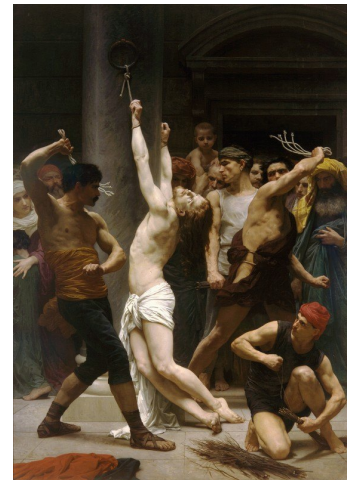




The Flagellation of our Lord Jesus Christ

William Bouguereau

The Flagellation of Christ, 1880 is one of Bouguereau's masterpieces, and today hangs at the Baptistery of La Rochelle Cathedral, France. Christ, tied to a column, limply hangs, his feet dragging on the ground and head hung back, he submits to his fate. Two men stand in mid swing with their whipping ropes, with a third kneeling to the lower right fastening birch branches for the next stage of the torture. Unlike the two men who are whipping or the fourth man standing behind with birch branches in the ready, the kneeling man tying the branches appears to show some remorse for his actions as his hand muscles loosen slightly with the pull of the string. The viewer can feel the pain of Christ's torment, though his eyes are vacant of expression as if his soul is in another place. The crowd surrounding this event is filled with curious spectators. To the left, a young boy shelters his eyes from the horrid sight by turning his back and pressing himself against his mother. To the right, just above Christ's head, a baby looks down at him sympathetically while hoisted up on his father's shoulders. Through the crowd, a bearded man looks directly at the viewer, thereby pulling the audience into the scene as if they are too part of the crowd. It is possible that this bearded man with furrowed brow is a self portrait, so both Bouguereau and the viewer are witnessing this scene. This life size capra d'opera is every bit as magnificent as any religious works done by Raphael, Caravaggio, or Velasquez. The harmonious interplay of drawing, paint handling, composition, perspective and emotional thrust are second to none in their expressive power.



What does Acts 6:9 Mean?

“Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.” Acts 6:9

a Hellenist: not raised in Judea but elsewhere in the Roman Empire, and his primary language is likely Greek, not Aramaic. The synagogues listed are also comprised of Greek-speaking Jews.

"Freedmen" is a blanket name for former slaves and their descendants. In the first century BC, Roman general Pompey captured some Jews, enslaved them, and took them to Rome. The Jewish slaves followed their religion so strictly, including refusing to work on the Sabbath and adhering to kosher law, they were useless as slaves, so Pompey released them. The Freedmen are descendants of these and other former slaves.

The Cyrenians are from Cyrene in modern-day Libya, and the Alexandrians are from Alexandria in Egypt. At the time described in this passage, both cities have large populations of Jews.

Cilicia is a province on the southeast coast of modern-day Asia Minor. Tarsus, where Paul comes from, is in Cilicia. "Asia," in this context, does not mean the eastern continent. In Stephen's era, the term Asia referred to a province in the western part of modern-day Asia Minor; this includes Troas, Ephesus, Colossae, and the other churches mentioned in Revelation 2–3. Paul will spend two to three years in Ephesus (Acts 19). It is the Jews from Asia who eventually get him arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27).

A synagogue is a place for Jews to meet, read Scripture, and discuss what they read. Although Moses gave the Israelites God's law, the kings often neglected or lost the law. In the reign of Jehoshaphat, the wise king sent officials throughout Judah to teach the people the law (2 Chronicles 17:7–9). When the exiles returned from Babylon, they had a problem. The law was in Hebrew, which very few people had learned. They natively spoke Aramaic, the trade language. So, when Ezra read the law to the people, scribes intermingled with the crowd, explaining what the words meant (Nehemiah 8:1–8). Synagogues served a similar purpose and are the model for the Christian church.

According to the Mosaic law, the men of Israel were to gather in Jerusalem for certain feasts throughout the year. Jerusalem is 1,400 miles from Rome, so Jews who did not live near Jerusalem came when they could. When they arrived, they found a group of their countrymen in an established synagogue. Some stayed in Jerusalem while others completed their business and returned home. Either way, to travel that far to worship at the temple of their people was a serious commitment and took a very devout person. It's easy to see how they would be protective of their faith and their temple.

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Is Life Meaningless?

In Ecclesiastes, we meet the critic, who explores three different themes, all of which attempt to show that life on Earth is meaningless. The critic opens with the idea that time moves forward and eventually we are all forgotten. Second, the critic states that no matter what, no matter how moral we are, human beings are destined to die. And finally, the critic explains that life is random—bad things happen to good, wise people and fools are rewarded. What is the point then? This book is a bit bleak, but it has a point. What the critic has said is true, but that doesn't mean life can't be enjoyed. When we recognize how little of life we control, we can truly appreciate what we have—good food, friends, and community. And we can trust that one day, God will restore the broken cycle of human life. He will come to clear the vapor—the hevel—and make all things right.

Is God Just?

Throughout the book of Job, we see Job and his friends wrestling with the question of why a God who is wise and just would let horrible things happen to an innocent man. It's a question that God himself answers, though not in the way Job was expecting. God takes Job on a virtual tour of the universe, giving him a window into all the complexities of the cosmos, and God is in total control of all of it. God is showing Job that his suffering is one small part of an infinitely large cosmic scheme. Job is humbled by God's response, his question being answered, but God still chose to restore all of Job's blessings to him. Even though individual humans are a small part of the universe, our problems are still important to God, and we can trust him to care for his people. Together, all three of these wisdom books show us the meaning of life and what it means to live wisely and fear God.