Bit

Part of the bridle, the bit (MT meteg; LXX χαλάνως) is placed in the mouth of an equid to guide and control the animal (cf. Ps 32:9; Jas 3:3). Bits, often made of bronze or iron, have been found throughout the ancient Near East, as have mended equine teeth – telltale signs of the use of bits (Wapnish/Hesse: 256). Isaiah’s oracle in 2 Kgs 19:28 (cf. Isa 37:29) employs the image of God putting a bit in Nebuchadnezzar’s mouth as a means of humiliating and controlling him like an animal.


Joel M. LeMon

Bithiah

Bithiah (MT Bit(y)äh) is a daughter of Pharaoh. She is the wife of Mered and the mother of Miriam, Shammai, and Ishbah (1 Chr 4:17 [MT 4:18]). Although she is unnamed in Exod 2:5, Weygand 1:3 identifies her as the foster mother of Moses. Her name is explained as “daughter of YHWH” due to her adoption of Moses. In addition, Shemtov 18:3 indicates that she was the only firstborn Egyptian female to survive the plague of the firstborn (Exod 12:29).

Nyasha Junior

See also — Pharaoh, Daughter of (Adoptive Mother of Moses)

Bithynia

A region in northwest Anatolia, modern-day Turkey, Bithynia was strategically situated at the westernmost edge of Asia Minor bordering the Bosporos and comprising the shoreline of the Propontis. Although its territory expanded and contracted over the centuries, it was bound on the north by the Black Sea and its neighboring regions of Mysia to the southwest, Phrygia to the south, Galatia to the southeast, and Paphlagonia and Pontus to the east. The river Sangarius (modern Sakarya) flows through the region to the Black Sea.

Settled by tribes, possibly of Thracian origin, and absorbed into the Persian Empire, from the 4th century BCE Bithynia was ruled by a series of kings. The region resisted conquest by Alexander the Great. By the beginning of the 1st century BCE, the kingdom had declined to such a state that the last king, Nicomedes IV who had been usurped by Mithridates VI and restored with the help of Rome, bequeathed it to Rome upon his death. In 74 BCE it officially became a Roman province, but still engaged with Mithridates, Rome did not establish administration until Pompey defeated Mithridates in 63 BCE.

The region is mentioned twice in the NT. 1 Peter 1:1 confirms the presence of a Christian community in Bithynia, along with Pontus, indicating an early spread of the religion in Asia Minor. In Acts 16:7, while in Mysia, Paul attempts to venture into Bithynia to preach, but is prevented doing so by the spirit of Christ.

Around the year 110 CE, the emperor Trajan appointed Pliny the Younger to oversee administration of Bithynia, which had declined through corruption. Pliny’s letters to Trajan from Bithynia (Book 10) provide the most information about the region detailing a variety of problems and Pliny’s actions as imperial governor. Pliny’s most famous letter (Ep. Tra. 96) gives an account of his dealings with the local Christians. Pliny describes questioning alleged Christians and punishing, often with death, those who refused to denounce Christ and worship statues of the gods and the emperor by offering prayers, incense, and wine. The torture of worship statues of the gods and the emperor by offering prayers, incense, and wine. The torture of two female slaves who were apparently high in the church hierarchy – according to Pliny they were deaconesses – testifies to the active role of women in early Christian communities. Pliny also offers information on early Christian worship. He tells that the Christians there meet on a fixed day of the week to sing in response hymns to Christ. This is followed by an oath sworn by Christians not to commit adultery, theft, or tell falsehoods. After the service, the Christians reassemble for a common meal. From this brief description, we are provided a glimpse of a Christian liturgy already in use, as well as some of the Christian rituals taking place in the region.

Trajan’s reply to Pliny approves of the governor’s measures for Christians who refuse to recant. However, for those who profess to have abandoned the religion, even if they have practiced it in the past, they are to be absolved. Christians, he writes, should not be sought out, in other words, actively persecuted. Moreover, anonymous letters listing names of the type Pliny had already used to...