
Day 289 - October 16

Historical Interlude (425-5 BCE)

Writings of the Apocrypha

Readings: No readings - summary of information provided in “The Narrated Bible”

Reflections:

- We see in Israel’s library (called the Old Testament) 39 books that capture the story of Israel. After 425 BCE, other writings will emerge over the next 400 to 600 years within Israel. They will not be given the same status as being inspired by God but still provide invaluable insight into this period of Israel’s history.
- These writings are called the “Apocrypha” or “hidden writings” of Israel and are not fully accepted by all as inspired by God. These writing will be included in Christian copies of the Scriptures from the Greek version called the Septuagint, to the Latin Vulgate around 400 CE edited by Jerome. All English Bibles from 1382 CE to original King James Version in 1611 CE will also include these writings. Luther in his German Bible in 1534 will include them as a supplement. Catholic and Greek Orthodox Bibles continue to include these writings although Protestant Bibles will begin to exclude them as of 1629 CE. Although viewed as historical writings, the Jews never accepted these as Scripture or inspired by God. In fact, most Hebrew Scriptures have not ever included these writings.
- It is important to note that these writings reflect religious ideas of mysticism and a developed demonology (view of Satan and demons) that appear to reflect direct influence from the Persian religions and the role that they played in shaping the thinking of Jews who were living dispersed across the Persian empire. The majority of these writings were written between 300 BCE and 100 CE.
- First Esdras – a recap of much of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. One interesting point in this book is that Zerubbabel apparently argued that truth and women are more powerful than kings and wine.
- Second Esdras – Written in Latin from 300 BCE onward is a summary of a number of apocalyptic visions similar to Daniel. It also tackles many of the questions around suffering found in the book of Job. The answer is: there are something things we just don’t understand.

- The Book of Tobit – a Jewish fiction story about a hero named Tobit. It contains more developed mysticism and demonology as well as an angel Raphael. It's main point is supporting self-less charity.
- The Book of Judith – another Jewish fiction story about a heroine Judith who saves her city and nation by deceiving an Assyrian general and decapitating him. The historical details are incorrect in this story underscoring its fictional nature. It strongly promotes strict adherence to the Law, particularly ceremonial and dietary laws. Some speculate this book was written within the Pharisee movement.
- Additions to the Book of Esther – These appear to be supplements to the story of Esther to bring God into the story: A dream by Mordecai, King Artaxerxes' edict, a prayer by Esther, a supposed letter to the Jews empowering them to defend themselves, and finally an epilogue by Mordacai reflecting on the fulfillment of his dream. These again appear to be creations to add God into this famous story.
- The Wisdom of Solomon – This writing is similar to other Wisdom literature, particularly Ecclesiastes. Although written around 50 to 40 BCE, it is attributed to Solomon. It deals with many of the issues common to the wisdom literature of Israel and ends with review of God's perpetual care for Israel, even though the nation has been so unfaithful.
- Ecclesiasticus (or "The Wisdom of Sirach" named after the author's father) – This is the longest of the Apocryphal writings and is very close to the book of Proverbs in style and content. It was written around 180 BCE in Jerusalem and was later translated into Greek about 50 years later in Alexandria. It includes a list of great Jewish leaders up to the high priest Simon who died in 199 BCE. It is written by a man named Jeshua. It covers most of the common topics found within wisdom literature but also includes such topics as dining etiquette and health tips. One of the great lines in its writings is in a section praising the various professions: "Their prayer is in the practice of their trade."
- The Book of Baruch – This was supposedly written by Jeremiah's scribe but the details of the writing betray the fact that this was probably not the case. It is more likely a creation dating around the first century. This writing calls for national repentance and plea for God's mercy. It includes a supposed letter from Jeremiah that may be one of the most insightful and scathing attacks against the practice of idolatry that is found within Jewish literature.
- The Story of Susann – This appears to be a fictitious story about a woman wrongfully charged with adultery by two conspiring elders. It may be a story written to bring about reform of the laws around adultery that required at least two witnesses. The point of the story is that it is possible for two to conspire against a victim and therefore a broader view must be held on the issue of witnesses.
- The Song of the Three Children – Written around 170 to 150 BCE, this writing was meant to apparently supplement the book of Daniel with additional accounts of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

- The Story of Bel and the Dragon – Another story written as a supplement to the book of Daniel. It represents an attack on the practice of worshiping serpents and dragons which was common around 100 BCE. It includes some fantastic miracles and is clearly fictitious.
- The Prayer of Manasses – a brief pious prayer likely written within the Pharisee movement.
- The First Book of Maccabees – A history of the Jewish people from 175 to 132 BCE. This book provides very helpful historical data around the events, battles and leadership struggles of this period.
- The Second Book of Maccabees – This is more of a patriotic book than a historical record of the period from 175 to 160 BCE. This book claims to be a summary of a five volume work by Jason of Cyrene.
- These books help give the reader a view into the priorities and political realities that the Jewish people continued to wrestle with during these centuries of prophetic silence.