

Visual Exegesis

Dura Europos

The Roman Catacombs

Dura Europos



Pompeii of the Desert

- Established 3rd cent. BCE
- Dedication: 224-245 BCE
- Destroyed mid-3rd cent. CE
- Roman fortress town on Euphrates against Parthians
- Excavated in early 20th cent.
- Evidence of carnage and destruction; synagogue preserved

No Images

- Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8 “Thous shalt not make unto thee a graven image nor any of manner of likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”
- “Thou shalt not bow down to them or serve them”
- These are not cultic images; there is a shift in thinking
- Strictness of prohibition depends on how threatened Israel felt
- Depiction of Word of God

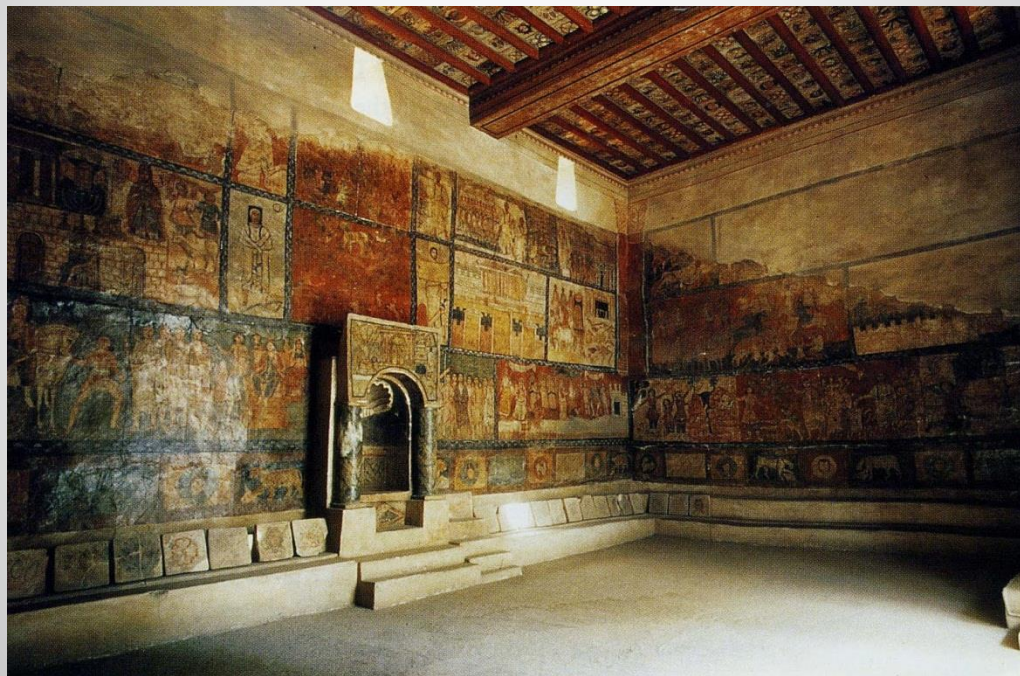
Why Images?

- After destruction of temple, not as much emphasis on visual depiction
- Surrounding temples depicted their gods in glory and splendor
- Jews depicted the power of their God in the visual narrative depiction of salvation history
- Dynamic God in time and space
- Possible influence on catacombs
- Incorporation of midrash
- Does Christian art have its origins in Judaism?

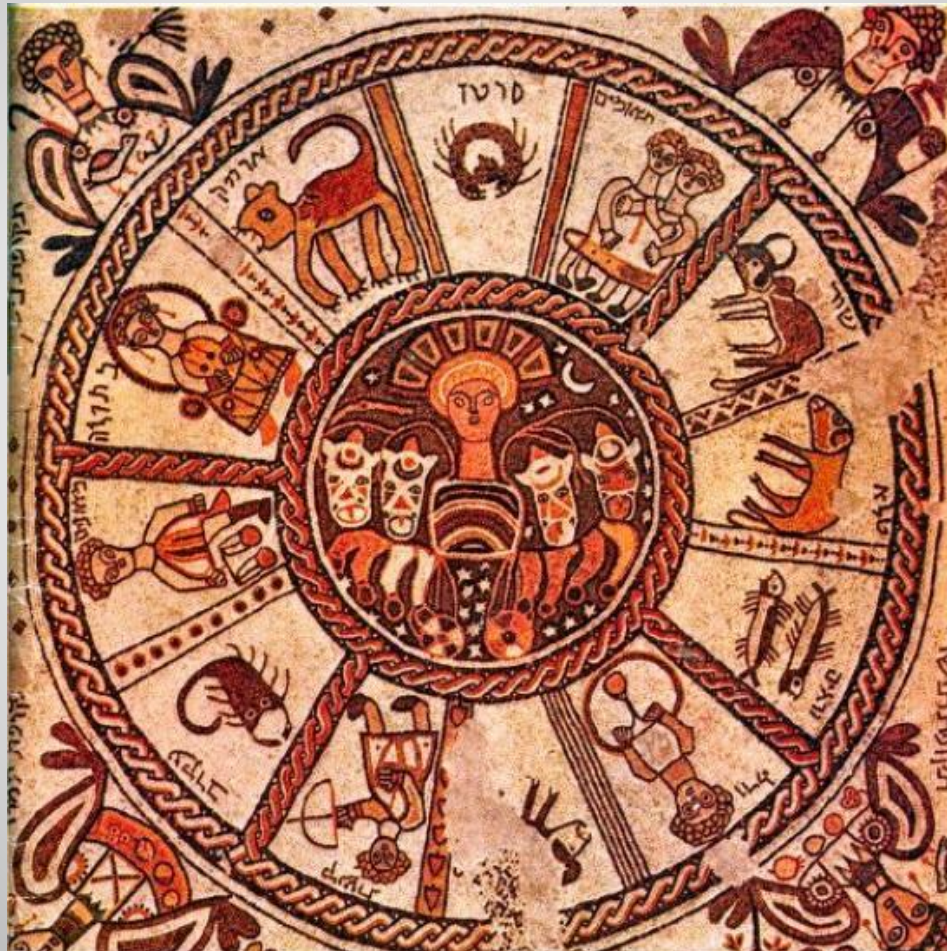
Other Gods



The Synagogue



A Surprise!



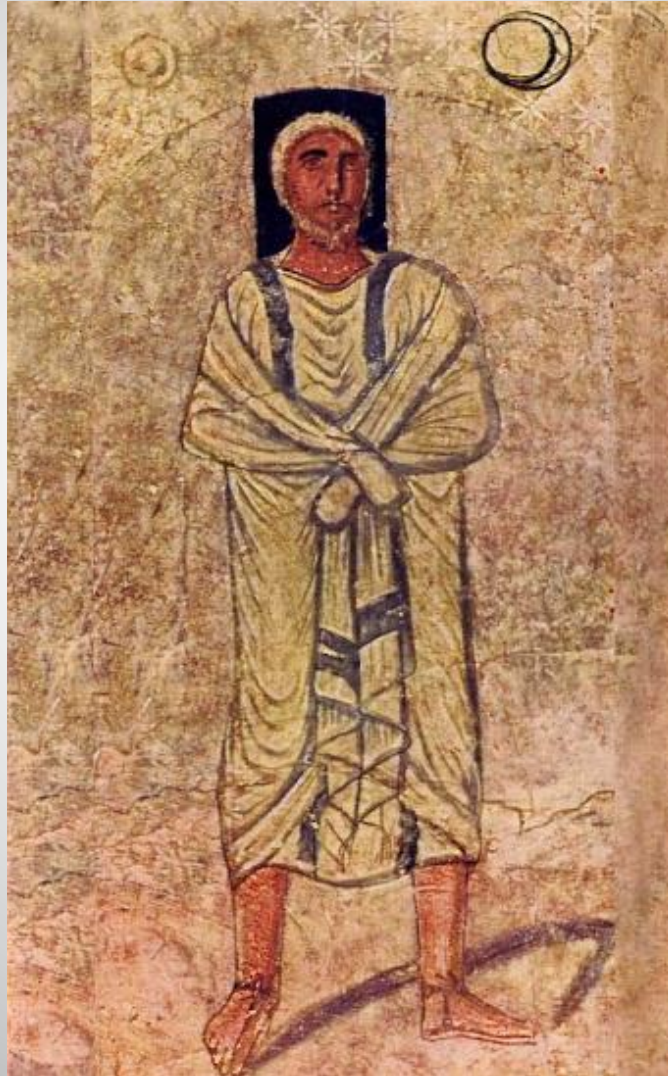
Dura Europos Synagogue



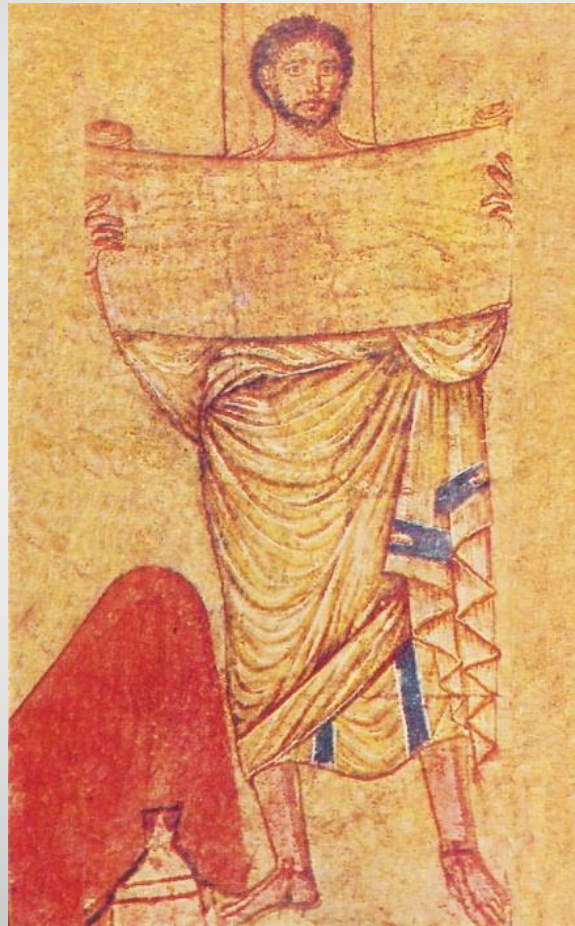
Ezra Reads the Law



Abraham and the Stars



Jeremiah



Moses and Burning Bush



The Ark of the Covenant *menorah, ethrog, lulab*



Moses in the River



Exodus and Temple



Exodus Crossing of Red Sea



Golden Calf



Moses Brings Forth Water



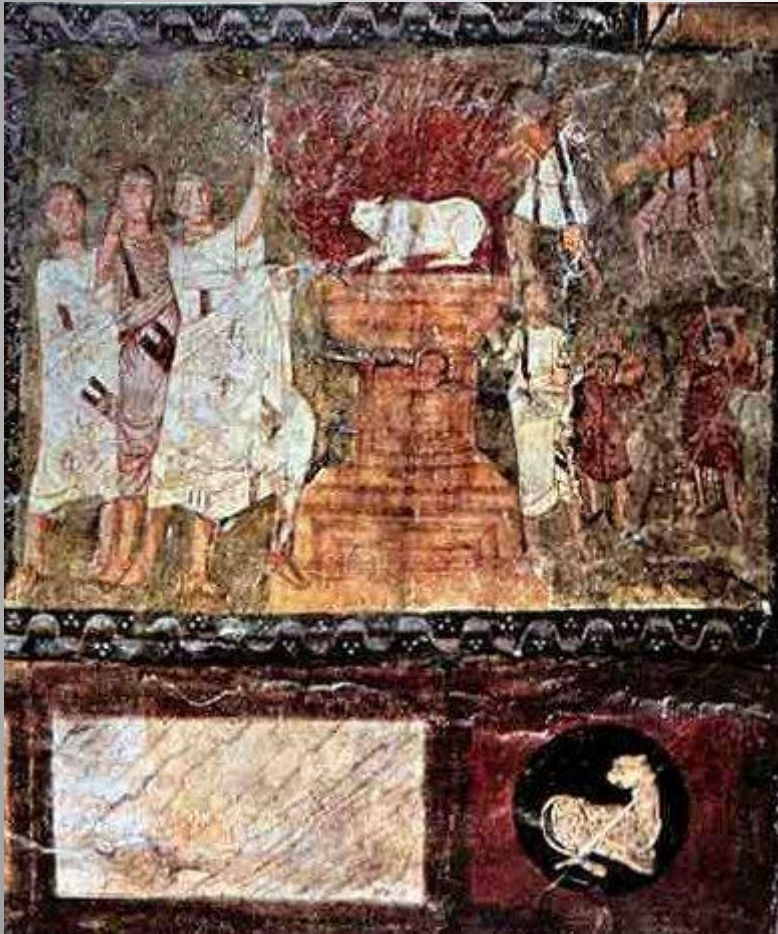
Aaron's Temple - Tabernacle



Midrash on Elijah and Priests of Baal (Amos 9:3; Hos 13:1)



Elijah's Sacrifice – 1 Kings 18



- 9th century BCE text – reappplied to 3rd century CE – midrashic technique – against the many gods of nature – lordship of Yahweh in pagan context
- Right arms of Elijah and his worshippers – pagan priests' right arms droop
- Bull recognizes will of God and refuses to be sacrificed to Baal

Anointing of David



Ark Captured by Philistines



Get Rid of the Ark



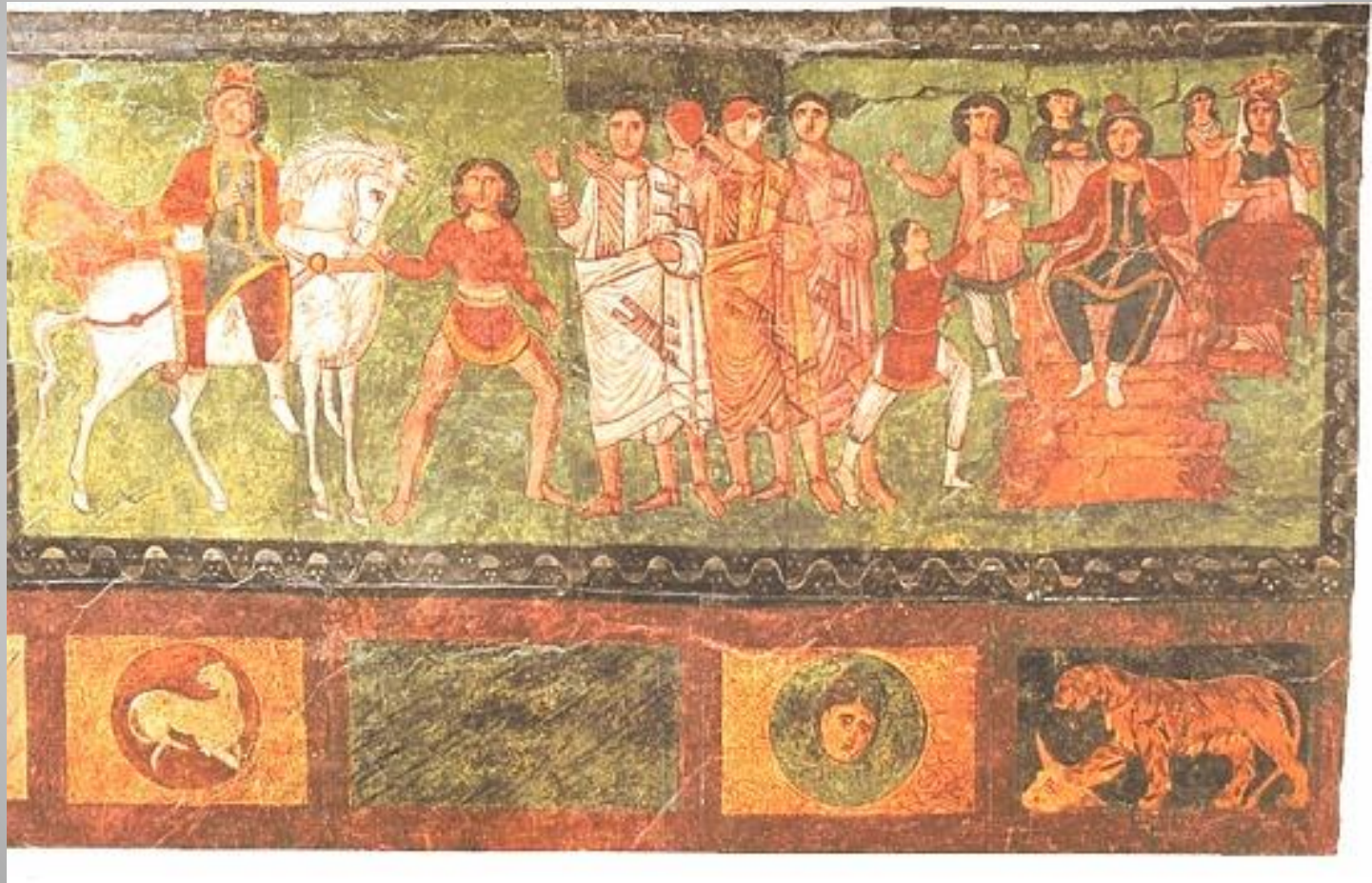
Ezekiel – Valley of Bones



Resurrection of Dead



Esther



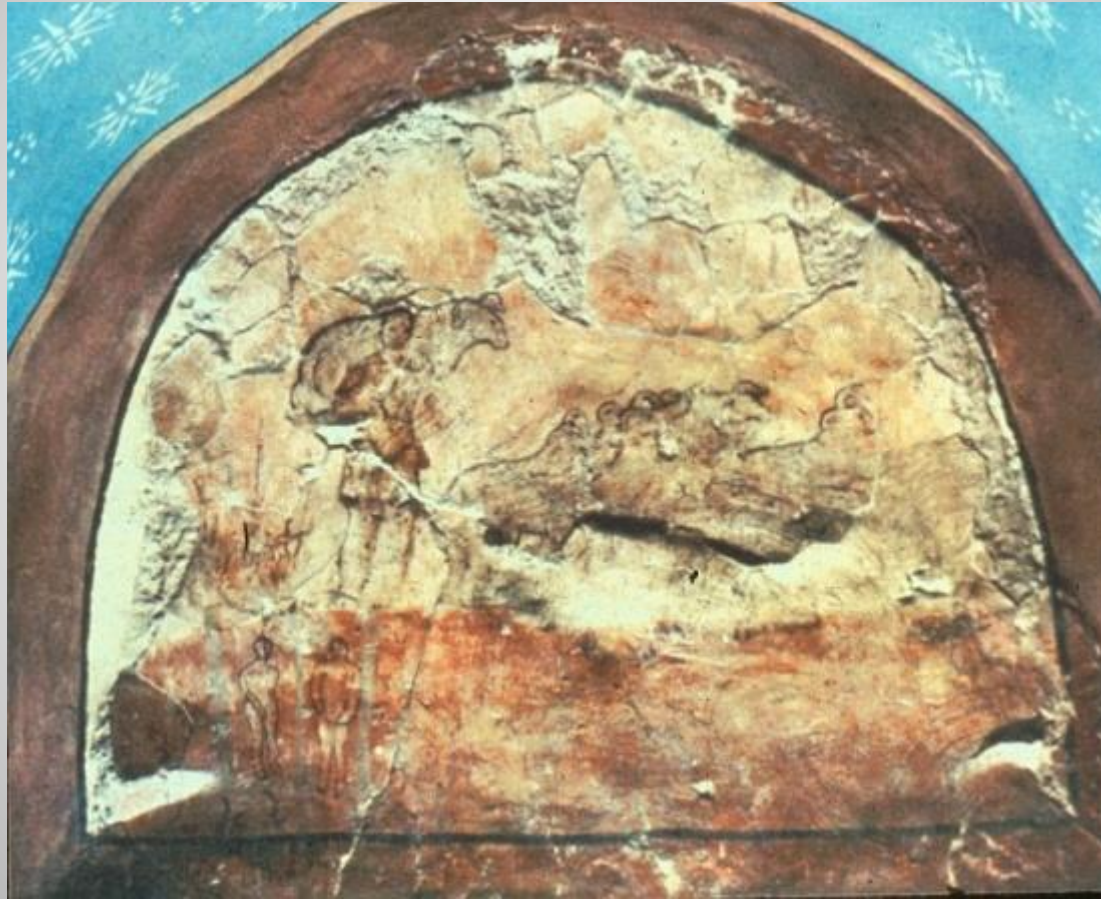
Esther and the King



Church in Dura Europos



Good Shepherd



Good Shepherd Dura Europos



Healing of Paralytic



The Catacombs



Which themes were chosen?

- OT themes predominate in pre-Constantinian era
- Moses striking the rock in the wilderness
- Abraham offering Isaac
- Jonah
- Noah
- Daniel

Which themes were absent?

- Jacob
- Joseph
- Joshua
- David
- Major prophets

NT themes

- Baptism of Jesus
- Raising of Lazarus
- Multiplication of loaves and fishes
- Healing of paralytic
- Wedding feast of Cana (water/wine)
- Woman at the well
- Missing: temptation, cleansing of temple
- Late: nativity, transfiguration, Last Supper, passion, and resurrection

Interpreting the Data

- Juxtaposition or proximity of one image to another
- Some form a 'symbolic complex'
- Deliverance? Symbol of Jesus' sacrifice?
- Most are funerary images and probably reflect beliefs about afterlife but are not necessarily limited to that

Popularity of OT themes

- 4 times as many as NT
- Jonah most popular, followed by Moses striking rock, Adam and Eve, and Daniel
- Early Jewish iconographic traditions? (prototype)
- Traditions of book illumination from Alexandria and Antioch?
- Liturgical texts?

Seeing the Truth

- Types >> OT >> divine providence; coming of Jesus
 - Binding of Isaac (crucifixion of Jesus)
 - Moses striking rock (baptism) 1 Cor 10:1-5
 - Jonah (Matt 12:39; 16:4; Luke 11:29)
 - Noah (1 Peter 3:20-21;
- Not literal or historical; 'see' the truth in the image
- Visual allegories

Moses Striking Rock



Jonah Over the Side



Jonah Swallowed



Jonah Lying Under the Bush



Noah and the Ark



Sacrifice of Isaac



Lazarus Come Forth



Lazarus Again



Cultural Adaptation

- Greco-Roman art and environment
- Jonah – sleeping
Endymion
- Ascension of Elijah –
Roman apotheosis
- Beardless Christ
- Roman clothing
(philosophers)





Christ the Teacher

Note that Jesus is beardless

Multiplication of Loaves



Other Christs

- Christ is depicted as Orpheus and Helios
- These borrow on core cultural values
- Indicates the replacement of traditional gods with the new God



Sol Invictus or Mithras



Jesus or Mithras?



Deliverance?

- Deliverance in time of danger and persecutions
- Note themes from Daniel
- After Constantine Noah and Jonah are dropped
- 3 youths in fiery furnace are often linked with Noah in Ark – persecution and martyrdom
- This is noted by John Chrysostom, Tertullian, and Cyprian

Daniel and the Lions



Three Men in the Furnace



Adam and Eve



Magi



Mary and Isis



Woman With Flow of Blood



Woman at the Well

