

THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE UPON CHRISTIANITY

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Introduction

The Old Testament closes a little over four hundred years before Christ (about 425 BC) with the Jewish people “*being partially restored to their land*,” and living under the dominion of the Persian Empire. The Jewish people had been living in exile in Babylon since about 605 BC... beginning in 538 BC, small groups of Jews started returning to their homeland. Seven different prophets ministered to God’s people during this time period: Daniel and Ezekiel ministered to the exiles in Babylon... while Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi ministered to the people who were returning to the land. It was at the end of this era where the children of Israel entered into a period known as the “*Intertestamental Period*.” This 400 year period between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament saw a number of significant changes: the people had greatly multiplied and were now dwelling together in the same land... rather than being under Persian rule, they were now under Roman rule with an Edomite king exercising jurisdiction over them. A number of incredible changes had taken place — religious, political, cultural and civil. The Old Testament closed with an exhortation to “*remember the Law of Moses*” (cf. Mal 4:4), as well as the promise to “*send Elijah to Israel before the day of the Lord*” — he would bring about *reform* in the lives of the people, that they might resemble their godly forefathers... if they did not, God would visit the land with a *curse* (cf. Mal 4:5-6).

After God delivered His final message through the prophet Malachi, He paused in His communications through men for some *four hundred years*. His silence must have been deafening to the Jewish people — some demanded that He act as He had always acted... others probably felt that man was too sinful to hear from Him, and that man’s lack of faith was the cause of His silence and apparent inactivity. The long and short of it is, *God’s silence was a part of His eternal plan*. He had spoken on numerous occasions and through various people, but He was now preparing to speak His greatest and most powerful Word to mankind through His Son, Jesus Christ. The “*pause*” added incredible emphasis to His monumental revelation.

The ways of God are beyond the grasp of man (cf. Is 55:8-9). The Architect of the universe is not without order and symmetry. Historically, God had generally allowed a desperate situation to arise before presenting His message or providing His deliverance. This pattern is repeated over and over again throughout Old Testament history; be it with Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Judges, Esther, Nehemiah, etc. The efforts of man had to be frustrated before God would intervene. *God simply allowed His people to exhaust their resources, and then He would manifest Himself*. Such is the way God continues to work in the lives of His children today — God usually waits until the wind blows and the storm rages before He shows up (cf. Jn 6:16ff); how else would we come to the end of ourselves and see ourselves for who we really are? Carefully read: Mt 26:30-35, 69-75; Lk 22:31-34; Jn 21:15-22; and Rom 7:14-20.

The Empires that Ruled During the Intertestamental Period

During the four hundred year intertestamental period, God's people experienced significant challenges and spiritual declension. This four hundred year period was characterized by six historical eras:

1. The Persian Era (397-336 BC)
2. The Greek Era (336-323 BC)
3. The Egyptian Era (323-198 BC)
4. The Syrian Era (198-165 BC)
5. The Maccabean Era (165-63 BC)
6. The Roman Era (63-4 BC)

1. **The Persian Era** (397-336 BC) — This era actually dates back to Persia's conquering Babylon in 536 BC, yet it continued on into the early years of the Intertestamental Period (397-336 BC). So the first thing Persia contributed to the people of Israel was a "foreign policy." You need to remember the history of the people of Israel — once Solomon goes off the scene, the kingdom splits into two kingdoms (Israel & Judah). Both of those kingdoms eventually are taken out of the land, and made subjects to foreign entities. The northern kingdom of Israel is scattered all over the Assyrian empire, and later Babylonia conquers the southern kingdom of Judah and basically takes the people out of Judah (though not all of them, certainly the leading people) and settles them in Babylonia. Persia eventually conquers Babylonia and when they do, their foreign policy lets the people of Judah return to their homeland. So with Ezra and Nehemiah, we have people who have been in exile, returning home. With the foregoing in mind, Persia was a strong influence over the Jewish people for some two hundred years (536-336 BC). God used Persia to deliver Israel from the Babylonian captivity (cf. Dan 5:30-31)... and allow the Jewish exiles to return to their land, rebuild it, and worship at the temple in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). These are significant things that Persia let the people of Israel do, and it is all related to that foreign policy that let them return to the land, and if they did not rebel, actually let them pretty much govern themselves. For about one hundred years after the close of the Old Testament canon (425 BC), Judea continued to be a Persian territory under the governor of Syria with the High-Priest exercising a measure of civil authority. The Jewish people were allowed to observe their religious tenets without any outside governmental interference. Persia's attitude was tolerant toward the Jewish remnant in Palestine until internal rivalry over the politically powerful office of High Priest resulted in partial destruction of Jerusalem by the Persian governor... other than that the Jewish people were pretty much left undisturbed by Persia during this period.

2. **The Greek Era** (336-323 BC) — Between 334 BC and 331 BC, Alexander the Great defeated the Persian king, Darius III, in three decisive battles that gave him control of the lands of the Persian Empire. In many respects, Alexander the Great has been regarded by historians as perhaps the greatest conqueror of all time; he was far and away the central figure to this brief period — he conquered Persia, Babylon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, as well as western India. Although he only reigned over Greece for thirteen years (he died at the age of thirty-three), his influence lived long after him. The cherished desire of Alexander was to found a worldwide empire unified by language, custom, and civilization. Under his

influence, the entire western world began to speak and study the Greek language — this process, called “*Hellenization*,” included the adoption of Greek culture and religion in all parts of the world. Hellenism became so popular that it persisted and was encouraged even through the Roman era and New Testament times. The *struggle* that developed between the Jews and Hellenism’s influence upon their culture and religion was long and bitter. Alexander, however, permitted the Jews to observe their laws and granted them an exemption from taxes during their sabbatical years. It was Alexander’s goal to bring *Greek culture* to the lands he had conquered; he wished to create a world united by *Greek language and thinking*. This is the crucial element that Greece brought to the table — they brought a Greek culture that is both educated, and a multi-god worshiping culture; thus there were many gods in the land; they brought in magic and the onslaught of mystery religions... so the *religious impact* was big on the land. Perhaps the most important impact Greece had, outside of culture, was that they brought the *Greek language*; and that language eventually became the language of the land. People actually became bilingual in a very short period of time. Ultimately this policy was dangerous to the religion of Israel, because the Greek way of life was attractive, sophisticated, and humanly appealing, but utterly ungodly — in that sense, it was very representative of our world today. Faithful Jews staunchly resisted the strong influence of pagan polytheism. Although the Greek language was sufficiently widespread by 270 BC, and resulted in the bringing about of a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) — this translation was called “*the Septuagint*” (more on that later).

- 3. The Egyptian Era** (323-198 BC) — When Alexander the Great died in 323 BC, the Greek empire became divided into four segments under his four generals: Ptolemy, Lysimachus, Cassander, and Selenus. Ptolemy Soter, the first of the Ptolemaic dynasty, received Egypt and soon dominated nearby Israel. He dealt severely with the Jews at first, but toward the end of his reign and on into the rule of Ptolemy Philadelphus (his successor), the Jews were treated favorably. It was during this time that the *Septuagint* was authorized. The policy of toleration followed by the Ptolemies, by which Judaism and Hellenism coexisted peacefully, was very dangerous for the Jewish faith. A gradual infiltration of Greek influence and an almost unnoticed assimilation of the Greek way of life took place. During this period Jewish worship was influenced to become more *external* than internal, a notion that had a lasting impact upon Judaism. Two religious parties emerged: the pro-Syrian Hellenizing party, and the Orthodox Jews (in particular the Hasidim or “*Pious Ones*” — the predecessors of the Pharisees). A struggle for power between these two groups resulted in a polarization of the Jews along political, cultural, and religious lines. It was the same conflict that brought about the attack of Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BC. The Jews had prospered until near the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty when conflicts between Egypt and Syria escalated. Israel was again caught in the middle. When the Syrians defeated Egypt in the Battle of Panion in 198 BC, Judea was annexed to Syria.
- 4. The Syrian Era** (198-165 BC) — Under the rule of Antiochus III the Great and his successor Seleucus Philopater, the Jews came under the control of Syria... though treated harshly, they were nonetheless allowed to maintain local rule under their High Priest. All went reasonably well until the Hellenizing party decided to have the person they favored, Jason, replace the High Priest favored by the Orthodox Jews — they brought this about by bribing Seleucus’s successor, *Antiochus Epiphanes*. This set off a political conflict that finally brought Antio-

chus to Jerusalem in a fit of rage. So angry was Antiochus, that in 168 BC he set about to destroy every distinctive characteristic of the Jewish faith — he forbade all sacrifices, outlawed the rite of circumcision, canceled the observance of the Sabbath and the offering of sacrifices, and disallowed the celebration of feast days... additionally, he mutilated and destroyed nearly every copy of the Hebrew Bible. Jews were forced to eat pork and make sacrifices to idols. His final act of sacrilege, and the one that spelled his ultimate ruin, was the desecration of the Most Holy Place by building an altar and offering a sacrifice to the god Zeus. Many Jews died in the ensuing persecutions. Perhaps a reminder of God's way of working with man is needed at this point — He creates or allows a desperate situation, then calls upon a special, faithful servant. Man, however, often attempts to rescue himself and seems to be almost at the point of success only to wind up in worse shape than before. This was about to happen in the life of God's people the Jews. God was simply setting the stage for the coming of His Deliverer (the Lord Jesus).

5. **The Maccabean Era** (165-63 BC) — An elderly priest named *Mattathias* (he was of the house of Hasmon), lived with his five sons in a village just northwest of Jerusalem. When a Syrian official tried to enforce heathen sacrifice in that village, Mattathias revolted, killed a renegade Jew who offered a sacrifice, slew the Syrian official, and fled to the mountains with his family. Thousands of faithful Jews joined him, and history records one of the most noble demonstrations of holy jealousy for the honor of God. After the death of Mattathias three of his sons carried on the Maccabean Revolt in succession: *Judas* (166-160 BC), *Jonathan* (160-142 BC), and *Simon* (142-134 BC). These men had such success that by 165 BC they had retaken Jerusalem, cleansed the temple, and restored biblical worship — this event is commemorated even today as the *Feast of Dedication* – [Hanukkah] – which Jesus Himself also celebrated (cf. Jn 10:22ff). Though fighting against Syria continued in outlining areas, the Jewish people finally received their independence under the leadership of Simon in 142 BC. They experienced almost seventy years of independence under the reign of the Hasmonaeen dynasty (the High Priesthood), the most notable leaders of which were John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC) and Alexander Jannaeus (102-76 BC). The most significant religious development of this period resulted from a strong difference of opinion concerning the kingship and High Priesthood of Judea. For hundreds of years the position of High Priest was held by individuals of political strength rather than those who were descendants of Aaron... orthodox Jews resented this development. When John Hyrcanus became governor and High Priest, he conquered Transjordan and Idumaea and destroyed the Samaritan temple — his power and popularity led him to refer to himself as a king. This flew in the face of the orthodox Jews, who by this time were called ***Pharisees*** (which literally means “*separatists*”); they recognized no king unless he was of the lineage of King David. Those who opposed the Pharisees and supported the Hasmonaeans were called ***Sadducees*** (they adopted their name from a Hebrew word meaning “*righteous*”). These names surfaced for the first time during the reign of John Hyrcanus who himself became a Sadducee.
6. **The Roman Era** (63-4 BC) — The independence of the Jews ended in 63 BC when a Roman general named *Pompey* conquered Syria and entered Israel. When Aristobulus II of Israel, who claimed to be king of Israel, locked Pompey out of Jerusalem, the Roman leader in anger took the city by force, and in doing so he reduced the size of Judea. Antipater the Idumaeen was appointed procurator of Judea by Julius Caesar in 47 BC. As some of you will recall,

Antipater's son Herod, eventually became the king of the Jews around 40 BC. Although ***Herod the Great***, as he was called, planned and carried out the building of the new temple in Jerusalem, he was a devoted Hellenist and hated the Hasmonaean family. Ultimately he killed every descendant of the Hasmonaean family, including his own wife (the granddaughter of John Hyrcanus)... as well as his own two sons (Aristobulus and Alexander). Remember, Herod was the man on the throne when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. During this era, the ***Pharisees*** believed in strict adherence to the *Scriptures* (the written law), as well as to the *Misnah* (the oral law), which sought to apply the written law to everyday life. Whereas the Pharisees were strongly connected with the Scribes, the ***Sadducees*** were strongly related to the High Priest; the priests seem to have tended toward the more social, political, and earthly aspects of their position (this position was obviously more attractive to the wealthy, socially minded Jewish leaders).

So, what did Rome bring to the table? *It brought law*; thus all of a sudden the known world was ruled by law that was enforced (sometimes brutally). *Rome brought peace*; where the land had known little peace for a long time, it enforced the peace (that is, the *Pax Romana*) — it characterized the Roman Empire. *It brought a stable government*; it brought “*systems*” (the Romans were a systems people); so it brought ways of doing things, from collecting taxes to governmental processes. *Rome also brought slavery*; it is estimated that in the Roman Empire, five out of every seven people were slaves (most people were under the jurisdiction of other people). So Rome was built on slavery. Slavery was an accepted fact in the ancient world and a significant factor in economic and societal life. Slaves were frequently the product of defeats in wars... often entire populations, as well as soldiers, were enslaved. The Emperor Titus after his Palestinian campaign sold ninety-thousand Jews into bondage. Some slaves worked the fields in groups; others were highly skilled workers and trusted administrators. Frequently, slaves were far better off than free laborers. Roman laws were passed to protect slaves and to allow rights, even private possessions, which were sometimes used to ransom the slave and his family (cf. Acts 22:27-28). Lastly, *Rome brought roads*; it built roads all over the empire. They were the freeway builders of their day. So they connected their empire together and that was vitally important for the church to fulfill its mission of taking the Gospel into all the world. So God used each of the various nations to fill up the time and prepare the way for the Messiah who was to come, the One that they had been hoping for... but when He came, they did not recognize Him or receive Him (cf. Jn 1:10-11).

Another group that emerged during the Roman era were “***the Herodians***” (cf. Mt 22:16); essentially, this was a political party whose aim it was to further the cause of Herod's government. They were probably motivated by a fear of the Roman government and the possibility of total destruction by them. Yet another group was “***the Zealots***,” this was a political party that was in direct opposition to the Herodians; they refused to conform to Roman rule. Rather than passively waiting for God to act, they took the position that “God only helps those who help themselves” — so the Zealots had a fiery nationalistic spirit. A final group that had developed was “***the Essenes***,” they were a highly religious cult which felt the need to withdraw from ordinary human society and practice a monastic kind of life and a mystical kind of Judaism. With a passion for the spirit of the law and being separated unto God, the Essenes lost all consciousness of Israel's evangelistic

mission; they were content to block out the world and ignore its problems, and let it die without hope.

It should be noted, the majority of Israelites lived *outside of Palestine* during the Intertestamental Period — toward the end of this period, they were found throughout the Mediterranean basin and Mesopotamia. With the destruction of the *Temple* by Babylon in 586 BC, the *Synagogue* became the place of education and worship for the Jews in exile. Since the majority of Jews did not return to Palestine after the Exile, synagogues continued to function in the Diaspora (the dispersion of Israel) and also became established in Palestine, even after the reconstruction of the temple by Zerubbabel in 516 BC. With the foregoing well established throughout the Jewish community, man's futile attempts to deal with the shifting tide of political power and religious belief, left Israel in a kind of spiritual bondage that was even worse than her political bondage. The rise of the various parties and movements was evidence of a sincere search for some final solution to her problems. Everything they did seemed to have failed. The stage of history was dark. The situation was desperate. Amid this setting God broke four hundred years of silence with the advent of His Son (Jesus Christ) into the world, the faithful Servant of the Lord... and the Intertestamental Period came to an end. The ***Intertestamental Period*** is the term Protestants use... whereas the ***Deuterocanonical Period*** is the term Catholics and Orthodox Christians use. These two terms describe the gap of time between the period covered by the Hebrew Bible and the period covered by the Christian New Testament — essentially, it covers roughly four hundred years, spanning the ministry of *Malachi* (400 BC) to the ministry of *John the Baptist*. This period of time is also known by the Protestant community as the "*400 Silent Years*," because it is believed to have been a span of time where God did not reveal anything new to His people. Many of the *Deuterocanonical books*, however, which are accepted as scripture by Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, were written during this time. This is also the time when many of the *Pseudepigraphal works* were produced — we'll cover both of these groups of books shortly. The reality is, *an understanding of the events of the "Intertestamental Period" provides an extremely valuable context for the New Testament.*

The Not-so-Silent 400 Years of Intertestamental History

When one finishes reading the Old Testament book of Malachi, the next book in order is the New Testament book of Matthew. What happens is this: the Old Testament closes with the book of Malachi and there is a *400-year gap* then before the New Testament begins. Many people refer to this as the *400 silent years*, because there is a general belief that during these years, from the closing of the Old Testament text with Malachi and Nehemiah (who were contemporaries), until the time of John the Baptist, you had roughly a *400-year period* in which no prophet spoke in the land of Israel, and no official text of scripture was being developed... it was as if God was silent.

Having said that, one needs to understand that though God may have been *silent*, He was not *inactive*. He was busy and that is what we want to address in this 400 year intertestamental period. If God was silent (that is, if there was no prophet in the land), then it was as if God had quit speaking to the people of Israel, so it helps us understand a lot of what ultimately goes on in the New Testament era. For instance, you don't have to read very far into Matthew, until you discover a prophet named John the Baptist has come on the scene. If you read the various nar-

ratives about John in the other Gospels, you discover that he came speaking to the people with a message of repentance — “*Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand!*” essentially it was a message of preparation — “*Get prepared for the coming kingdom of God!*” It was a powerful message and people flocked into the desert of Judea where he did his preaching. Interestingly enough, it was not necessarily convenient for people to go into the desert to hear John speak, yet *people flocked to hear him speak*. One naturally has to ask himself, “*Why was that?*” Well, for four-hundred years there had not been anyone like that... and now, all of a sudden, one appears. *Could God be speaking to His people again?* Could a prophet of God now be in the land again? The Jewish people were now in bondage to Rome... *the Messianic hopes* of the people dominated the thinking of the Jewish people — they looked forward to a divine appointment that God would send to assume kingship over Israel (Judah), and deliver it from its oppressors. Some actually looked forward to a Messiah who would establish the kingdom of God on earth (cf. Mt 3:1-3; 4:17; also Acts 1:6-7). Just as the Jewish people flocked to see John the Baptist... they also flocked to see Jesus. This is “*the context*” of what was going on in the Jewish world.

It is important that we see the big picture, so that we are comfortable with the understanding that there were some significant things that went on during the intertestamental period that would revolutionize God’s world. There is a passage in scripture that captures the notion of this period. The apostle Paul writes in Galatians 4:4-5, “*When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His son*, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” That little phrase, “*when the fullness of time came*,” gives significant application to these 400 years in a myriad of ways because of what God was doing — *He was getting things ready for the most significant person and event in all human history... the coming of the Savior (the Messiah; the Lord Jesus Christ) into this world*. In order to understand exactly what was going on during this 400 year period, one needs to understand the three dominating elements of that day — the *rulers* who ruled the land... the *readings* that were written during this time... and the *religion* of that day. The reason we need to look at these three elements is because of the contextual impact they had on the New Testament world, and the things we read about in the New Testament... so if one does not know what happened during the intertestamental period, much of what he reads about in the New Testament is going to seem somewhat strange. *With that said, we need to understand what was going on religiously during this time*.

The Literature of the Intertestamental Period

The reality is, there was a lot of material written during this period of time, especially in the Jewish community. The Jewish people were not only a highly educated people, they were strongly devoted to their culture and the tenets of Judaism; as such, they were a well-read people as well. The most significant material written during the Intertestament Era was the *Apocrypha*. The word Apocrypha is from the Greek *ta apokrypha*, meaning “*the hidden things*,” although there is no strict sense in which these books are hidden; hence the term Apocrypha has been somewhat confusing since the early days of the church. The Apocrypha was a group of about fifteen books; thirteen of them comprise the *Old Testament Apocrypha*: 1-2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Rest of Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (also titled the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Additions to Daniel, Prayer of Manasses, and 1-2 Maccabees. Both the status of these books and the use of the term apocrypha have been in

confusion since the early days of the church; in the broader sense the word apocrypha has come to refer to any “*extra-canonical scripture*.” The ancient rabbinic practice was to regard all such writings as “*outside books*,” and this designation was continued by Cyril of Jerusalem, who used *Apocrypha* in the sense of Scriptures outside the canon. Since the Jews uniformly denied canonical status to these books, they were not found in the Hebrew Bible... but the manuscripts of the LXX (the Septuagint) include them as an *addendum* to the canonical Old Testament. Oftentimes the author of these books concealed his own name and ascribed his work to an apostle or disciple (for whatever reason), thus compromising the acceptability of these books as indeed being divinely inspired (*canonical*).

These books were not recognized as *Scripture* (God-breathed writings) during the early years of the church; *the Jews uniformly denied canonical status to these books*, and so they were not found in the Hebrew Bible; but the manuscripts of the seventy authors (LXX) of the *Septuagint* (that is, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) included them as an “*addendum*” to the canonical Old Testament. Likewise, in the second century AD, the first Latin Bibles were translated from the Greek Bible (which included the Septuagint) and so the Latin Bible also included the Apocrypha. *Jerome’s “Vulgate”* (that was the popular name given to the common Latin version of the Bible) distinguished the *libri ecclesiastici* and the *libri canonici*, with the result that the Apocrypha were accorded “*secondary status*.” At the *Council of Carthage* in 397 AD (some three hundred years after the last apostles died), *Augustine* was in attendance, and it was decided to accept the Apocrypha as having unqualified canonical status (with the exception of 1-2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh), and anyone who disputed this ecclesiastical decision was anathematized. The *Reformers* repudiated the Apocrypha as unworthy and contradictory to the doctrines of the uncontroverted canon; *Martin Luther*, however, admitted that they were “*profitable and good to read*.” Among Protestant communions, only the *Anglican Church* makes much use of the Apocrypha today. Regarding the material that is included in the Apocrypha, much of it speaks into history... therefore, if one is to understand many aspects of medieval life, it is necessary to study the Apocrypha. Moreover, by reading the Apocrypha one will gain important insights into the nature of Christianity during the *postapostolic period*. So, as one looks through this period of time, one cannot help but respect much of the material in these books. It is important to note that the Apocryphal books were not officially added to the Old Testament by the *Roman Catholic Church* until the *Council of Trent* in 1546 (just a few years prior to the Reformation), when it decided to make them an integral part of their Scriptures. Up until this time these books were understood to be *deuterocanonical* (*secondary canon*). During the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century (this same period of time), the *Reformers* returned to the Hebrew rabbinic text, which did not include the *deuterocanonical* books. On the other hand, the Apocrypha were always a part of the Eastern Orthodox Scriptures, because *Eastern Orthodoxy* has always embraced the *Greek Septuagint* (the Hebrew Bible that had been translated into Greek during the 3rd century BC) as the official translation of the Bible (more on this later). Though most theologians do not view the apocryphal books as being “*inspired by God*” (*i.e.*, God-breathed), the vast majority believe they have great value from a cultural and historical viewpoint, because they give understanding to the religious climate during the inter-testamental period, showing it to be a time of deep turmoil and religious conflict.

Another group of writings that needs mentioning is the *Pseudepigrapha* — these writing were basically a large collection of Jewish writings not included in the Old Testament canon, dating

from 200 BC to about 200 AD (a four hundred year period); some of the writings contain legendary histories, psalms, and wisdom literature, and even some Christian additions. The material contains about sixty writings by anonymous authors. The books were never regarded by ancient Jewish rabbis as being the equivalent of Scripture (*i.e.*, canonical); such has been the dominant position of the Christian Church since the first century as well. Obviously, there were a number of things written by different Jewish and Christian writers during the intertestamental period, but that doesn't make the material "*divinely inspired*" any more than some present-day writing by a renowned Christian writer (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17). The *Pseudepigrapha* tended to focus on the values and thoughts of people at the time in which they were written; such messages made life tolerable for the Jews... it reaffirmed belief in the sovereignty of God and in His care for His dispossessed people. It was the doctrine of God in these writings which was most influential. Influenced as the Jewish people were by ideas foreign to their biblical heritage, the *Pseudepigraphal* writers sought to remain true to this heritage, while developing and enriching it in ways which would answer the questions of the times in which they lived. Many theologians believe the theology of these writers is essentially a theology of hope. The value of the *Pseudepigrapha* for Jews and Christians alike is considerable. Along with the *Dead Sea Scrolls* they form an indispensable background for understanding the developments which took place after the OT was written.

Then there were the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. We have heard a lot about these scrolls in our time because they were not discovered until 1947. Basically they reflect the thoughts and the ways and the practices of various separatist groups that pulled away from Rome and away from the common culture of the day, and frankly tried to preserve the values and things that they considered to be important. Another item that was shaped during this period of time was an edition of the Bible called the *Septuagint* (as mentioned above) — it is often abbreviated LXX (Roman numeral for "seventy"). The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) in 3rd century BC. It is alleged that seventy-two Jewish translators were sent from Jerusalem to Alexandria, Egypt, to produce a Greek version of the Hebrew Bible for Ptolemy II. The reason for identifying the Septuagint by the abbreviated numerals LXX, is the belief that 72 scholars (when rounded off it is "70") produced this Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the OT). By the time of Christ and the early church, Greek was the dominant language of the day... so it is only natural that the Septuagint rendering of the Old Testament would have been popular throughout the New Testament Church. Jesus Himself often quoted directly from the Septuagint; thus the integrity of this translation is highly acclaimed and respected in the Christian world. Remember, the New Testament was also written in Greek — this was the language that dominated the Greco-Roman world during the first century, and was "*the language of choice by God Himself to convey divine truth to the world.*" Of all the languages in the world, no other language is as "*exacting*" and "*precise*" as New Testament Greek (commonly referred to as *Koine Greek* — the Greek language that was "spoken" by the common man... not *Classical Greek* — the scholarly language of philosophers, business and legal matters that were "written"). One might compare these two variations of the Greek language with the English language that is commonly spoken to Shakespearian English (if you've ever read Shakespeare, you'll notice it is a very formal literary style that is more difficult to understand). It is fascinating to note that God chose to communicate divine truth to human beings through *the language that common man spoke* (Koine Greek), not through a language that only those who were "*highly literate and educated*" could understand. So God developed the Greek language to "*convey doctrinal truth*" in an extremely precise manner, that everyone

could understand. The Old Testament language of Hebrew is a “*picture language*” (every word is basically a picture); thus it is an exceptional language for telling stories and describing historical events (as opposed to a highly doctrinal composition like the New Testament). Since the Greek language had come to be the dominant language of people all over the known world, the evangelization of people was now possible through one language. The Septuagint became a key tool in communicating both the Old & New Testaments to the world; as such it became a much quoted and much read edition throughout the Roman Empire. By the way, the English language takes on a character much like that of Greek (as opposed to Hebrew), in that it is also “*a very definitive language*,” thus, it is “*the language of science*” in our world today.

Discoveries of manuscript fragments at various locations in Palestine have made a great contribution to the study of the Intertestamental Period. The scrolls found at Qumrân in 1947 consist of Scripture texts and commentaries... Hebrew and Aramaic portions or transcripts of apocryphal, targumic, and pseudepigraphical literature, some of it previously known only in Greek... sectarian documents that had long disappeared; etc. The discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and the recovery of the Essene library at Qumrân is filling many gaps in intertestamental history and Christian antecedents and forms an immensely valuable area of biblical study. Other Judean caves have yielded fragmentary manuscripts, letters and coins. Remains of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic manuscripts from the *Cave of Horror*, and the caves at *Naaleelim* have also been helpful. Even more impressive are the discoveries from the *Cave of Letter* — small fragments of Psalms 15 & 16, Numbers 20:7f, and letters written by Simon Bar Cochba to his cohorts (Bar Cochba was the last of the Hebrew leaders to spearhead a major revolt against Rome — though his efforts initially succeeded, ultimately they failed and he was killed in 135 AD). The cave at *Wādī Murabbaât* contained a scroll of the Minor Prophets, other biblical books, and papyri in Greek, Latin and Arabic. The excavations carried on at *Masada* from 1963–1965 under the direction of Yigael Yadin, discovered fragments of biblical scrolls including Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Ezekiel. Non-biblical fragments included a small portion of the book of Jubilees in Hebrew and large fragments of chapters 39–44 of the Hebrew original of Sirach. The significance of these findings are helpful on many levels, and provide us with a clearer understanding of the intertestamental period. Regarding the various Old Testament books that are accepted as “*canonical*” (divinely inspired) in the Christian world, God obviously directed its outcome and placed those books there that He inspired. As the psalmist writes, “*Forever Thy word is settled in heaven, O Lord*” (Ps 119:89). The Lord Jesus Himself said, “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away*” (Mt 24:35). The prophet Isaiah writes, “*The word of our God stands forever*” (Is 40:8), as does the apostle Peter, “*The word of the Lord abides forever*” (1 Pet 1:25). As asserted throughout this study, if you take the Lord out of the picture, you will come up with all kinds of conflicted ideas and thoughts and even begin to wonder what “*truth*” really is; obviously that’s a dead end street. If you demand to arrive at the pinnacle of divine knowledge with human wisdom, you will never get there. Never. Make God preeminent in your thinking and truth will reign in your soul.

The Impact of the Intertestamental Period on Judaism

Another key to understanding the silent years is that of “*religion*.” We need to contrast two things first and that is the *temple* versus the *synagogue*. Though temple worship had been re-

established during the intertestamental period, it struggled. The priests had become more and more politically connected to whoever the ruler was and they became a little more compromising in their approach to things. The response to that, was the establishment of a local teaching institution known as the *synagogue*, where teachers who functioned in those localities, taught the people. It is here where you begin to see a shift from the temple, which is ceremonial, to the synagogue, which is much more instructive, moral and ethical; thus this was a much more formalized religion in that sense, and was much more common and of the people. So one sees a shift in that direction.

Yet another thing one needs to consider are the various people groups that had come on the scene. The first group was called the *Sadducees* and its counterpart was called the *Pharisees*. The *Sadducees* became connected to the temple — the high priest came from this group, as did most of the priests. They became very connected to the rulers of the land, to the Greeks, thus making them very prominent in the Jewish community. When Rome comes on the scene, they naturally connect themselves to Rome because they want to stay in power. There is power... there is wealth... there is prestige attached to being a temple servant, and they obviously want that to remain. Their counterpart was the group of teachers who taught in that institution we know as the synagogue — the *Pharisees* — they were the local teachers. They were much more of the people. They were not common in any sense, but were in fact, brilliant by all accounts. They were reflective of the teaching of the people, not at the formal, religious temple... hence, they were more at the grassroots level of the people. So one cannot help but see the shift that took place in the Jewish community.

There was another group called the *Sanhedrin*. They are a ruling counsel of Jews that had managed to stay in power from the time of the Greeks and they basically were the local group, the Judean group, that brought civil law to the people. They answered to the rulers, but they were that group of Jewish people who ruled during this time. Jesus Himself encountered the Sanhedrin; they were threatened by His power and authority; thus they wondered what to do with Him. As opposed to the Sanhedrin, there was a group that did not connect to the politics of the time; they were known as the *Scribes*. The period of the *Sopherim* (scribes) began with the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity; they were teachers who were highly involved in the preservation of the Hebrew scriptures. The scribes developed the general precepts of the law, and where the written law made no direct provision they created a compensation, either by establishing a precedent or by inference from other valid legal decisions. As such, during the last century before Christ, Jewish law became gradually an extensive and complicated science. This law was *unwritten*, and was propagated by *oral tradition*; thus very assiduous study was necessary to come to a general consensus of opinion. Ultimately, it was the judgment of the *rabbinical scribes* that determined what was valid law; in a sense you had a liberal/conservative divide — “let’s compromise where we need to stay in power,” or “let’s not compromise at all and preserve the scripture and its traditions.” With that in mind, it is obvious that there was a little *divide* that took place in the land... as well as a *rising conflict* during this 400-year period, all of which came to the forefront in the New Testament.

Yet another group that surfaced during the last century before Christ were the *Herodians*; they were a group of Jewish people, who were closely connected to the Roman rulers — they tended to be a group of wealthy people who attached their wealth to Rome, because the Herods were

the rulers from Rome who ruled over this area known as Judea. Though the Herodians were keenly opposed to Jesus (cf. Mt 22:16-17; Mk 3:6; 12:13), no explicit information is given by any of the evangelists (gospel writers). This group was principally concerned with paying homage to a sovereign who had the capacity to bring the friendship of Rome and other advantages to them. As opposed to those who would side with Rome, we have a group called the Essenes — they were a large, fairly diverse group that pulled out of the culture, and became separatists. They were an ascetic community that had moved down by the Dead Sea (a la the Dead Sea Scrolls) — the Dead Sea Scrolls describe how the Essenes lived, how they preserved the scripture, what they valued, and how they related. Their main colonies were near the north end of the Dead Sea and around Engedi. This sect which owned and produced the Dead Sea Scrolls was strictly organized as a single body, was bound to unconditional obedience, and their labors were strictly regulated. The strongest tie by which the members united themselves was the absolute community of goods; those who entered the community had to share all they had with the whole order; there was “one purse” for all. Whereas the Herodians were compromisers, the Essenes were separatists.

The last two groups the believer needs to get a handle on were the Publicans and an opposing group called the Zealots. The publicans were tax collectors of that day, and Rome always managed to pick the lowest of the low from a particular culture to be their tax collectors. A clever reason for doing so was this — Rome wanted the people to hate the tax collectors, rather their Roman rulers... so the publicans were not a loved group; as such they were strongly connected to Rome, they got their income from Rome. The way they gathered taxes was simple — “I get what Rome wants and if I get more, I get to keep it!” As such, they often over-charged people, and even fraudulently extorted hush-money from them (cf. Lk 3:13; 19:8); the publicans were also regarded by the Jewish community at large as being traitors and apostates. The position of Zacchaeus as a “chief among the publicans” (Lk 19:2) implies a gradation of some kind among the publicans. Furthermore, the strong feeling of many Jews as to the unlawfulness of paying tribute to Rome made matters even worse. So the publicans were not the most favored people in the land. In contradistinction to the publicans were the zealots, who were militant Jewish patriots who actually encouraged division from Rome, only more violently. They believed violence was justified if it would free the nation from its foreign oppressors. The noted first century Jewish writer Josephus described them as fanatics whose extravagant claims and untempered rashness actually made them a hindrance to their own cause. He identified them with the extremists who provoked the war with Rome in AD 66. Thus the zealots were “the Jewish terrorists” who hated Rome with a passion and did whatever they could to violently overthrow Roman rule.

A Brief Summary of the Silent Years

The Intertestamental Period denotes the history of postexilic Judaism from the time of the Book of Malachi to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. This period was characterized by the struggle of the Jews in Palestine to attain political and religious autonomy from a series of dominant foreign powers... by the emergence of eight different movements within Judaism (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Scribes, Sanhedrin, Herodians, Zealots & Publicans)... by the process of hellenization carried on by the Macedonians (Greeks) and Romans... and finally by the emergence of Christianity. Intertestamental Judaism was characterized, not by a continuing

stream of Old Testament prophecy (that had ceased), but by the interpretation of that revelation, and the correct exposition and application of it. The Jews were keenly aware the prophetic word (prophecy) had ceased. Most biblical scholars believe the Old Testament canon probably closed before 400 BC, and that by 75 AD the formation of the New Testament canon was nearly completed, and Judaism and Christianity had parted company. This is just a short summary of what transpired during this 400 year Intertestamental Period, but out of this period we saw the Jewish people fight for their Hebrew identity. The question was this: was their identity going to be compromised by the culture and the lives of nations that ruled over her? Were their values and beliefs going to be stubbornly hung onto and preserved through the coming ages, or would they abandon parts of them? Obviously the conflict among the Jewish people strongly influenced the coming New Testament world. There was a growing intensity — there was hope that a Messiah was going to come and deliver them from their oppressors, but there was also an intensity over this clash between those that would compromise to the ruling groups, and those who wanted to hang on to the traditional values that had become an integral part of their historical identity. So the 400 silent years were anything but silent in a number of ways. **God was filling up the time** (cf. Gal 4:4), getting things ready for the coming of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Persia and Greece were the dominant powers at the beginning of this period. Cyrus had founded the Persian dynasty (559-530 BC); he was succeeded by Cambyses (530-522 BC)... Darius I (522-486 BC)... Xerxes I (i.e., Ahasuerus — 486-465 BC)... and Artaxerxes I (465-424 BC) — those names are found numerous times in the historical books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, Haggai, and Zechariah. When reflecting upon the “dates” of Old Testament history, it is important to remember that the “date number” gets increasingly smaller as they approach the birth of Christ (for instance, 559 BC is 400 years further back in time than 159 BC). I state this because most people have a difficult time assessing “dates before Christ” (BC). To continue: Cambyses conquered Egypt in 525 BC, but his attempt to extend his rule over the Greek world failed when the Persians were defeated at Marathan (490 BC) and Salamis (480 BC). The Persian king Artaxerxes I was assassinated in 424 BC and Darius II ascended the throne. Though Egypt threw off Persian control and began its 30th Dynasty in 380 BC... Araxerxes III led a victorious attack in 343 BC; thus permanently terminating the rule of the Pharaohs. At this point, the rise of Macedonia (Greece) as on the horizon — Philip II of Macedon (359-336 BC), the father of Alexander the Great, conquered numerous cities in the region... but while attending the wedding feast of his daughter, he was murdered (336 BC), and Alexander the Great (at the age of twenty) was chosen to be his father's successor. Alexander crushed a revolt by Thebes (335 BC)... defeated the Persians at the battle of Granicus (334 BC)... conquered Tyre after a long siege (333-332 BC)... and then arrived in Egypt in 332 BC. He began the process of “hellenization” in the Near East by founding the city of Alexandria on the north shores of Egypt, his largest colony. After leaving Egypt, he defeated a vast army led by Darius, and thus became master of the Persian Empire. Alexander extended his empire as far east as India... but after returning to Babylon on his way back west, he developed a fever and died (323 BC).

As mentioned earlier in this study, when Alexander the Great died, his empire was divided among his leading generals: Ptolemy (Egypt); Seleucus (Babylon and Syria); Antipater and his son Casander (Macedonia and Greece); Antigonus (Phrygia and parts of Asia Minor); Lysimachus (Thrace and Pergamum); and Eumenes (Pontus). A power struggle developed among them as they attempted to develop their own dynasties. Palestine assumed the role of a buffer state

between the domains of Ptolemy and Antigonus; they were first under *Ptolemaic rule* (320-198 BC), and then under *Seleucid rule* until 142 BC, when Demetrius II granted them independence and freedom from tribute. Antiochus IV tried unsuccessfully to reimpose tribute but his death in 128 BC brought a final end to the Seleucid dynasty. The Jews actually enjoyed relative independence for about one hundred years (until 64 BC). When *Pompey* annexed Syria as a province of Rome in 64 BC, he then proceeded to Jerusalem in 63 BC and the Jews came under Roman rule; hence losing their political independence until recent times (the 20th century). For the record, Pompey was killed in a civil clash with *Julius Caesar* in 48 BC, and shortly thereafter Caesar was assassinated (44 BC). *Octavian* succeeded Caesar and defeated the rival forces of Mark Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC. *Tiberius* succeeded Augustus (Octavian), and *Caligula*, *Claudius*, and *Nero* were emperors in turn. Nero, who reigned from 54-68 AD, initiated the persecution of Christians by the Roman state — he was the emperor before whom Paul was brought on his first imprisonment at Rome, and in the persecution of Christians it is believed that Paul and Peter suffered martyrdom under his reign. *Vespasian* (69-79 AD) succeeded Nero, and under his direction *Titus* conquered Jerusalem in 70 AD and crushed Jewish resistance at Masada.

The process of *hellenization* that was initiated by Alexander the Great, and later continued by the Romans, was of central importance in this period. As previously mentioned, *Alexandria*, Egypt, was Alexander's first and greatest colony — a trading and administrative center on the shores of the Mediterranean. Other cities in the Mediterranean area that developed by colonization included *Ephesus*, *Corinth*, and *Philippi*. Such colonization brought with it the Greek language, Greek standards of weights and measures, coinage, and the gymnasium (from the Greek *gymnasion*), which was a public facility for sports that also provided instruction in philosophy, literature, and music.

A Brief Recap of Jewish History

The rebuilding of the temple, following the exile of the Jewish people in Babylon in 586 BC, was completed in 516 BC. The next century saw the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. Biblical scholars agree that *Nehemiah* restored the walls of Jerusalem in 444 BC, and that *Ezra* came to Jerusalem in 457 BC, the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (Ezra 7:1, 8), and collaborated with Nehemiah in (Neh 8:1). During this period, *Malachi* condemned the sins of an unrepentant nation and a corrupt priesthood, though a small remnant continued to follow in the footsteps of Ezra and Nehemiah (Mal 3:16f).

In Palestine, during this obscure period, the Jews and Samaritans became religiously and ethnically separated, a fact reflected in the Gospel narratives. Earlier, Aramaic began to replace Hebrew as the vernacular. This development is discernible even within the canon — notably in the book of Daniel. From Alexander the Great onward, Judaism became increasingly threatened by the cultural forces of a highly intellectual Hellenism, both in Palestine as well as the Diaspora. Jewish resistance to such hellenization often explains the vast bulk of *intertestamental literature*, much of it historically valuable, though not canonical. The discerning reader perceives that divine guidance kept the right books within the compass of Scripture. Eventually and gradually Judaism manifested itself in “*The Three Pillars of Judaism:*” the *Old Testament Canon* of Law,

Prophets, and Writings... the *Synagogue*, with its new, liturgical, and entirely non-sacrificial worship... and *Rabbinism* (rabbinic teachings and traditions), which culminated in the construction of the Talmud and Midrash.

The Jerusalem temple and priesthood were corrupt in Malachi's day, but when *Antiochus Epiphanes* (Antiochus IV) came to the Syrian throne in 175 BC their apostasy and deliberate policy of hellenization were even more notorious. The new monarch in his attempt to force hellenization, overestimated the extent to which he could insult the seemingly decadent Jewish religion. A faithful remnant sparked the celebrated *Maccabean revolt*, led in turn by Mattathias and his sons Judas Maccabeus, Jonathan & Simon (the Maccabees) in 168–135 BC. By their revolt, God's chosen people slowly regained a precious if transitory freedom. This liberation culminated under Simon in 142 BC, when they gained exemption from the taxes and overlordship of the Seleucids (1 Macc 13:41f). In gratitude to the deliverer, but in violation of the scriptural requirements of direct hereditary succession, the high priesthood (now Hasmonean) became invested and ratified in the person of Simon in 140 BC. This break with tradition, however, was never wholly acceptable to the pious and orthodox, and it became a cause of frictions later on. Simon's life ended tragically when he was murdered in 134 BC by his son-in-law, an ambitious hellenizer. But his son John Hyrcanus, another intended victim, escaped and became his successor; hence, the Hasideans and Hasmoneans.

During the long dominion of John Hyrcanus (134–104 BC), who was virtually king as well as high priest, the *Pharisaic* and *Sadducean* parties became clearly differentiated, with their respective legal and priestly emphases. John abruptly transferred his allegiance from the first to the second. We have seen already that his high priesthood was not entirely satisfactory to the orthodox; neither was his kingship, so far as monarchy could be acceptable at all in a theocratic and covenant community, for he was not of the house and lineage of David. The quarrel with the Pharisees no doubt flared up on these grounds. This was followed the brief reign of Aristobulus I, and the lengthy one of Alexander Janneus (102–76 BC). Janneus, able and successful in many political respects, entirely alienated the Pharisees by his obvious personal unfitness for the high priesthood. Pelted with lemons by the common people for a technical and ritual mistake, he retaliated with defiance and massacre (cf. Josephus Ant. xiii.13.5). At the close of his life, he counseled his queen and successor Alexandra Salome to make peace with the Pharisees. This she did, giving them increased powers in the Sanhedrin, which they retained right into New Testament times. Her son Aristobulus usurped the place and power of his older brother Hyrcanus and reigned till 63 BC. Then Pompey of Rome intervened, and Palestine was integrated into the Roman province of Syria.

The first phase of Roman domination in Palestine extended from 63 till 37 BC... the Jews were uneasy under the yoke at this point. *Pompey* had entered the holy of holies in 63 BC, though he seems to have done so to merely look around... then *Crassus*, proconsul of Syria, plundered the temple treasury in 54 BC. During most of this period Hyrcanus II, a pitifully ineffective puppet, held nominal rule, civil and ecclesiastical. Freed from his younger brother, yet now subject to the Roman governor, he tended to delegate such real power as he possessed to the Idumean *Antipater*, whose Edomite origins gave deep offense to Jewish sentiment. The incumbency of Hyrcanus ended pathetically after more than twenty years, when his intending successor

Antigonus confined him in bonds and thereby rendered him virtually unfit for office. Antigonus himself did not last very long, and with him the Hasmonean line came to its end. Herod, a son of Antipater and therefore also of Edomite blood, secured the backing of Rome in 40 BC, and was able to consolidate his kingship over a torn and troubled Palestine just three years later. During his rivalry with Antigonus he had used and equipped the fortress of Masada which was located on a mountain top just west of the Dead Sea.

Herod (73-4 BC), rightly or wrongly called “Herod the Great,” was capable, loyal to Rome, and reasonably successful in his control of Palestine. But his political leanings, his Idumean blood, and his ten wives did not commend him to Jewish subjects. He rebuilt in lavish manner the Jerusalem temple, but numerous heathen sanctuaries were also indebted to his lavish generosity. Since Herod features prominently in the Infancy narratives of Jesus, his death in 4 BC gives a date around which Jesus must have just been an infant. The domains granted to his sons Archelaus, Herod Antipas and Philip (who are all mentioned in the biblical narrative), provided leadership to the various Roman procuratorships in Palestine... in short, the historical framework at the time of Christ in the first century, and that of the early church, are well versed in Scripture and need not be expanded upon in this study.

About 66 AD, warned by the prophetic predictions of the Lord Jesus (Mark 13:14), the Christians in Jerusalem fled to Pella, an ancient city of Greek Macedonia (20 miles northwest of Thessalonica). This was the beginning (perhaps effectively the end) of the split between church and synagogue. The prolonged siege of Jerusalem by Titus followed, culminating in 70 AD in the total destruction of the temple and the butchery of Jews in Jerusalem, just as Christ predicted (Mark 13:2). Though the conquest of Titus was virtually final, pockets of resistance remained. Nine hundred sixty Jewish men, women, and children gathered on the summit of the old Herodian fortress of Masada; on the east side was a sheer drop of about 1300 feet to the Dead Sea. From here they defied, almost successfully, the embattled might of Rome. Flavius Silva and his men nearly retired in frustration and defeat. But wind, fire, and catapult stones at last smashed the Jewish defenses; and the conquering legions proudly mounted the high platform, only to find that the defenders had committed suicide. Yigael Yadin, with others, uncovered the skeletons of these people in the 1960s; he aptly calls them an “undying symbol of desperate courage.”

Outside of Jerusalem, Judaism assumed slightly different forms. The Qumrân community, associated by some scholars with the Essenes, carried on its own kind of scriptural exegesis and religious practice with the belief that they were a righteous remnant living in the last days. Large numbers of Jews made up the Dispersion (*diasporá* in Greek); that is, those who were scattered throughout the countries outside Palestine. Such a group lived on the island of Elephantine in the Nile... other important Jewish communities existed in Alexandria, Rome, Antioch, and numerous cities in Asia Minor.

Regarding the dispersion of the Jews from Palestine throughout their history, the first great dispersion involved the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC (by the Assyrians)... and the second great dispersion involved the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BC (by the Babylonians). Following those two dispersions, the Egyptians under Ptolemy I (322-285 BC) took a number of Jews into captivity to Alexandria during his invasion of Palestine. Alexandria’s

importance as a Jewish center dates to this time (remember, that's where the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek took place). The *Syrians* under Antiochus (223-187 BC) forced about two thousand Jewish families to move from Babylon to Phrygia & Lydia in western Asia Minor (cf. 1 Pet 1:1). The *Roman* general Pompey, after capturing Jerusalem in 63 BC, sent many Jews to Rome as slaves. The forcible suppression of Jewish revolts in AD 70 and AD 135 led to further dispersions. It should be noted, the descendants of many of these Jews never returned to Palestine. By the time of Christ, millions of Jews were widely dispersed throughout the cities and countryside of the Roman Empire and beyond. From the time of the Babylonian captivity, Jews outside of Palestine greatly outnumbered those in the land. In New Testament times, only about two and one-half million Jews lived in Palestine, while four to six million Jews lived outside of Palestine (Philo, *Legatio Ad Caium*, 36). The regions of Mesopotamia, Syria/Asia Minor and Egypt each had more than one million Jewish residents, while Italy and North Africa each had around 100,000 Jewish residents. The Jews in Egypt for the most part lived in and around Alexandria and made up 10 to 15 percent of the population. There was a substantial Jewish population in virtually every town of any decent size in the Mediterranean region. The largest urban populations in the Empire were the 200,000 Jews in Alexandria and the 50,000 Jews in Rome. Furthermore most Jews in the dispersion lived in cities, where they could pursue a variety of trades and could often find fellow Jews with whom to associate.

With all of the foregoing in mind, the Jews realized that their very identity depended upon maintaining *separation* from the community at large, but they faced pressure to adopt the values and practices of their neighbors. Since Jews could not worship the image of the emperor (as was expected of everyone within the Empire), nor could they take part in public festivals that involved eating meat previously offered to pagan gods, the Jewish people were often granted exemptions by Roman authorities, as they had been by Persian and Hellenistic authorities before them. Among these privileges were the right to observe the Sabbath and to send each year a half-shekel tax to Jerusalem for the maintenance of the temple, and exemptions from contributing money to and participating in the celebrations of civic cults. In addition, they were granted the freedom to exercise legal jurisdiction within their own communities. During the later first century BC, and the first century AD, several Greek cities moved to limit such Jewish privileges. The Jews, in spite of their exemptions, were not respected by most of the Roman elite — *Cicero* called Judaism “*a barbarous superstition*” and its followers a “*mob.*” *Juvenal* writes that their Sabbath rest demonstrates “*their laziness.*” It should be noted, the Jews of the *diaspora* had already left behind Aramaic for the language of the Greeks. The Jewish people in the cities adapted their lives to the larger Gentile society in varying degrees; some actually gave up their religious beliefs and practices entirely. Nevertheless, the Jewish population still saw the vast majority of them maintaining allegiance to the Jewish community, and not intermarrying with non-Jews. In similar fashion, Jews in the modern world continue to deal with the pressure of assimilation. Some, such as Hasidic Jews in America, have chosen to isolate themselves from the larger society, though others have taken a more accommodating path, even giving up many traditional beliefs and practices. Reflect upon the following noted quotes about the Jewish people back in the first century AD —

- *Cicero on Jews in Rome* — “You know how large a group they are, how unanimously they stick together, how influential they are in politics.”

- ***Strabo, quoted in Josephus Jewish Antiquities*** — “This people has already made its way into every city, and it is not easy to find any place in the habitable world which has not received this nation and in which it has not made its power felt.”
- ***Quoting Acts 21:20-21*** — “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed; they are all zealous for the law, and they have been told that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs.”

Sacred Scriptures & Ancient Writings

In ***philosophy*** knowledge is derived from logic or experience, whereas in ***religion*** understanding comes through ***revelation***. It is through revelation that God makes known what human beings are supposed to know and do. Our English word “revelation” comes from a Latin word meaning, “*to uncover or lay bare*,” therefore revelation is understood to be the uncovering of that which is divine. The Bible is often called the “*Word of God*,” because it is said to be the very words of God Himself; therefore it is regarded as the ultimate spiritual authority for Christianity. The testimony of Scripture itself is this: the process whereby God communicated His revelation in writing is referred to as “*inspiration*,” which literally means to “*breathe in*” (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). The Bible tells us that God inspired 40 different writers over a period of 1,500 years to record His personal message to humanity; *i.e.*, “*men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (cf. 2 Pet 1:21). Therefore, Christianity teaches that God mysteriously joined Himself with sinful, imperfect human beings to produce His inspired written Word. It is also important to remember that the Holy Bible consists of “*sixty-six independent books*” – it is not just one book, though it is regarded by many as such – it consists of thirty-nine Old Testament books, and twenty-seven New Testament books... though these books have been assembled into “*one volume*,” they actually consist of sixty-six independent books. ***The formation of the Old Testament*** (as it exists today in Judaism and Protestantism) was firmly established by the 4th century BC.

The formation of the Christian New Testament took place over a period of about 300 years... though all twenty-seven books were written within forty years after the death of Christ (with the possible exception that the Book of Revelation; it may have been written by the apostle John as much as twenty years later while he was in exile on the isle of Patmos). In the first century each of the various books were ***written and circulated throughout the Christian world***. In the second century ***the rise of heresy*** served as an impetus to establish a clearly defined body of sacred literature; thus a sifting process began in which “***inspired Scripture***” was ***clearly distinguished*** from all other Christian literature in general. The three main criteria used to determine which books were inspired by God were these: First, each book had to be ***authored by one of the apostles*** themselves, or individuals who were closely affiliated with the apostles; second, each book had to be ***accepted by the churches to whom they were written*** and circulated; and third, each book had to be ***doctrinally consistent with what the churches had already believed***. The process by which the various books were recognized as Scripture is commonly referred to as ***the history of the canon*** – the English word “***canon***” in Greek meant “***a carpenter’s rule***,” it was this term the leaders of early church chose to identify and describe those books that were

“inspired by God,” as opposed to those which were measured and found to be of *“secondary value”* in church usage (such books were not identified as being canonical in nature). So the term canon in Christianity refers to a group of books acknowledged by the early church leaders as *“the rule of faith and practice.”* In 397 AD, the *Council of Carthage* gave *formal ratification* to the twenty-seven books of the Christian canon (New Testament), expressing what had already become the unanimous judgment of the churches for over three hundred years. Hence, the Bible became officially recognized as the *“Christian Scriptures”* — remember, up until this point each of the revered twenty-seven books were separate independent books... so the Council of Carthage in a sense made them *“a single, unified body of Christian literature.”* Historians tell us that there were some fifty spurious written gospels and a number of letters that false teachers were promulgating during the first, second, and third centuries; thus, it was very important for the early Church to distinguish between what was false and what was true. It has been said that Muhammad (the founder of Islam) got his ideas of Christianity in large part from these false sources. The early Church exercised extreme care when distinguishing between genuine and spurious writings (cf. 1 Tim 3:15). Incidentally, the Jewish canon (Hebrew Bible) consists of the *same books* that Protestants identify as the Old Testament.

To help reduce the cloudiness that may exist in some people’s minds regarding the canonicity of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, consider the following: There were only *“eight authors”* of these twenty-seven books, and each author was extremely well known throughout the Christian world — the four gospels were authored by three prominent Jewish writers (*Matthew, Mark, John*) and one prominent Gentile writer (*Luke*); the evangelist Luke was a physician and a cohort of the apostle Paul on a number of his missionary journeys (cf. Acts 16:10-11; 16:25-17:1; 20:6-21:18; 27:1; 28:2, 12-16); he was *“Paul’s faithful fellow-laborer”* till the end of his first imprisonment (Philemon 1:24; Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11). Remember, Paul’s primary ministry was to the *Gentile world* — thus Luke’s presence with him must have been a significant contribution to Paul’s understanding of the non-Jewish world. So influential was Luke to Paul, that he not only wrote one of the gospels, but also was the one who authored *“The Acts of the Apostles”* (the Book of Acts). Dr. Luke’s scholarly literary quality has been highly esteemed by theologians down through the ages; obviously he was a highly educated man. Regarding Mark, who is often referred to as John Mark, he was not one of the twelve disciples either, but his close association and service with the apostles Peter and Paul, and his extensive missionary work qualified him to write the second gospel — the brevity and journalistic simplicity of his gospel has often made it the first book translated into a new language. It is also interesting to note that ten times in the New Testament he is mentioned by his Gentile (Latin) name, Mark, and just three times by his combined Jewish & Gentile name, John Mark. Aside from these four authors, two of Jesus’ blood-brothers (*James & Jude*) authored two letters that bare their names (cf. Jam 1:1; Jude 1:1; also cf. Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3) — like Paul and Barnabas, James received the title of apostle and was a prominent leader in the Church at Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:1-13ff; 21:18; Gal 1:19; 2:12), and presided over the first council (cf. Acts 15:13)... Jude was also numbered with the disciples in the upper room after the Lord’s ascension (cf. Acts 1:12-14), and was an important voice in the Christian community.

To continue, the two principal leaders of the Christian world (*Peter & Paul*) authored all of the other sixteen books of the New Testament (fourteen by Paul and two by Peter). It is important to remember that Peter’s primacy of leadership and ministry was principally to the *Jewish world*

(cf. Gal 2:7-9; Matt 16:18; Mark 3:16; John 1:42; 21:15-17; Acts 15:7-11; Gal 1:18)... whereas Paul’s ministry was principally to the *Gentile world*, as the vast majority of his letters clearly attest (essentially they are all to Gentile communities – cf. Gal 2:7-9; 2:1-2; Acts 13:1-3, 46-47; 14:27; 15:1-17; Acts 13-28). The apostle Paul was of pure Jewish descent (Phil 3:5), a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28), and a student of Gamaliel (a highly distinguished teacher of the law – Acts 22:3)... it was through his advanced studies that Paul became so familiar with the outward observances of the law, and gained that experience of “*the spirit of bondage*” which enabled him to understand himself, and to teach others regarding the blessing of “*the spirit of adoption.*” Paul is known throughout the Christian world as undoubtedly *the most brilliant theologian of the New Testament era*; remember, “God took him up to the third heaven – to Paradise – where he heard inexpressible words; whether it was in body or apart from the body, Paul did not know”... whatever it was, it so profoundly impacted his life, “*a thorn in the flesh was given to him to keep him from exalting himself*” (cf. 2 Cor 12:1-7; Gal 1:1, 11-12; 2:1-2). *God is the one who endowed Paul with genius and chose Him to proclaim the good news of salvation to the Gentile world* (cf. Gal 2:7-9), and changed his name from “*Saul*” (a Jewish name) to “*Paul*” (a Roman name; cf. Acts 13:9). The foregoing explanation should resolve any questions one may have about the integrity of the authorship of Scripture. Though hundreds, perhaps thousands of literary writings flooded the world during the first few centuries of the Church, *only those with apostolic integrity and authorship were granted “canonicity”* (divine authorship)... not one single impure word was permitted to wiggle into the inner chamber of divine truth. Why should that be surprising to anyone, if the sovereign God of the universe is truly on the throne? It is only those who over-emphasize “*human input*,” that have a problem with this issue (cf. Prv 16:1; 19:21; Is 40:2-7; 43:13). Though some non-apostolic writings may have in fact been “*highly acclaimed*,” and valuable contributions to the Christian community (just as some writings are by present day authors), *only God-inspired (God-breathed) revelation qualifies for “canonicity”* – so only eight God-inspired authors contributed to the formation of the New Testament. Remember, “*the church of the living God is the pillar and support of the truth*” (cf. 1 Tim 3:15); and with the presence of the Holy Spirit at the helm, that isn’t a problem. In spite of the fact that imperfect fallen human beings (just like you and me; saved but fallen nonetheless) were a part of the writing and preservation of God’s Word, *GOD HIMSELF* insures us that His Word shall forever remain pure and unadulterated (cf. Is 40:8; 55:11; 59:21; Mt 5:18; 24:35; Lk 16:17). The reality is, if God is truly *GOD*, then the preservation of His Word was not the slightest problem... if it had simply been left up to imperfect man, then it would have been corrupted a long time ago. Ultimately, the question is, “How big is *GOD* in your mind?” Let me encourage all of you who are reading this study to turn from a *human-based* understanding of this world in which we live, to a *divine-based* understanding of it – *GOD* is infinitely bigger than the entire created order!

Apocrypha & Pseudepigrapha Literature

A vast amount of *Jewish literature* written during the intertestamental period (mainly the two centuries prior to Christ), and the first two centuries of the early church, was basically preserved through various *Christian churches*. A part of this literature is commonly referred to today as the *Apocrypha* (hidden books; hence, secret books). These books are largely Jewish literature and history, and are not directly relevant to Christian doctrine; that is, they are not considered inspired or authoritative. The Apocrypha were well-known in the Jewish community during the two centuries prior to Christ, and had been included in the *Greek* translation of the Hebrew

canon, which was known as the *Septuagint* (this translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, by a group of Jewish scholars, took place in Alexandria, Egypt, around 250 BC), but were not included in the **Hebrew** canon as decided upon the Jewish rabbis in 90 AD. It should also be noted, at the end of the 4th century AD, when the bishop of Rome (Damasus) commissioned the biblical scholar **Jerome** to prepare a Latin version of the Scriptures, he asked him to translate the apocryphal books as well. Jerome did so only under protest, because he knew these books were not a part of the Hebrew canon — as such, he essentially recognized the Apocrypha as having only secondary status. Remember, Jerome followed the Greek Jewish canon (the *Septuagint*) and then added a second category for apocryphal books. Furthermore, Jerome translated the Scriptures into Latin from the Greek translation of the Old Testament; *i.e.*, the Hebrew Bible (the *Septuagint*)... so the Latin translation is actually “a translation of a translation,” and not a translation of the original Hebrew Scriptures. Obviously Jerome wasn’t a student of Hebrew, but since he was well versed in Greek, he translated the Old Testament into Latin using the Greek translation of it (the *Septuagint*). Years later, subsequent copyists (for whatever reason) frequently failed to state that the Apocrypha were secondary or additional works. **Augustine**, who also lived in the 4th century, accepted most of the Apocrypha as Scripture, but maintained that they had secondary status compared with other Old Testament books.

It is also interesting to note, at one time in the early church the term “Apocrypha” was actually used for books that were not regarded by its leaders as being canonical (that is, of divine origin, God-breathed, divinely inspired)... in modern usage, however, the term Apocrypha is reserved for those Jewish books that are referred to in the Roman Catholic Church as deuterocanonical works; *i.e.*, those works that belong to a “second” (deutero) or subsequent canon for Catholics, but are not a part of the Jewish Bible — remember, the Apocrypha were admitted into the canon “years after” all the other books; not at the same time. As previously mentioned, these works are also regarded as canonical in the Eastern Orthodox churches, because this church of Greek origin (and the Greek language) uses the *Septuagint* (the Greek Old Testament) as its version of Scripture (just as we in America use an English translation as our version of Scripture). When the Protestant churches in Europe returned to the Jewish canon (Hebrew Old Testament) during the Reformation period in the 16th century, the Catholic deuterocanonical works became for them “apocryphal” (*i.e.*, non-canonical) — it should also be remembered, these books were not officially added to the Old Testament in the Roman Catholic Church until 1546 at the “Council of Trent” (just a few years prior to the Reformation). So, it is always helpful to keep “context” in mind when evaluating this issue.

In 19th century biblical scholarship, a new term was coined for those ancient Jewish works that were not accepted as canonical by either the Catholic or Protestant churches; such books are now commonly called Pseudepigrapha (meaning, “falsely inscribed;” singular = pseudepigraphon); that is, books wrongly ascribed to a biblical author. The term Pseudepigrapha, however, is not an especially well suited one — not only because the pseudepigraphic character is not restricted to the Pseudepigrapha alone, but because not all Pseudepigrapha are ascribed to any author; thus many of them are anonymous treatises. Theoretically, the name Pseudepigrapha can designate all ancient Jewish writings that are not canonical in the Catholic or Protestant Church. The writings of the philosopher **Philo of Alexandria** (1st century BC – 1st century AD) and the renowned 1st century historian **Josephus** and fragments of other post-biblical Hellenistic Jewish historians and poets are usually excluded. Furthermore, four centuries of **Rabbinic literature** (2nd century BC

thru 2nd century AD) also is generally excluded; the reality is, much of this literature existed for centuries only in oral form. In addition to the foregoing, some of the Jewish Pseudepigrapha were discovered only in the last two centuries, and the Dead Sea Scrolls (the first of them) was not discovered until 1947, most of which belong to this category, and still not yet all published. Thus, in the broader meaning of the terms, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are a block of Jewish literature written in antiquity from the later Persian period (4th century BC) and not canonized by the Jewish community.

Of all the literature extant today only the *Apocrypha* (contained in Latin and Greek Bibles) were read in the liturgical services of the church. The *Pseudepigrapha*, in their various versions, were in most cases nearly forgotten; and manuscripts of most of them have only been rediscovered in modern times — a process that continues to this day. The discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* at Qumrān in the Judaeen desert in 1947, not only furnished new texts and fragments of unknown and already known Pseudepigrapha, but also contributed solutions to problems concerning the origin of other Jewish religious writings (including some Old Testament books), the connection between them, and even their composition and redaction from older sources. The new original texts also strengthened interest in the Jewish literature of the intertestamental period because of its importance for the study of both ancient Judaism and early Christianity. As a result of such discoveries, better critical editions of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, as well as new studies of their content, have been published.

The *Apocrypha*, whose texts originated mostly before the rise of Christianity, were regarded as canonical in the early church and did not possess any Christian interpolations (alterations). On the other hand, many of the *Pseudepigrapha* were interpolated by Christian writers; that is, new material had been added to many of these texts. The nature and the extent of these Christian interpolations are often difficult to define since a Christian interpolator not only changes the text according to Christian views or introduces specific Christian terminology but also may introduce in a Jewish text ideas, motifs, or terminology that are common to both Judaism and Christianity. For these reasons it is sometimes difficult to decide if a passage in a pseudepigraphon, or even sometimes the whole work, is Jewish or Christian. Once again, keep in mind that none of the *Pseudepigrapha* works have any canonical value in either the Jewish or Christian communities.



This is the top of “The Israel Museum” in Jerusalem that contains significant ancient Hebrew literature.

Persian and Hellenistic Influences

Some of the Apocrypha (*e.g.*, Judith, Tobit) may have already been written in the Persian period (6th – 4th century BC), but with a few possible exceptions, all the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were written in the Hellenistic period (300 BC – 300 AD)... yet the influence of Persian culture and religion sometimes can be detected even in comparatively late Jewish apocalyptic works. The Persian influence was facilitated by the fact that both the Jewish and Persian religions are iconoclastic (against the veneration or worship of images) and opposed to paganism and display an interest in eschatology (doctrines of last times). Although such an affinity did not exist between Judaism and Hellenistic culture, literary activity among Hellenistic Jews was generally Greek in character: the Greek-writing Jewish authors thought mainly in Greek concepts, used genuine Greek terminology, and wrote many of their works in Greek literary forms.

Though *Hellenistic Jewish authors* sometimes imitated biblical forms, they learned such forms from their Greek Bible (the *Septuagint*). Many Greek products written by Jewish writers served as religious propaganda and probably influenced many pagans to become proselytes, or at least to abandon their heathen faith and become “*God-fearing*.” Thus, the Jewish literature written in Greek could be used by Christianity for similar purposes later. Greek influence on Jewish writings written in Hebrew or Aramaic in Palestine in the intertestamental period was by no means as significant as upon Jewish works written in Greek among the *Hellenistic Diaspora* (Jews living outside Palestine). In Palestine, religion and culture formed a unity, and the Hellenization of the upper classes in Jerusalem before the Maccabean wars (167–142 BC) was restricted to some families who had accepted Greek civilization for practical purposes. Jews in Palestine developed a flourishing autonomous culture based upon religious ideals. Living without interruption in their powerful religious tradition and with their own non-Greek education, the Palestinian Jews were able to produce literary works without significant evidences of Greek influence. The language of this literature was both *Aramaic* and *Hebrew*. Under the national revival in the Maccabean period (the 2nd century BC), Hebrew became prevalent as the language of Jewish literature in Palestine; but since Aramaic was a spoken language in Palestine during the whole period, some of the extant literary works of Palestinian Jews in the Maccabean and Roman period probably were originally written also in Aramaic.

APOCRYPHAL WRITINGS

Brief Descriptions of the Apocryphal Books

First Esdras – This book is someone's attempt to revise the canonical book of Ezra, supplementing it with material from the last two chapters of 2 Chronicles and the last two chapters of Nehemiah, and with an entertaining tale about three young courtiers who debate the question, “*What is the strongest thing in the world?*” The debate is held before the king of Persia, and the winner is to get a prize. The first maintains that it is *wine*; the second that it is *the king himself*; the third argues with some irony and humor that *women* are stronger than either wine or kings, but that “*truth*” and “*the God of truth*” are by far strongest. Truth is one of the central concepts of Persian religion and the competition itself is before a Persian king; thus it seems likely that the story is Persian in origin and that it became Jewish by the identification of the third youth who

turns out to be none other than Zerubbabel, who for his prize receives generous help from the king in rebuilding Jerusalem. This book enjoyed considerable popularity in the early church but lost its prestige in the Middle Ages in the Latin Church. At the reforming *Council of Trent* (1545-1563), the Roman Catholic church no longer recognized it as canonical.

Second Esdras – Also called the *Ezra Apocalypse*. This is a typical Jewish apocalypse, probably first written in Greek about AD 100. Some hold that it was originally written in Hebrew. It appears to be a composite work, compiled of two or three sources. Around AD 120 it was edited by an unknown Christian, then translated into Latin. The Christian editor added some introductory and closing chapters in which reference is made to Christ, but the original Jewish composition was not changed in any important respect. This book was not included in Septuagint manuscripts, so the Greek text has been lost. The most important witness to the original text is the Latin version, which was included in medieval manuscripts of the Vulgate. The book consists mostly of dialogues between Ezra and angels sent to him to answer his urgent theological questions about the problem of evil, and in particular the failures and afflictions of Israel. All of this is presented as if written long before by Ezra and hidden away. The book was obviously written as an encouragement to the Jews, who had recently suffered the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). It also includes some symbolical prophecies concerning the Roman empire, in which Rome is figured as a three-headed eagle that oppresses the world and is finally destroyed by a roaring lion (a figure of the Messiah). There is a fantastic story of how the Hebrew Scriptures were all destroyed in the Babylonian exile and then perfectly restored by the miraculous inspiration of Ezra as he dictated all of the books to five scribes over a period of forty days. Along with the canonical books, Ezra dictates 70 secret books that are to be reserved for the wise. Second Esdras is presented as being one of these secret books. Martin Luther omitted First and Second Esdras from the Apocrypha of his German Bible in 1534, and both books were also rejected by the Roman Catholics at the *Council of Trent* in 1546... nevertheless, they were ultimately included in the Apocrypha of the King James version.

Tobit – This is a didactic and romantic tale written in Aramaic probably around 200 BC, and later translated into Greek. Fragments of the Aramaic text were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The story is of a Jewish family taken to the capital city of Persia, Nineveh, during the Babylonian captivity. Tobit, the blind father, sends his son Tobias on a journey to collect a debt. On his way Tobias is led by an angel in disguise (Raphael) to the house of a virgin who had been married seven times, but whose husbands were all slain by a demon on their wedding night. Tobias marries the girl and drives away the demon by burning the heart of a certain fish in the bedroom, and with the help of Raphael. He returns home with the money and his bride, and then heals his father's eyes by applying the gall of the fish to them. The story is sprinkled with pious observations and exhortations, and concludes with Tobias' departure from Nineveh, which, after the natural death of Tobit, is destroyed in judgment. The book contains prayers, psalms, and aphorisms, most of them put in the mouth of Tobit. It is the oldest Jewish witness to the “*golden rule*” (Tobit 4:15)– “*what you hate, do not do to anyone.*” Eschatological hopes are also described: at the end of time, all Jewish exiles will return, Jerusalem will be rebuilt of precious stones and gold, and all nations will worship the true God. In these eschatological images, however, the figure of the Messiah does not occur.

Judith – The Book of Judith is similar to the biblical Book of Esther in that it also describes how a woman saved her people from impending massacre by her cunning and daring. The name of the heroine occurs already in Genesis 26:34 as a Gentile wife of Esau, but in the Book of Judith it evidently has symbolic value. Judith is an exemplary Jewish woman. It is a story about a beautiful young widow named Judith (meaning "Jewess") who saves her city from a military siege. She goes out to the enemy commander's camp, allures him, gets him drunk, and then cuts off his head while he sleeps in his tent. She returns with his head and shows it to her people, exhorting the men to go forth and rout the enemy, which they do. The book speaks about the victory of Nebuchadnezzar "who reigned over the Assyrians at Nineveh," in the time of an unknown Arphaxad, king of the Medes. Throughout this story Judith is presented as a woman who is virtuous, pious, and beautiful, and very keen to observe the Law of Moses. The Jews were not threatened again during Judith's lifetime (she lived to be 105), or long after. This book was written about 150 BC in Hebrew, and soon translated into Greek. The Hebrew text is lost.

Additions to Esther – The Hebrew Book of Esther had a religious and social value to the Jews during the time of Greek and Roman anti-Semitism, though the Hebrew short story did not directly mention God's intervention in history. To bring the canonical book up-to-date in connection with contemporary anti-Semitism and to stress the religious meaning of the story, additions were made in its Greek translation. These Greek additions are (1) the dream of Mordecai (Esther's uncle), symbolic vision written in the spirit of apocalyptic literature; (2) the edict of King Artaxerxes against the Jews, containing arguments taken from classical anti-Semitism; (3) the prayers of Mordecai and of Esther, containing apologies for what is said in the Book of Esther — Mordecai saying that he refused to bow before Haman (the grand vizier) because he is flesh and blood and Esther saying that she strongly detests her forced marriage with the heathen king; (4) a description of Esther's audience with the King, during which the King's mood was favorably changed when he saw that Esther had fallen down in a faint; (5) the decree of Artaxerxes on behalf of the Jews, in which Haman is called a Macedonian who plotted against the King to transfer the kingdom of Persia to the Macedonians; and (6) the interpretation of Mordecai's dream and a colophon (inscription at the end of a manuscript with publication facts), where the date, namely "the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra" (*i.e.*, 114 BC) is given. This indicates that the additions in the Greek Esther were written in Egypt under the rule of the Ptolemies. So these six long paragraphs inserted in the *Septuagint* version of Esther in several places, and are thought to be the work of an Egyptian Jew writing around 170 BC. They are designed to provide the book with a more religious tone, and to make it clear that it was for the sake of their piety that the Jews were delivered from the evil designs of the Gentiles related in the canonical book. These additions were put at the end of the book by Jerome when he made his Latin translation because he accepted only the Hebrew text as canonical.

Wisdom of Solomon – Sometimes called simply *Wisdom*. This book is a collection of theological and devotional essays first written in Greek by an Alexandrian Jew about 100 BC, but presented in such a way that they seem to be discourses of King Solomon. The author compares Jewish religion with Greek philosophy, and shows faith to be the highest form of wisdom. The book is edifying and worthy of much respect. It has often been quoted by Christian writers in the past.

Ecclesiasticus – originally called *The Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach*, or simply *Sirach*. Written first in Hebrew about 200 BC by a wisdom teacher named Joshua Ben Sirach, and translated into Greek by his grandson around 135 BC. The book consists mainly of proverbs and other wise sayings about common life, strung together in short discourses or organized in topical sections. It also contains longer discourses about religious life and faith, which are well worth the read. It came to be called *Ecclesiasticus* (the "churchly" book) because in early times it was often read in church services, being the most highly regarded of the apocryphal books. This book should not be confused with the canonical book of *Ecclesiastes*.

Baruch – The apocryphon of Baruch, which now only exists in Greek and was included in the Septuagint, is attributed to Baruch, secretary to the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah in the 7th-6th century BC. It was Baruch who read Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon. After hearing his words, the Jews repented and confessed their sins. The first part of the Book of Baruch (1:1-3, 8), contains a confession of sins by the Jewish people following the destruction of Jerusalem and the exiles' prayer for forgiveness and salvation, may date from the Persian or at least from the pre-Maccabean period. This early section was originally written in Hebrew and seems to be very ancient. The other two parts (3:9-4:4 and 4:5-5:9) were written in Greek or freely translated from Hebrew or Aramaic. The first is a praise of wisdom: only Israel received wisdom from God, which is the Law of Moses. The last part of the book contains Jerusalem's lament over her desolation and her consolation. The Book of Baruch is a composite book of five chapters, in which there are exhortations against association with idolatry, celebration of the Law as God's "wisdom," and encouragements and promises to faithful Jews, collected together and edited probably about 150 BC. The material is presented as if by Baruch, the disciple of Jeremiah, during the time of the Babylonian exile.

Letter of Jeremiah – Often printed as Chapter 6 of *Baruch*, this short work purports to be a letter from Jeremiah to the Jews in exile in Babylon, but this is generally regarded as an imposture, or a mere literary device used by an author writing around 200 BC. The letter attacks the folly of idolatry as did Jeremiah's letter "to those who were to be taken to Babylon as captives." So this letter essentially is a short tract against pagan idolatry, and makes much use of ridicule and sarcasm.

Song of the Three Holy Children (including *The Prayer of Azariah*). An embellishment of the ordeal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) recorded in the canonical book of Daniel, designed to be added after verse 23 of the third chapter. These are the prayers of the three young men who praised God after they had been placed in the midst of the fiery furnace during a persecution of Jews in Babylon, as told in the Book of Daniel. The first prayer is said by Azariah alone; the second one is a prayer of thanksgiving said by all three after having been saved by God. Essentially this book consists of prayers and hymns of the sort which might have been offered to God by the three while in the furnace.

The Story of Susanna – The second addition to Daniel, the story of Susanna, and the third one, Bel and the Dragon, are preserved in two Greek versions. In both stories the hero is the wise Daniel. Susanna was the pious and beautiful wife of Joakim, a wealthy Jew in Babylon. Two lecherous old judges became inflamed with love for her — they tried to force her to yield to their lust, and when she refused they publicly accused her of committing adultery with a young

man, who escaped. At a trial they give false testimony and she is condemned to death by the council of elders, but Daniel the prophet was divinely inspired to know the facts of the case, and he cross-examined the two elders separately — the first stated that Susanna had been surprised under a mastic tree, the other under a holm tree. Thus Susanna was saved and the two false witnesses executed. This story was inserted between chapters 12 & 14 in the Septuagint version of Daniel, and at the beginning of the book in Theodotion's version.

Bel and the Dragon – This is a combination of two stories which were also attached to Daniel in the Septuagint, at the end of the book. The story of *Bel* concerns a Babylonian idol of that name, to which the people daily provided him with much food, but Daniel refused to make an offering to it. When he was challenged, he told the Persian king that the vain idol had no need of offerings because it could not eat anything. The king then required the priests of Bel to prove otherwise or die. The priests tried to deceive the king by entering the temple of Bel at night through a secret entrance and eating the food-offerings themselves, but they were exposed by Daniel, who had spread ashes on the temple floor, revealing their footprints. The priests of Bel were then slain and their temple destroyed. The Babylonians also worshipped a dragon, but Daniel declined to worship him as well. To destroy the beast, Daniel boiled pitch, fat, and hair together: the dragon ate it and burst asunder. After Daniel's sacrilege of slaying the dragon, the King was forced to cast Daniel into the lions' den, but nothing happened to him. Indeed, he was given a dinner by the prophet Habakkuk, who was brought there by the hair of his head by an angel. On the seventh day the King found Daniel sitting in the den, so he led Daniel out and cast his enemies into the den, where they were devoured. The two stories are an attack against idolatry. As the addition ends with the story about Daniel in the lions' den, it is probable that this short treatise originated in a tradition that was parallel to the canonical Book of Daniel and that the two stories were translated from a Hebrew or Aramaic original. Both of these stories were evidently written around 150-100 BC.

The Prayer of Manasseh – This is a psalm of repentance, composed to suit the situation of Manasseh, the wicked Judean king who was carried captive to Babylon (cf. 2 Chron 33:11-18, where the psalm was probably intended for insertion in the Septuagint). This book was rejected by the Roman Catholics at the Council of Trent in 1546.

First Maccabees – The first two of the four books of the Maccabees are deuterocanonical (accepted by the Roman Catholic Church). In the First Book of the Maccabees the author mentions Alexander the Great, then moves on to the Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes (who died in 164-163 BC), and his persecution of the Jews in Palestine, the desecration of the Jerusalem Temple, and the Maccabean revolt. After the death of the priest Mattathias, who had refused to obey Antiochus, his son Judas Maccabeus succeeded him and led victorious wars against the Syrian Greeks. Exactly three years after its profanation by Antiochus, Judas captured the Temple, cleansed and rededicated it, and in honor of the rededication initiated an annual festival (*Hanukah*) lasting eight days. After Judas later fell in battle against the Syrian Greeks, his brother Jonathan succeeded him and continued the struggle. Only in the time of Simon, Jonathan's brother & successor, did the Maccabean state become independent. A short mention of the rule of Simon's son John Hyrcanus I (135-104 BC) closes the book. The author, a pious and nationalistic Jew and an ardent adherent of the family of Maccabees, evidently lived in the time of John Hyrcanus. The book imitates the biblical style of the historical books of the Old

Testament and contains diplomatic and other important (though not necessarily authentic) official documents. This book was written in Hebrew about 100 BC, and soon afterwards translated into Greek. The Hebrew text was seen by Jerome, but is now lost. It is a sober but stirring historical account of Jewish history from 175 BC to 135 BC, during which time the Jews of Palestine fought for and gained national independence from their Greek overlords. It is highly regarded by historians as a source of accurate information.

Second Maccabees – This book is not a sequel to First Maccabees, but a different account of many of the same events related in that book down to 161 BC, combined with many fanciful and legendary additions. The writer's interests are religious rather than historical, and he uses the history as a backdrop for advancing religious ideas current among the Jews of Alexandria during the first century BC. The book is preceded by two letters to the Jews of Egypt: the first from the year 124 BC and the second written earlier (164 BC) commemorating the rededication of the Temple. In the preface of the book, the author indicates that he has condensed into one book the lost five-volume history compiled by Jason of Cyrene. Second Maccabees describes the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean wars until the victory of Judas Maccabeus over Nicanor, the commander of the Syrian elephant corps in 161 BC. Descriptions of the martyrdom of the priest Eleazar and of the seven brothers under Antiochus, in which Greek dramatic style is linked with Jewish religious spirit, became important for Christian martyrology. The book also furnished proof texts for various Jewish and subsequently Christian doctrines (*e.g.*, doctrines of angels and the resurrection of the flesh). Second Maccabees is generally thought to be later than First Maccabees, but earlier than AD 70. Some statements in this book support the Roman Catholic teachings on purgatory, prayers for the dead, and the intercessory work of glorified "*saints*."

The “extra books” which were eventually received as Scripture in the Greek Orthodox church and those received in the Roman Catholic church do not correspond exactly to the list of books commonly called "*Apocrypha*" by Protestants (see the chart below). The Protestant Apocrypha includes all of the books normally included in manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate. But three of these (1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh) were omitted from the list published by the *Council of Trent* in 1546 when it fixed the Roman Catholic canon. The Eastern Orthodox churches (including the Greek, the Russian, the Ukrainian, the Bulgarian, the Serbian, the Armenian, and others) do not receive 2 Esdras because it was not in the Septuagint, and they receive some books which were present in many manuscripts of the Septuagint but not in the Vulgate (Psalm 151, and 3 & 4 Maccabees).

The foregoing study has been a brief description of the various historical elements that took place during the Intertestamental Period, and their impact upon the New Testament world. Some of you may want to study this era in greater depth because of its strategic importance on the development of the Christian Church. Though it was a period of significant action, when one keeps everything in its proper light, one cannot help but see the hand of God orchestrating all that took place... thus when one studies the teachings of Christ and the New Testament apostles, its interpretive application becomes ever more apparent & understandable. Familiarizing yourself with the Intertestamental Period will give you a contextual background that will give integrity to your understanding of the many teachings in the New Testament — with that in mind, you may want to peruse this material once again.

THE APOCRYPHAL BOOKS AND THE VARIOUS SECTORS OF CHRISTENDOM

Greek Orthodox Canon	Protestant Apocrypha	Roman Catholic Canon
1 Esdras Tobit Judith Additions to Esther Wisdom of Solomon Ecclesiasticus Baruch Epistle of Jeremiah Song of the Three Children Story of Susanna Bel and the Dragon Prayer of Manasseh 1 Maccabees 2 Maccabees 3 Maccabees 4 Maccabees Psalm 151	1 Esdras 2 Esdras Tobit Judith Additions to Esther Wisdom of Solomon Ecclesiasticus Baruch Epistle of Jeremiah Song of the Three Children Story of Susanna Bel and the Dragon Prayer of Manasseh 1 Maccabees 2 Maccabees	Tobit Judith Additions to Esther Wisdom of Solomon Ecclesiasticus Baruch Epistle of Jeremiah Song of the Three Children Story of Susanna Bel and the Dragon 1 Maccabees 2 Maccabees

Bibliographic Sources for this Study

Aside from my own textbook, "Christianity: The Pursuit of Divine Truth,"
 the other sources I used in writing this study were as follows:
 Henry A. Ironside's, "The Four Hundred Silent Years"
 James Jeffers, "The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era"
 Walter Elwell's, "Evangelical Dictionary of Theology"
 Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's, "Commentary on the Old & New Testament"
 William MacDonald's, "Believer's Bible Commentary"
 The New King James Study Bible
 Baker's Dictionary of Theology
 The New Columbia Encyclopedia
 Unger's Bible Dictionary