



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

## 1 - Resources and Reasons

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### *Introduction*

1. We can see the need for this survey by asking how it would affect our understanding if U. S. History courses skipped everything from the 1620s until the 1960s. Or if Western Civilization courses covered the period from Rome to the Reformation and then skipped to the 1960s.
2. I don't recall what prompted my interest in this period, but the need for at least a survey of it became apparent as I studied and taught more, particularly as background for the Gospels. Including a section on it in my book as I surveyed the Bible's story was axiomatic.<sup>1</sup>
3. Projected class sessions for this *survey*: (1) Resources and Reasons; (2) Origins, the Persian Period, and the Greek Period; (3) Revolt/Independence & Roman Rule; (4) Impact and Lessons.

### *Body*

#### I. Primary Sources.<sup>2</sup>

##### A. The Old Testament Apocrypha.<sup>3</sup>

1. The word means "hidden, obscure,"<sup>4</sup> and refers to a group of separate Jewish books and supplements to the canonical books.
  - a) The Septuagint (LXX) interspersed them among the 39 canonical books.
  - b) Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic adherents considered them canonical; the Catholic Church reaffirmed this at the Council of Trent in the mid 16th century.
    - (1) Roman Catholics use the term "Deuterocanonical" ("second canon"), referring to later acceptance of the books as canonical, not to their secondary status.
    - (2) The Eastern Church also uses "Deuterocanonical," reserving "Apocrypha" for the books more commonly known as "Pseudepigrapha."
  - c) Protestants (e.g., Luther and the Anglican Church) accepted them for private education, not as canonical.
2. Composition and Style.
  - a) Most of the books were originally written in Greek from the late 3rd to 1st century BC.
  - b) Some collections add to this list, but *generally* the Apocrypha consists of 15 books, written in various literary styles.<sup>5</sup>
    - (1) Historical: 1, 2 *Maccabees*, 1 *Esdras* (also called 3 *Ezra*).

- (2) Legends, novels, folktales, and detective stories: *Judith*, *Tobit*, and three additions to the Old Testament book of Daniel—*Susanna*, *Bel and the Dragon*, and the *Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men*.
- (3) Wisdom or Didactic (intended to teach): *Baruch*, *Epistle of Jeremiah*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, *Ecclesiasticus* (also called the *Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach* or just *Sirach*).
- (4) Prayers or religious themes: *Prayer of Manasseh*, *Additions to Esther*.
- (5) Apocalyptic: *2 Esdras* (also called *4 Ezra*).

## B. The Pseudepigrapha.

1. Meaning and description.
  - a) "Pseudepigrapha" is literally "false ascriptions" (concerning authorship)
  - b) Jewish writings (though some show evidence of Christian editing) that were excluded from the Old Testament canon and generally omitted from the Apocrypha (remember the books included in the Apocrypha vary, so there is overlapping from list to list).
2. Composition and Style.
  - a) Written from 200 BC to 200 AD; two groups, Palestinian and Jewish-Hellenistic.
  - b) Genres include: (1) apocalyptic; (2) the last "testaments" of noted OT leaders; (3) expansions of OT narratives; (4) wisdom and philosophical literature; (5) psalms, prayers, and odes; (6) various other miscellaneous works.<sup>6</sup>
  - c) Themes include (1) attacks on idolatry; (2) statements of increased reverence for the Law; (3) arguments against the emphasis on the temple (some of the books are anti-Sadducean writings of the Pharisees); (4) and the expectation of fulfilled promises.
3. Most prominent: *Psalms of Solomon*, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Jubilees*, *Testament of Job*, *1-3 Enoch*, *Sibylline Oracles*, *The Assumption of Moses*, and *3-4 Maccabees*.<sup>7</sup>
4. An important point: "Few of the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha even claim to be historical narratives, but their *themes* captured the interests of the Jews during the various time periods in which they were written" (my emphasis).<sup>8</sup>

## C. The writings of Josephus.

1. Josephus (ca. 37-100 AD) was a Jewish soldier and historian born in Jerusalem to a father who was a priest and a mother who claimed royal ancestry.
  - a) A self-described former Pharisee and general who initially fought against the Romans in the First Jewish-Roman War (66-70 AD), but surrendered to the general Vespasian.
  - b) Josephus became a Roman slave and interpreter who defected to the Romans and was granted freedom (and citizenship when Vespasian became Emperor in 69 AD).
  - c) He wrote as a beneficiary of Roman patronage.
2. His writings provide a record of Jewish history, especially the events of the first century AD and the Jewish-Roman War.
  - a) *Jewish Wars*—record of the struggles of the Jews from 170 BC to the time of his writing in the late first century AD; (especially useful for the decades after Christ<sup>9</sup>).
  - b) *Antiquities of the Jews*—20-volume Jewish history from creation to the first century AD;
  - c) Autobiography, *Life*—answered charges regarding his conduct in the Jewish War;
  - d) *Against Apion*—defends Judaism against detractors from the previous three centuries.
3. Although highly rhetorical, his writing provides useful information about the first century AD environment from someone who lived close enough to the events (the Maccabean revolt, for example) to be aware of important primary source information.

D. Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS).<sup>10</sup>

1. Discovered in 1947 at Qumran, DSS is a collection of biblical manuscripts (MSS) (all the OT books except Esther) and other writings of the sect who wrote them.
2. The OT MSS predate the previously extant MSS by as many as 1,000 years, and are therefore useful for confirming (and sometimes clarifying) the text used in translating.
3. The writings provide a look into the life of a Jewish sect that many scholars think probably arose during the Maccabean era around the middle of the 2nd century BC.<sup>11</sup>
4. The DSS are not representative of mainstream Judaism or Jewish attitudes, but do give insight into one group's approach to interpreting Scripture along with a glimpse at the diversity of views in Palestine in the late first century BC and early first century AD.<sup>12</sup>

E. Some important values of this literature.<sup>13</sup>

1. The information provided by books such as 1 Maccabees [and Josephus] is indispensable for understanding this period of Jewish history; however, it does need to be critically evaluated (both for bias and, in Josephus, later editing).
2. The writings (and especially the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, DSS) are important for knowledge of the various religious beliefs and motivations among the Palestinian Jews; bear in mind, much of the teaching differs from that found in the canonical writings.
3. Themes from this literature help us understand some references (both direct and indirect) in New Testament books (part of the *context*, like 911 in our setting).<sup>14</sup>
4. For the book of Revelation, we gain understanding for interpreting the apocalyptic images from seeing how those images were used in previous apocalyptic writings.

II. About the Period Generally.

- A. Long called *the intertestamental period*, most scholars now use *Second Temple Period*, from the rebuilding of the temple by Zerubbabel to its destruction by the Romans (516 BC-70 AD).<sup>15</sup>
- B. Since many Jews understood that prophecy ceased to exist after Malachi (ca. 433 BC) during the reign of Persia's Artaxerxes (d. 424), some have called it *the silent 400 years*.<sup>16</sup>
- C. For those inclined to see God's providence in history, studying this period helps show how its events and ideas contributed to what Paul called "the fullness of time" (NET: "the appropriate time") (Gal 4.4).<sup>17</sup>

III. Some Reasons to Study the Period.

- A. Helps us understand things not found in the OT books, but present in the NT writings.
  1. For example, note these terms, *none* of which appear in the Old Testament: synagogue, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Caesar, centurion, denarius, Hellenists.
  2. Think more broadly about events and attitudes.
    - a) Nehemiah (and the Jews at the time of Esther) answered to the Persians. In the Gospels, Herod was a client king of Rome, Augustus and Tiberius were emperors (Claudius is mentioned in Acts), and the Jewish council answered to the Roman governor, Pilate (Felix and Festus are mentioned in Acts).<sup>18</sup> How did Rome come to dominate? Why did the adverse attitudes we see displayed toward them exist?
    - b) What explains the bilingual climate of first century Israel? Why is Greek the language of the New Testament (and the world)?
    - c) Why do we have a new festival, the feast of Dedication (John 10.22)?
    - d) Why do we see:

- (1) A palpable longing in Israel to be "saved from our enemies" (Luke 1.71; etc.)?
  - (2) Such eager anticipation for the Messiah/Christ (John 4.29)?
  - (3) Such excitement about the possibility that Jesus might be the one (John 6.15)?
  - (4) Evidence of more than one understanding of what the coming one would be (cf. "Prophet" in John 6.14; and especially 7.40-41)?<sup>19</sup>
  - e) What was the origin of the Greek translation most often used in citations of the OT in the NT writings? Why was it so influential? (A related question: how had the Jews come to be scattered (Diaspora) throughout the ancient world?)
- B. Provides the *context* we need to understand New Testament events and teaching.
1. At one level, better knowledge of this period heightens our appreciation for the fact that the biblical religion is *historical*; its events interact with other events (cf. Acts 26.26).
    - a) New Testament authors did not write in a vacuum, but from their understanding of culture, drawing on and utilizing cultural and historical understanding.
    - b) When we know more of the history, the events of the story are lifted "off the page."
  2. We also get a more comprehensive (and accurate) view of the New Testament's context
    - a) *Context* is not just a literary matter, the words before (and after!) a particular sentence or phrase; *context* also includes historical and cultural circumstances.
    - b) "It is not too much to say that every serious attempt to understand the Scriptures must be historically oriented. Only by being acquainted with the political, social, and religious background of the biblical era can the student understand the allusions to contemporary culture that the biblical writers assume will be obvious to their readers."<sup>20</sup>
- C. Helps us become better students of the New Testament.
1. Knowing the New Testament's historical and cultural context helps us become better equipped to study it, and especially to be faithful to the call to seek and believe the truth (a term used more than 150 times in the New Testament).
    - a) Like all history, biblical history is nuanced and textured (even "messy").
    - b) The greater our appreciation of the nuances and texture, the greater our understanding of the events (and more importantly, the teaching).
    - c) In the interest of pursuing truth, we should seek as much accuracy as possible, declaring things certain, probable, possible, or false depending on the evidence.<sup>21</sup>
  2. Beyond learning about the events, we can develop better understanding of why events and/or reactions occurred, the reasons and motives at work.
    - (1) A basic rule for study is to determine what a passage meant (and did not mean) to the people who wrote and read it in the setting in which they lived before we try to say what it now means;<sup>22</sup> history should help us hear as they heard.
    - (2) Why did first century people think and react as they did?
      - (a) What historical motivations help explain why Peter assumed what he did about what the Messiah would and wouldn't do (Mark 8.31-33)?
      - (b) Or the expectation that led James and John to ask for chief seats in the kingdom (Mark 10.32-45)?
      - (c) A text like *Psalms of Solomon* 17 (probably from the first century BC<sup>23</sup>) helps us find an answer (and sharing it has the added benefit of "showing our work," i.e., making clear that we who teach are not just making this stuff up).

- i) 17.21-24, 26 - "21 Behold, O Lord, and raise up to them their king, the son of David, at the time, in the which you choose, O God, that he may reign over Israel your servant. 22 And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers. And that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample (her) down to destruction. 22 In the wisdom of righteousness he will thrust out sinners from (the) inheritance, He will destroy the pride of the sinner as a potter's vessel. 24 With a rod of iron he will break in pieces all their substance. He will destroy the godless nations with the word of his mouth. . . . 26 And he will gather together a holy people, whom he will lead in righteousness. And he will judge the tribes of the people that has been sanctified by the Lord his God."24

#### IV. Surveying The Era: Major Periods and Crises for the Jews.<sup>25</sup>

- A. Jews continue under Persian rule (516 [ca. 424]-331 BC).
  1. Destruction of the First Commonwealth and the First Temple (before period 1).
- B. Alexander the Great and the Greek period (331-167 BC).
  1. Collapse of the Persian Empire in the wake of Alexander the Great's invasion (period 2).
  2. Persecution by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (period 2).
- C. The Maccabean revolt and the Hasmonean dynasty [independence] (167-63 BC).
  1. Domination by Rome (periods 3, 4).
- D. The Roman period (63 BC-70 AD).<sup>26</sup>
  1. Roman destruction of the Jewish state and Temple (period 4).

### Appendix

Brief observations about additional Jewish sources (see note 2).

1. Writings of Philo (ca. 30 BC - 50 AD) - a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt who wrote voluminously as a biblical commentator, apologist for Judaism, and philosopher. "He is useful to the modern student . . . for his method of exegesis and the philosophical materials he incorporated. There are often, moreover, important clues in his writings to features of the Hellenistic synagogue, and in this he is especially valuable" (Ferguson, 451).
2. Targums (more precisely *Targumim*, plural of Targum) - Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Scriptures read in the synagogue. They preserve the way passages were commonly interpreted, and are included among the Rabbinic writings (see Ferguson, 468-470).
3. Rabbinic writings, including the Talmud (Mishnah, Gemara) - written compilations of rabbinic interpretations that, prior to their compilation, were passed down orally (i.e., the oral law). They reflect multiple interpretations, not all of which agreed, and sometimes reflections or critiques in response to Christian teaching. Because they reflect multiple interpretations from different time periods and were written in the second century and later, "the use of this literature for backgrounds of early Christianity is problematic. Much material from the first century and earlier is certainly preserved in the rabbinic literature, but determining precisely the extent of such traditions is not easy. . . . Sometimes early traditions have been modified in transmission so that they contain details of later date. . . . The quantity of *reliable* historical information for the pre-70

period in rabbinic literature is not great: even what is attributed to that period actually depends for its formulation on the second- and third-century situation. . . . [T]he difficulties do not mean that one should ignore the rabbinic literature. When used carefully in comparison with other sources the rabbinic writings often help fill out the picture" (Ferguson, 462-463).

### A Few Recommended Popular-Level Resources

Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content*, 3rd ed., Revised & Enlarged (Abingdon Press, 2003) (esp. chapters 1-2).

J. Julius Scott, Jr., "The Time Between the Testaments," *ESV Study Bible*. ed. Lane T. Dennis (Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1783-1791 (and subsequent articles, pp. 1793-1800).

Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments* (Baker Book House, 1959).

Robert L. Cate, *A History of the Bible Lands in the Interbiblical Period* (Broadman Press, 1989).

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> David Anguish, *Getting Acquainted with the Bible: Its Makeup, Purpose, and Story* (Searcy, AR: CarChlex Books, 2019), 93-110.

<sup>2</sup> "Let it be clear at the outset that of all the 'helps' that assist the reader to understand the New Testament, the Old Testament is by far the most important. In that earlier collection of books, one finds the religious presuppositions and historical background without which the thinking and experiences of the New Testament writers cannot be understood" (Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content*, 3rd ed., Revised & Enlarged [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003], 14.)

Note that, given the survey nature of this presentation, I have limited discussion of sources to those most relevant for conditions in first century AD Palestine. Therefore, resources from Greek and Roman writings that are helpful for understanding NT background are not included. Relative to Palestine, I am limiting discussion to those that are often referenced as the most significant. See the brief statements regarding a few others in the Appendix.

<sup>3</sup> A comparable group of books, the New Testament Apocrypha, emerged in the second and following centuries AD. For a brief overview of the OT Apocrypha, see Roger T. Beckwith, "The Apocrypha," *ESV Study Bible*, 2581-2583.

<sup>4</sup> Terms that may be used to "refer to the mysterious or esoteric nature of some of the contents of these books or to their spurious or heretical nature (or both)" (Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* [Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009], 81).

<sup>5</sup> The 4th edition of the *New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha* (NRSV) (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), lists 18 books, as found in different ancient editions: (1) Catholic canon; (2) Greek and Slavonic Bibles not in Catholic canon; (3) in the Slavonic Bible and Latin Vulgate Appendix; (4) Appendix to the Greek Bible.

<sup>6</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009), 9.

<sup>7</sup> The two-volume collection of the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* edited by James Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985) includes 63 writings.

<sup>8</sup> Blomberg, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The following is summarized from Köstenberger, 83-84.

<sup>11</sup> The Essenes are popularly associated with DSS, but the identity of the responsible group remains uncertain. Many think that what prompted the group's departure from Jerusalem and withdrawal from mainstream society was the corruption of the Jerusalem priesthood during the Maccabean period (167-63 BC) and that the priest of the time is likely referred to in the literature as the "Wicked Priest" in contrast to the "Teacher of Righteousness," the presumed founder of the community.

<sup>12</sup> Everett Ferguson notes that, "in making accessible new evidence for variety in first-century Judaism, they [DSS] have required a modification of descriptions projecting 'normative' Judaism on this period. This in turn has supplied new configurations in the background of Christianity" (Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993], 436).

<sup>13</sup> This list is drawn from personal reflection supplemented by Köstenberger, 83.

<sup>14</sup> This influence is seen in two ways. (1) Writers draw on and utilize themes that would conform to canonical teaching (e.g., the echoes of *Sirach* in James). (2) Writers utilize or react to a theme that would have been “in the air” in their teaching (e.g., the references to *1 Enoch* and possibly the *Testament of Moses* in Jude 9 [*Moses*] and 14-15 [*Enoch*]).

<sup>15</sup> Julius Scott observes, “Most of the writers of the NT grew up in a world of ‘Second Temple Judaism,’ the time between the temple’s reconstruction (516 B.C.) and its final destruction (A.D. 70). This period introduced changes into the political structure, culture, and religion of the Old Testament world” (J. Julius Scott, Jr., “The Time Between the Testaments,” in *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane T. Dennis [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008], 1783).

<sup>16</sup> Blomberg, 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Longenecker has stated, “Set in the context of a fulfillment motif, the statement tells us that Jesus, God’s Son par excellence, is the culmination of and focus of all of God’s redemptive activity on behalf of humanity” (Richard E. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 [Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1990], 170).

<sup>18</sup> The title of the governors gives us more insight into the nature of the areas they ruled. Prior to the rule of the Emperor Claudius (41-54 AD), the title for a governor in the position of these men was “prefect” (Pilate). After Claudius, it was “procurator” (Felix, Festus). Both titles indicate that these rulers were directly appointed by the Emperor to govern a region that was considered troublesome or prone to unrest. A “proconsul,” such as Gallio (Acts 18.12) was appointed by the Senate to govern calmer, more secure regions.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding John 7.40-41, D. A. Carson notes the use of the two titles, “Prophet” and “Christ,” and comments, “A contemporary Christian reader might find it difficult to imagine how these two confessions could be divided. In the first century, however, many Jews thought of the promised Prophet and of the Messiah as two separate individuals. . . . It is possible (though not certain) that Christians were the first to identify the Davidic Messiah with the Prophet like Moses [Deut. 18:18-19], precisely because they recognized in Jesus the one who perfectly fulfilled both prophecies—just as it is doubtful that anyone systematically linked the suffering servant prophecies with the royal messianic prophecies until Jesus himself came on the scene” (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991], 329).

<sup>20</sup> Metzger, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Metzger observed that, “The chief danger, as every writer who has attempted to popularize knows, is that, in making the complex clear, one may also make it appear simple, or, in making the debatable plain, one may also make it appear certain. In more than one New Testament problem the balance of probabilities is close, and the student should be presented with differing interpretations of the evidence. In all historical research one must seek not only to learn what can be known of the past, but also to become aware of what, because of incomplete or conflicting testimony, cannot be known” (Ibid., 13-14).

<sup>22</sup> See Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 74.

<sup>23</sup> R. B. Wright, who wrote an introduction and translated the *Psalms of Solomon*, discussed the views concerning its date and argued that the first century BC best fits its content. See James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 640-641.

<sup>24</sup> Note also vv. 6, 30-31 from the same passage: “<sup>6</sup> They set a (worldly) monarchy in place of (that which was) their excellency. They laid waste the throne of David in tumultuous arrogance. . . . <sup>30</sup> And he will have the heathen nations to serve him under his yoke. And he will glorify the Lord in (a place) well known (above) all the earth. And he will purge Jerusalem, making it holy as of old, <sup>31</sup> so that nations will come from the ends of the earth to see his glory, bringing as gifts her sons who had fainted, and to see the glory of the Lord, with which God hath glorified her.”

The Pseudepigrapha (English) Translated by Craig A. Evans, et. al., Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville, Nova Scotia CANADA. Portions also translated by Daniel Christiansen. Version 2.7. Copyright © 2009 by OakTree Software, Inc.

<sup>25</sup> The crises are cited by Köstenberger (p. 60) from L. R. Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Students* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 18-24.

<sup>26</sup> The Romans ruled beyond the end of the NT period; 70 AD is when the Second Temple was destroyed.