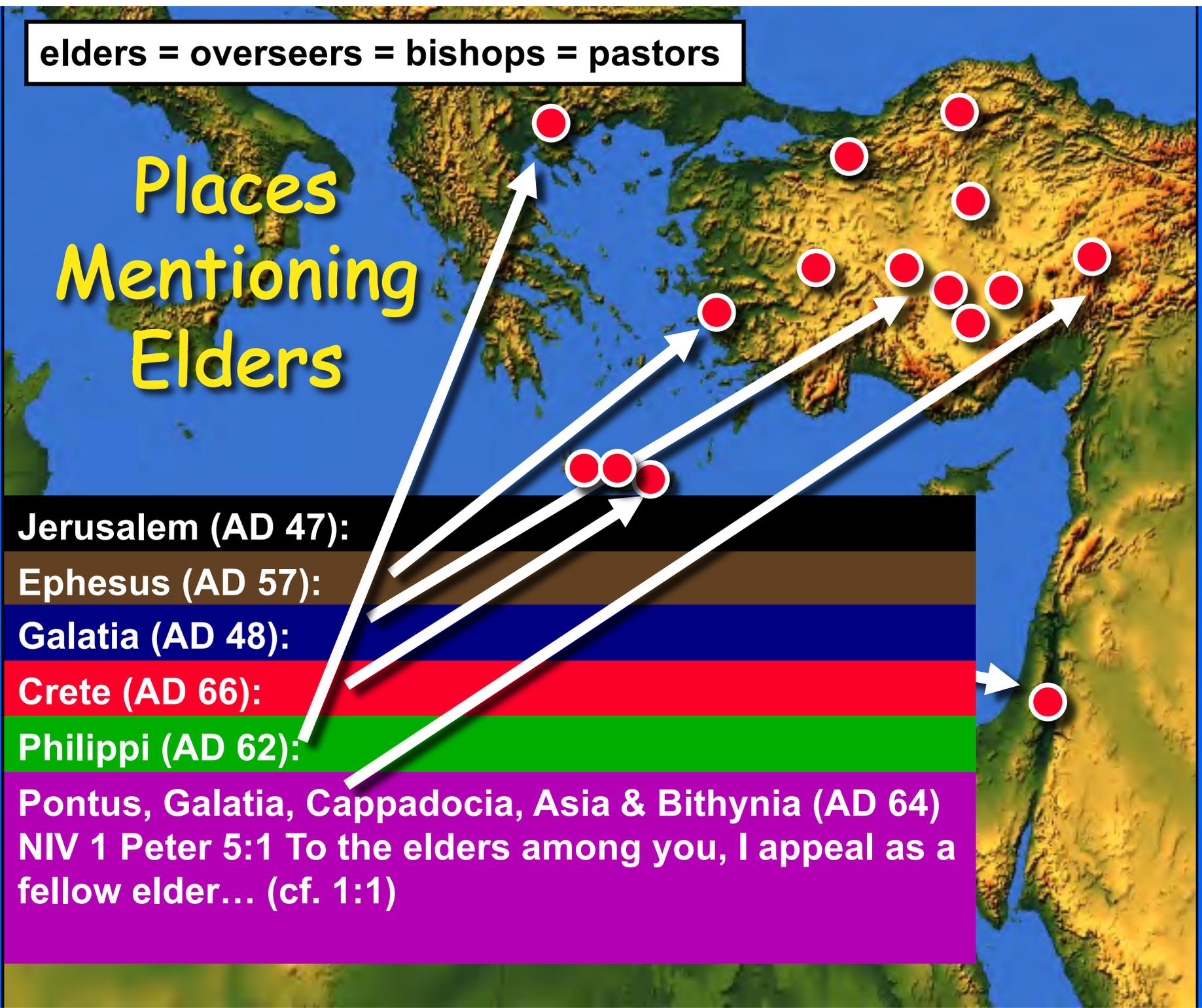
**Elders  
led  
Synagogues  
600 BC**

**NT  
Elders**

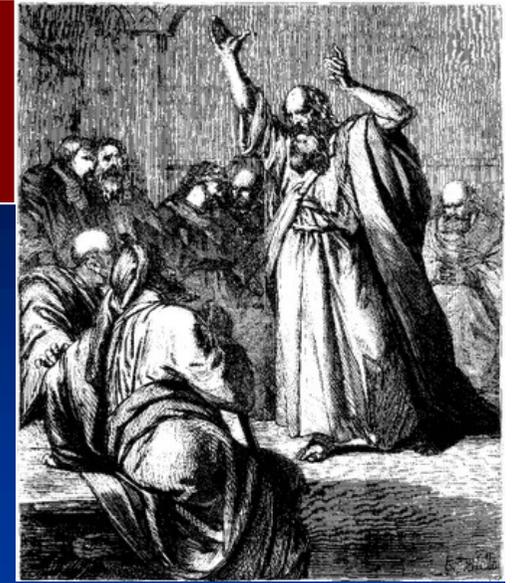
elders = overseers = bishops = pastors

# Places Mentioning Elders

- Jerusalem (AD 47):
- Ephesus (AD 57):
- Galatia (AD 48):
- Crete (AD 66):
- Philippi (AD 62):
- Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia & Bithynia (AD 64)  
NIV 1 Peter 5:1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder... (cf. 1:1)

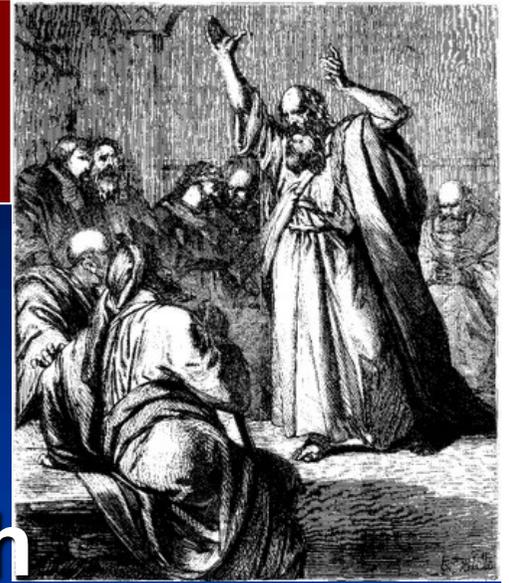


# The Elders of Israel



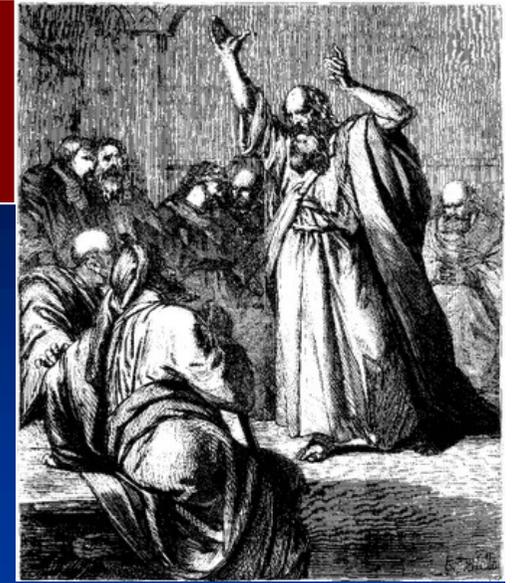
1. Elders are found **throughout** the nation's history
2. Elders were prominent **even when God spoke revelation through a single man** such as Moses (Exod. 3:16, 18; 4:29, etc.) or a prophet like Elijah (2 Kings 6:32)
3. There was always a **plurality** of elders in the OT—only once does the word appear in the singular (“elder” in Isa. 3:2)

# The Elders of Israel



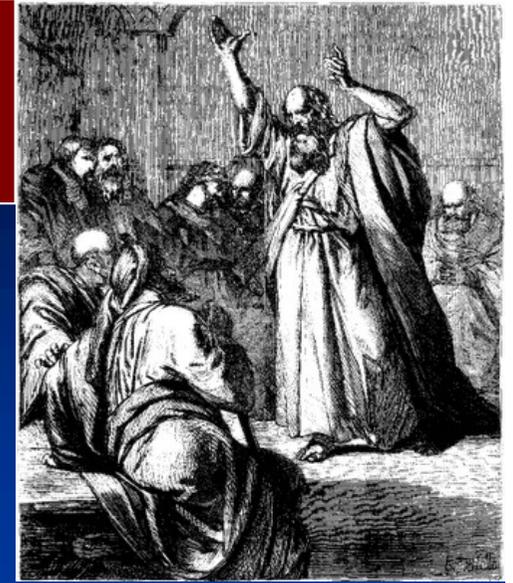
4. Elders led at **various levels**: national, regional, city, house
5. Elders **ruled other nations**, such as Midian (Num. 22:4), Moab (Num. 22:7), and Gibeon (Josh. 9:11).
6. Once Israel's elders **prophesied** (Num. 11:25-26).
7. Elders were **commanded to teach** the people God's laws every seven years (Deut. 27:1-8; 31:9-10), which they did under Josiah (2 Kings 23:1-2).

# The Elders of Israel



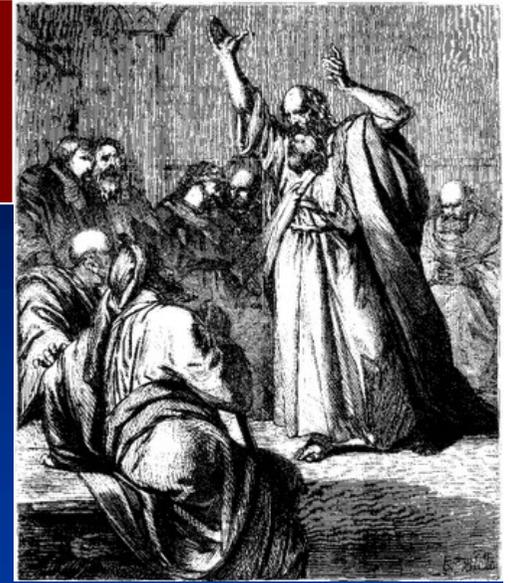
8. Elders were respected for their **wisdom** (Ps. 107:32; Prov. 31:23; Lam. 4:16; 5:12)
9. Elders **counseled kings** in their ruling (1 Kings 12:6-8, 13; 20:7-8; Jer. 26:17) and anointed kings to power (1 Chron. 11:3)
10. Elders **submitted to prophets'** instructions (Elijah in 2 Kings 6:32; Ezekiel in Ezek. 14:1)

# The Elders of Israel



11. Elders **ruled alongside other administrators**: a palace administrator, the city governor, and officials (2 Kings 10:1, 5). Their decision was especially binding in postexilic times (Ezra 10:8, 14).
12. OT elders often **failed to lead** the people biblically
13. Elders **will rule over Israel in the future** millennial reign of Christ (Isa. 24:23)

# The Elders of Israel



14. Unfortunately, the OT gives **no explicit instructions** on who they were or how to select them. Yet the term itself implies that each group of elders was composed of **older, mature men.**

# 1 Corinthians 11:4 NLT

**<sup>4</sup>A man dishonors his head if he covers his head while praying or prophesying.**



## 1 Corinthians 11:5-6 NLT

**<sup>5</sup>But a woman dishonors her head if she prays or prophesies without a covering on her head, for this is the same as shaving her head.**

**<sup>6</sup>Yes, if she refuses to wear a head covering, she should cut off all her hair! But since it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or her head shaved, she should wear a covering.**





BaldlyGo.com



Should women worship with the veil?



Veils at a wedding are beautiful...



**In most societies today, head coverings send the wrong signal—that we are out of touch with societal convention**



**= Today we must honor our  
authorities during worship.**

**Men**



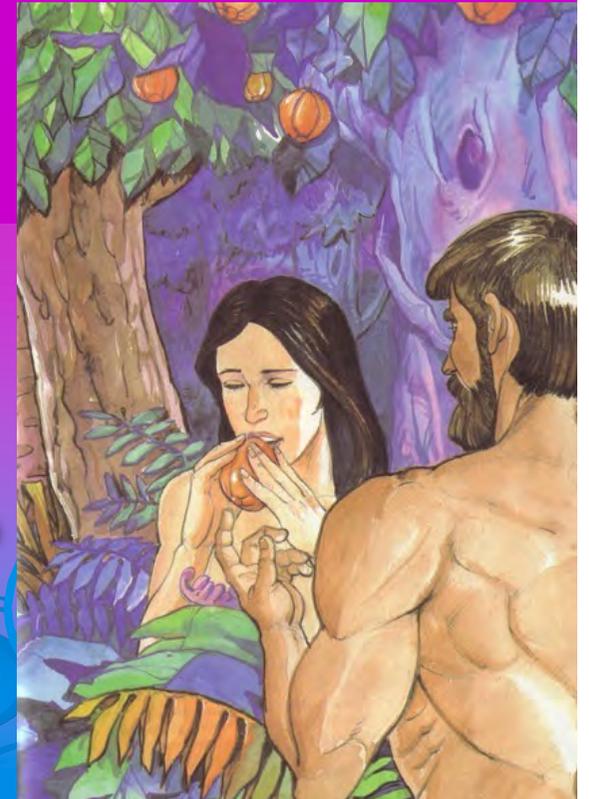
**Women**



# 1 Timothy 2:11-15

**<sup>11</sup>A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.**

**<sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup>But women {Gr. she} will be saved {or restored} through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.**



**= Today we must honor our  
authorities during worship.**

**Men**



**Women**

**All**

# Consult my website at [BibleStudyDownloads.org](http://BibleStudyDownloads.org) for thousands of OT & NT backgrounds slides

## New Testament Backgrounds In English

### TRANSLATIONS

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Latar Belakang Perjanjian Baru (NT Backgrounds in Indonesian)

新约全书背景 (NT Backgrounds in Chinese)

Bối cảnh thời Tân Ước (NT Backgrounds in Vietnamese)

Шинэ Гэрээний үеийн байдал (NT Backgrounds in Mongolian)



### Notes

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NTB186b-e Gospel of Judas.doc (v.1.0.0)

### Introduction

00-NTB Internet Resources.ppt (v.1.0.0)

00-NTS 8-19 Backgrounds-23\_eng\_ns\_5427\_v1.0.0.pptx

# The Babylonians

*(Neo-Babylonian Empire)*

**625-539 BC**



**Dr. Rick Griffith, Singapore Bible College**  
**[www.biblestudydownloads.com](http://www.biblestudydownloads.com)**

# History of Babylon



Genesis 10:8-10; 11:2, 9; Rev. 17:1-6

How did Babylon start?

What motivated this beginning?

What resulted from its founding?

What did Babylon signify?

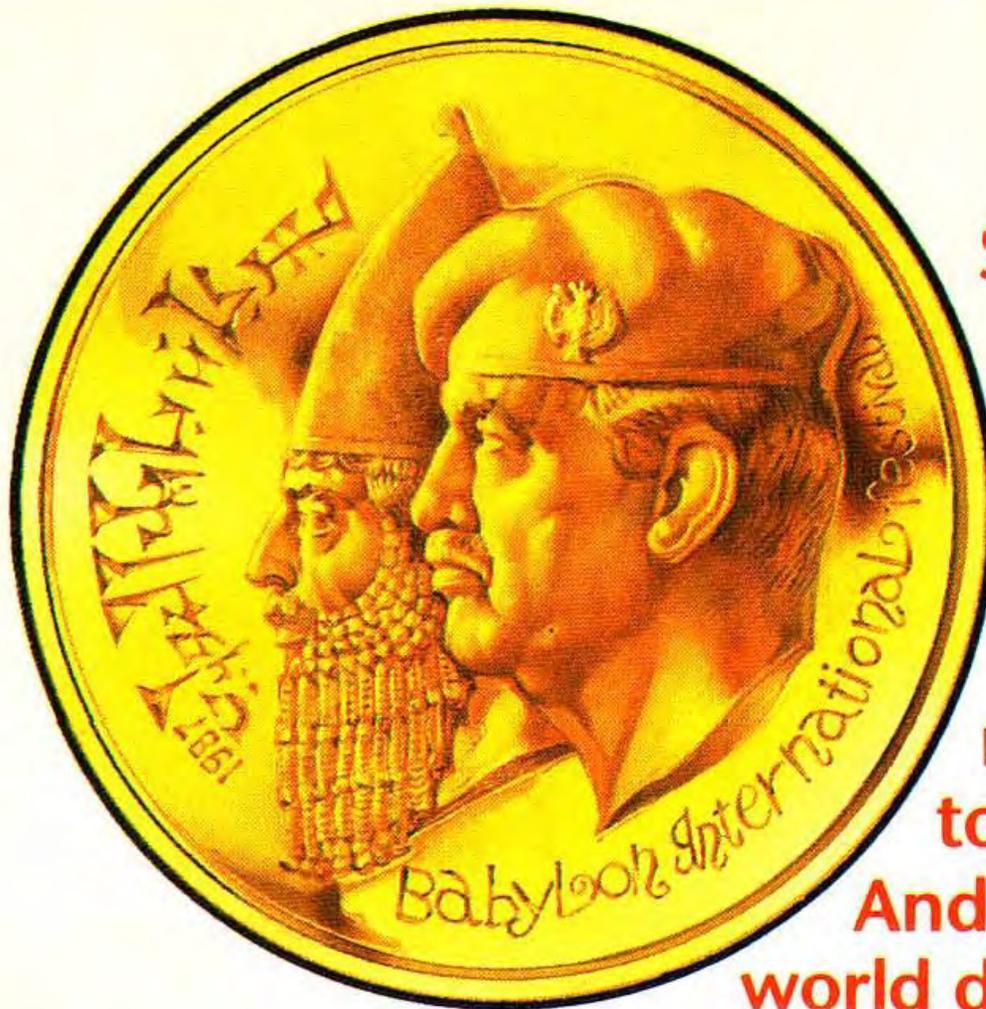
**The Name**

**The Location**

**The Tower of Babel**



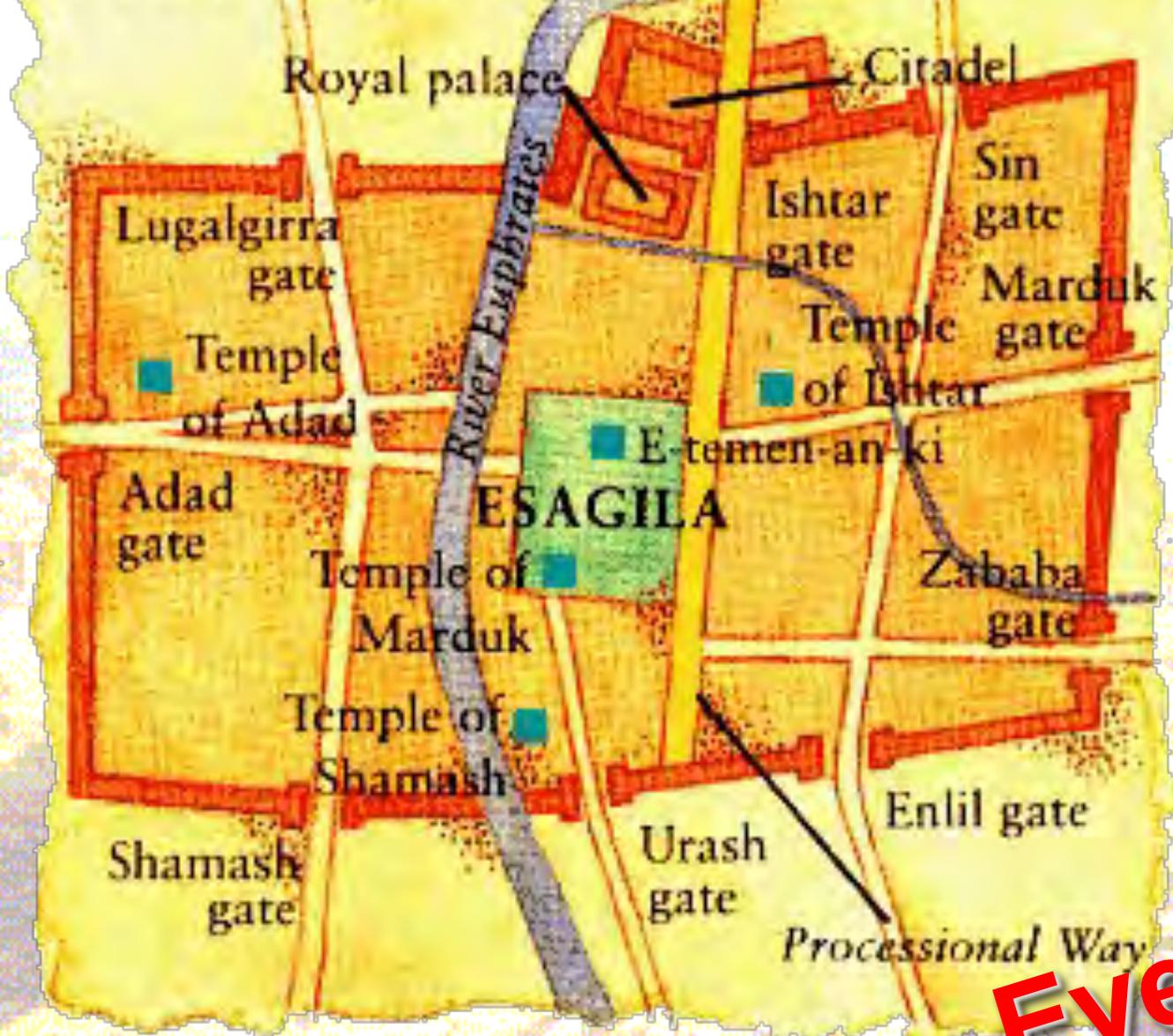
## Neo-Babylonian Rulers



**SADDAM HUSSEIN**  
and the ancient  
world conqueror  
Nebuchadnezzar.  
Not only do they  
look alike, but their  
mission is the same—  
to control the world.  
And the symbol of this  
world dominion is an ancient city . . .

**BABYLON: Prelude to Armageddon?**

# The city of Babylon

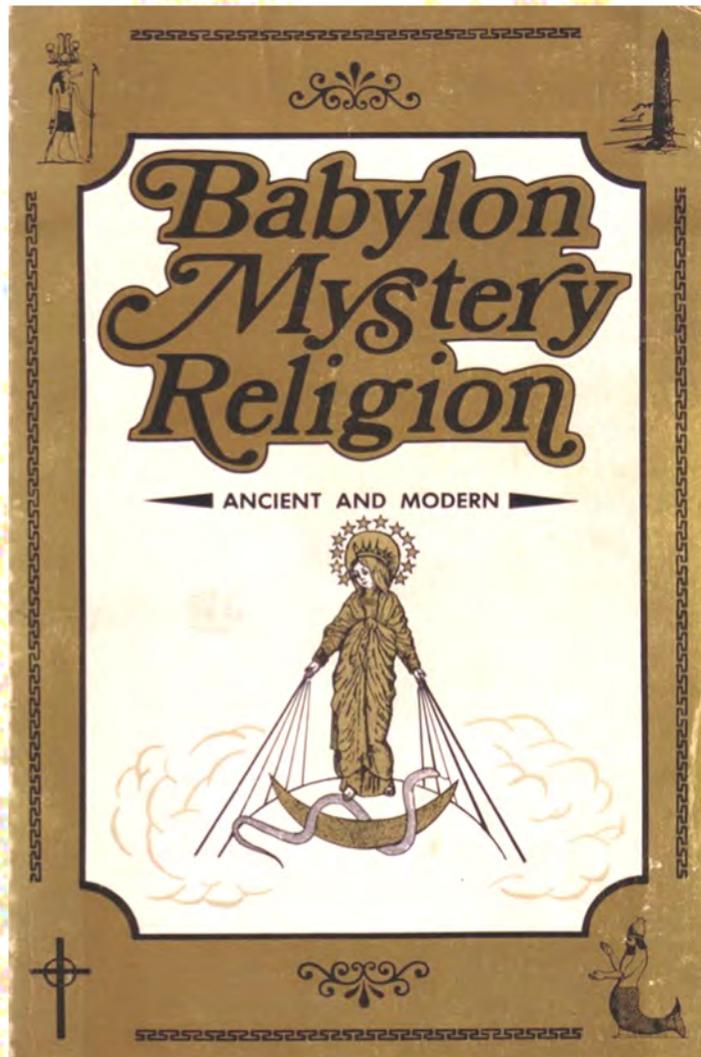


**Where  
were the  
gods?**

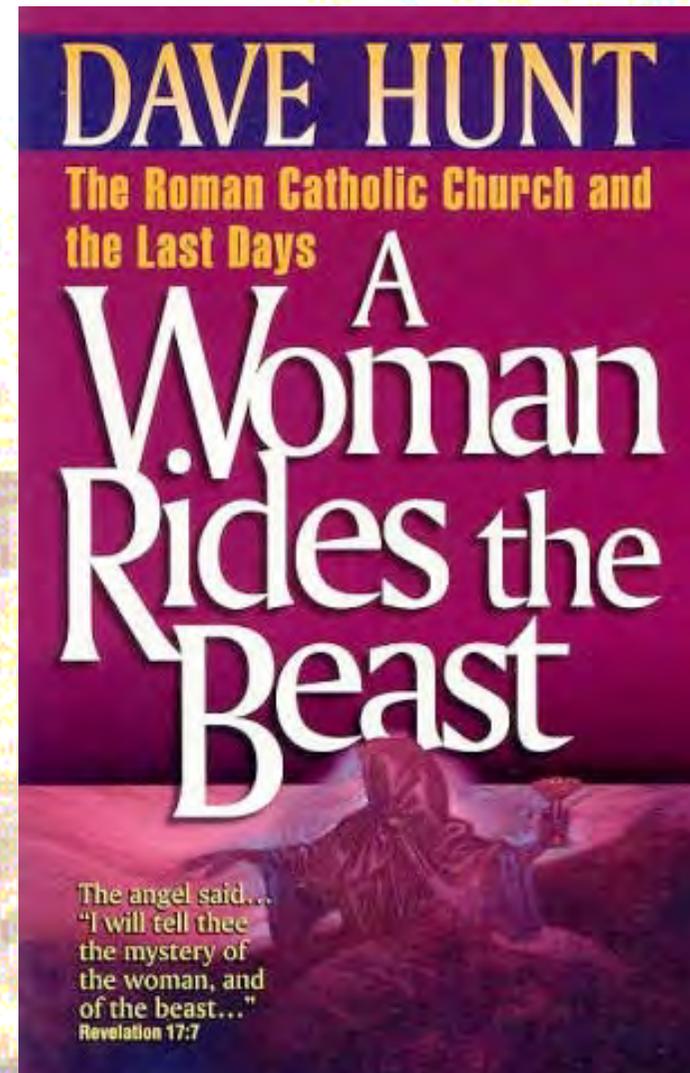
**Everywhere!**

## Catholics Repeat Babylon's Mistakes

Sources:



Ralph  
Woodrow



## Mother and Child Worship



**Babylon**



**Egypt**



**Greece**



**Buddhist**



**Hindu**

## Mother and Child Worship

### Babylonians



The goddess mother Semiramis as wife of Nimrod was called the “Queen of Heaven”

### Israel

Jeremiah 7:18 (NIV): “The [Jewish] children gather wood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough and make cakes of bread for **the Queen of Heaven.** They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger.”

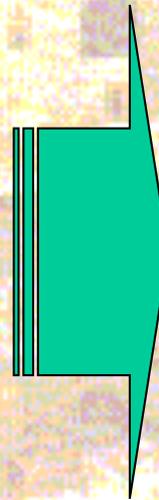
## Mother and Child Worship

### Babylonians

### Catholics



The goddess mother Semiramis held her child Tammuz in her arms



Mary is worshipped along with her son Jesus in the Babylonian fashion





**Who is the  
Focal Point of  
Michelangelo's  
Pietà?**

**Jesus is  
much  
smaller than  
Mary!**

## Obelisks

### Babylonians

Image  
90 feet x 9 feet  
(Dan. 3)

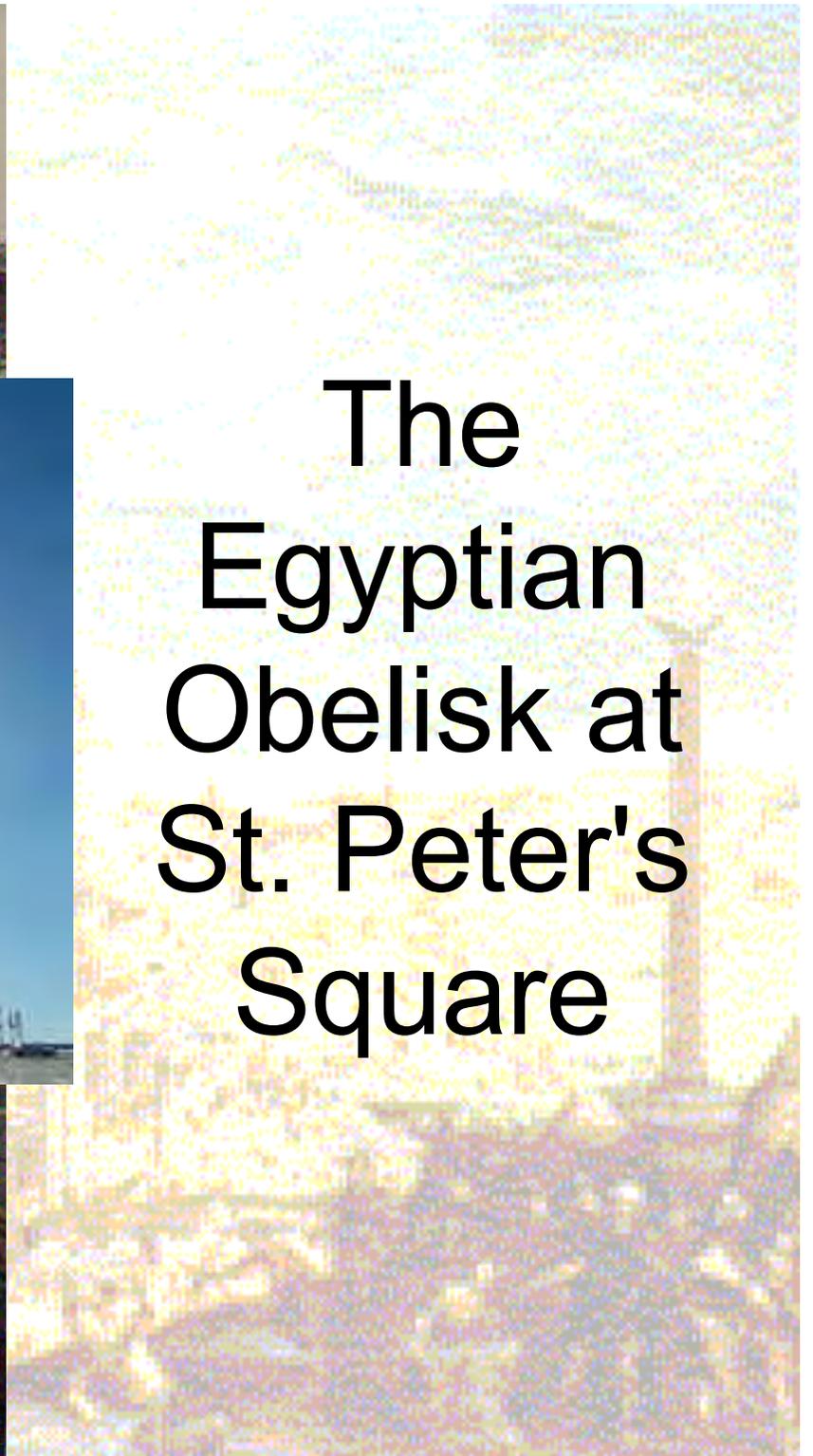


### Catholics

The obelisk focal point of St. Peter's Square in Rome was brought by Caligula (AD 37-41) from an Egyptian temple of sun-worship. Pope Sixtus V moved it to the Vatican in AD 1586. He imposed the death penalty if it was broken!



# The Egyptian Obelisk at St. Peter's Square



# BABYLON MYSTERY RELIGION TODAY

OTB 140

**Other  
Pagan  
Parallels:**

## Babylonians

**Relics**

**Pilgrimages**

**Indulgences**

**Purgatory**

**Pontiffs**

**Celibate Priests**

**Transubstantiation**

**Easter Festival**

**Winter Festival**

## Catholics

**Relics**

**Pilgrimages**

**Indulgences**

**Purgatory**

**Pontiffs**

**Celibate Priests**

**Transubstantiation**

**Easter Festival**

**Winter Festival**

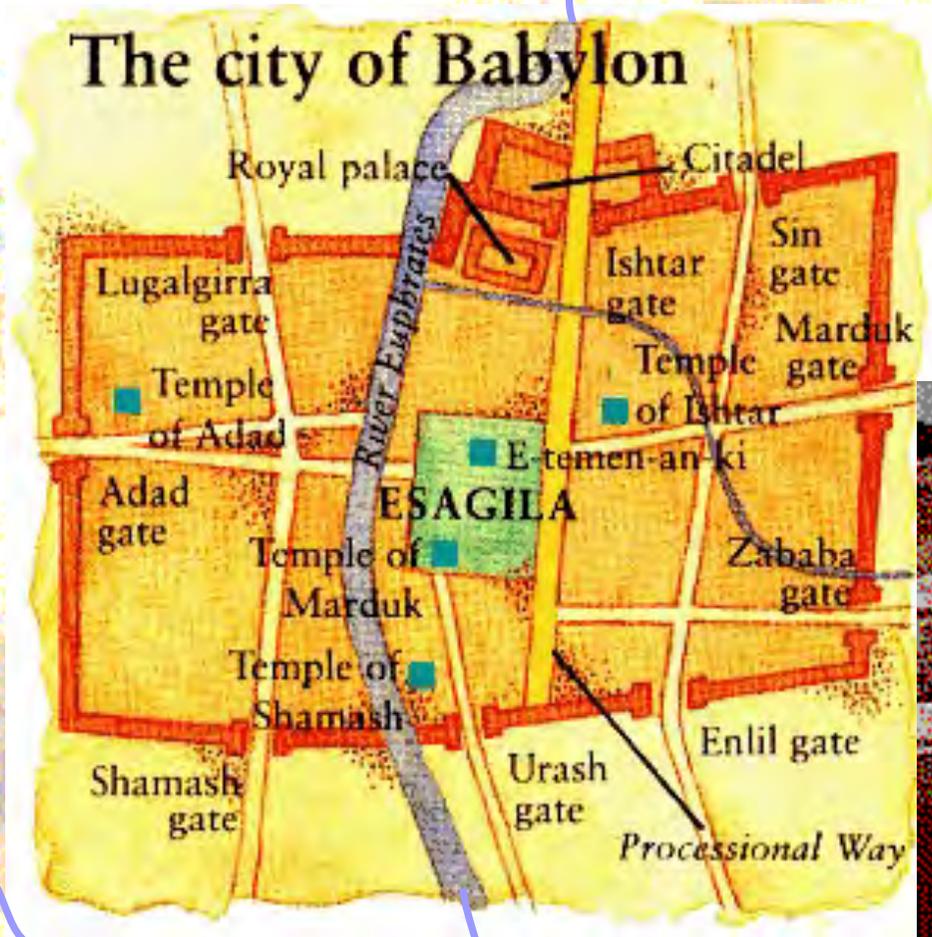
# Belshazzar Humbled



• Rembrandt

# BABYLON FELL (539 BC)

Cyrus entered under the water gates



Daniel 5

(Belshazzar's Feast)



# Babylon's Fall (Herodotus)

OTB 144

“[Cyrus] placed a portion of his army at the point where the river enters the city, and another body at the back of the place where it issues forth, with orders to march into the town by the bed of the stream, as soon as the water became shallow enough: he then himself drew off with the unwarlike portion of his host, and made for the place where Nitocris dug the basin for the river, where he did exactly what she had done formerly: he turned the Euphrates by a canal into the basin, which was then a marsh, on which the river sank to such an extent that the natural bed of the stream became fordable.

“Hereupon the Persians who had been left for the purpose at Babylon by the river-side, entered the stream, which had now sunk so as to reach about midway up a man's thigh, and thus got into the town.

*The History of the Persian Wars 1.191 (430 BC)*

# Babylon's Fall (Herodotus)

---

OTB 144

“Had the Babylonians been apprised of what Cyrus was about, or had they noticed their danger, they would never have allowed the Persians to enter the city, but would have destroyed them utterly; for they would have made fast all the street-gates which gave upon the river, and mounting upon the walls along both sides of the stream, would so have caught the enemy, as it were, in a trap. But, as it was, the Persians came upon them by surprise and so took the city. Owing to the vast size of the place, the inhabitants of the central parts (as the residents at Babylon declare) long after the outer portions of the town were taken, knew nothing of what had chanced, but as they were engaged in a festival, continued dancing and reveling until they learnt the capture but too certainly. Such, then, were the circumstances of the first taking of Babylon.”

*The History of the Persian Wars 1.191 (430 BC)*

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