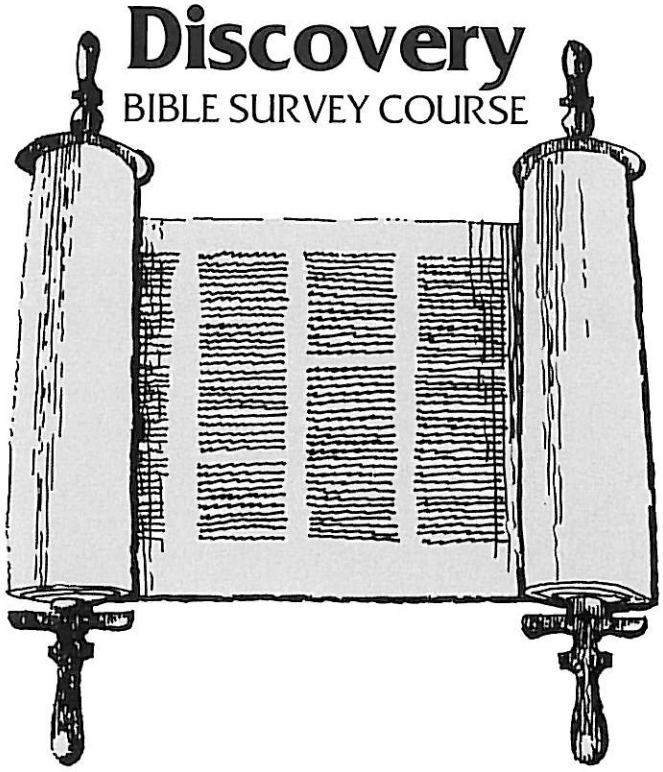
Discovery
BIBLE SURVEY COURSE



Book 3

Discover the People of the Way

Maynard Shelly

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Faith and Life Press

Library of Congress Number 84-82126
International Standard Book Number 0-87303-096-6
Printed in the United States of America

Design by John Hiebert
Printing by Mennonite Press, Inc.

Table of Contents

Open the Bible, and you find words. Taking meaning from these words and the sentences that they form, we've come to a notion of what the Bible has to tell us. An understanding of Scripture based on a reading of its words has served us well. Yet we are sometimes puzzled. Some words conceal when we want them to reveal.

We need not read far into the Bible before we sense that behind its words are people—men and women with, we suppose, feelings and fears much like ours. Yet they lived two to three thousand years ago. After such a long time, do we really share their view of the world? Can we brush aside the mists of the centuries that have passed and reach out to the people behind the words?

Can we flesh out the words of the Bible with the women and men who encountered the God of Scripture? To meet those people in their world brings the Bible right into experiences within our own lives.

So much to learn about the Bible people

Discoveries about the people of the Bible have exploded in recent years and decades. The fruits of these explorations have filtered down to us ever so slowly and in piecemeal form. Snatches of these studies have been cloaked in controversy and have been confounded by arguments about meaning and value. Too often, well-meaning leaders of the church have decided that people should be protected from knowledge which might be unsettling. Yet, for the most part, such information enlightens and enriches.

To the four books in this *Discovery* series, we have tried to bring the most important results of the revival of Bible research in our day. We want to share those findings that over the years are commonly agreed to be reliable without entering into all the technical details. Much of this material is still under study and future research may change or improve the insights about the people of the Bible and the ways in which the Bible came to be. Only as we enter into that ongoing journey, can we be part of that continuing search for the people of the Bible and their understanding of the God who met them on their pilgrimage.

Introduction

What *Discovery* is not

This series of books is not a Bible study nor a study of the books of the Bible. Neither is it a commentary on the Bible to interpret its meaning and teaching. Here, we intend only to give you the people of the Bible and a piece of the world in which they lived. Having met them, you can enter into your own study of the Bible as you begin with the meaning that these writings first had for these Bible people.

We have not handled matters of doctrine or theology, not because we feel these have little value, but because we regard them as so important that all who come to discuss them should first know the witness of the Bible itself. As we broaden the base of our Bible knowledge, we are better able to understand what the Bible teaches and how to apply those doctrines to our day.

Yahweh in the Bible text

We have made one change in the text used for quotations from the Bible (RSV). From earliest times, the Israelite name for God was Yahweh. Yet, when the words of Scripture were fixed on paper, a time had come in the life of Israel when the name of God was no longer spoken,

the syllables being regarded as too holy to be sounded on human lips. It was not even written, being recorded only in the form of a code which is translated and written in our traditional versions as LORD.

Knowing now the earlier form of the name of God in the life of Israel, we have chosen to use that title to recall the feeling for the power of the holy name. Yet we also want to remember the link between Yahweh and LORD, for when we come to the people of the New Testament, and we find them speaking of Jesus as Lord, we feel something more of their witness and conviction.

Themes that carry meaning

As you walk with the people of the Book, you will discover words and ideas important to them. Here are several that you will find.

Covenant. Abraham, Moses, David, and their people had a conviction of a special relationship with God, a feeling of being chosen. The covenant was their link to God. Much of their journey included a search for the meaning of this special bond. Whom did it include? What did it mean to be included? Was anyone left out? Through the covenant, they came to learn about God. And as they experienced God in their own lives, they began to see covenant in a new light.

Kingdom. King and kingdom sparked debate: should the people of God have a king or not? The question wasn't answered even after the people took a king and the king took them. Wasn't God their king? Was the kingdom the same as the covenant? And when the kingdom of God's people fell before a pagan empire, could they hope for a kingdom restored? When we meet the people of the New Testament, we find them still working with the meaning of kingdom.

Grace and salvation. The people of the New Testament moved on to talk about grace and salvation, yet they had not left covenant and kingdom behind. They only added new dimension to the former questions of belonging and response. They had found new ways of knowing God and understanding the plan of God.

Jerusalem. The convictions of the Bible people had important links with history, the most outstanding of which were related to Jerusalem. The two disasters that befell the holy city—the first fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the second in A.D. 70—bracket a most important era. Each fall of Jerusalem left its stamp on the soul of the people. The first gets much mention in their writings. The second receives no direct reporting at all, but its shadow hovers over much of the New Testament. We have entered into their lives when we wrestle with them about these watershed events which shaped so much of what they came to affirm about God and the way in which they responded to their God.

Revelation and history

In the Bible, we find a history, albeit, a special kind of history. In one sense, it is God's history, but it is also our history. That's what makes the Bible so special. It belongs both to God and to us. The Bible is the history of God's revelation—a revelation through history.

God entered into history, making it the arena of revelation: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14); " 'his name shall be called Emmanuel'(which means, God with us)" (Matt. 1:23).

The faith that Jesus Christ is Lord of Scripture has special application not just when we come to study the teachings of the Bible. That faith also has a special meaning for revelation. The Christ-event confirms that history is God's arena and God's way of revealing. Through Jesus, God entered into the life of our world as Jesus "himself likewise partook of the same nature" (Heb. 2:14) and became a part of our life.

In the incarnation of Jesus, God shared our flesh and our history. If within the humanity of Jesus lies a profound understanding of God's revelation, the divine use of history has an equally important application for the way we study the Bible.

Since the Bible is history, we can come to it using the methods that we have learned for understanding our world. This makes this book different from many other surveys of the Bible which have seen history as less important.

The historical method opens up the Bible. It brings meaning to the words of the Bible by introducing us first of all to the people behind the words and the world in which they lived. This approach to the Bible is both simple and profound. It is simple because each living person is a historian and has a sense of his or her own history. Such a study is also profound because through it, revelation overtakes us. Within the sum of words, people, and events, we find God at work. Yesterday's people of faith called this revelation as do all believers today.

Discovery with inspiration and authority

The journey we undertake here promises many rewards. We will make new friends from an ancient time because we will have traveled with them. Our lives will be broadened by sympathy for their witness and their loyalty and by our own sharing in the rigors of their test of faith.

The inspiration and authority of Scripture will have new meaning for us for we will find it more than a proposition about the meaning of words, but something made real by the living witness of people who received a revelation from God and carried it faithfully from generation to generation. The power of this witness will be multiplied many times over as we discover how wonderfully God has worked.

How to Use This Series

This study will require dedication and discipline from individuals and groups. The emphasis here is on learning. The mastery of facts requires careful reading and study, but the effort invested is small compared to the rewards.

As aids for learning, three features are included with each chapter: Journal, Inventory, and Discovery.

JOURNAL—For individual study at home

The journey begins with the reading of the portion of Scripture assigned in Journal. After that, follow the directions for making entries into a notebook. Putting your observations into words and writing them down is the first step in getting a firm grip on facts. What you write will stay with you many times longer than what you have only read and left unwritten. A notebook will help you keep your work together in one place for quick reference and encourage you to stick to the job.

In your readings, we want you to sample each type of literature and gain experience in making your own observations of the words read. At the same time, you will begin to make connections between the Bible people and the world in which they lived. Before long you will have a diary (or journal) of your journey into the world of the people of the Bible.

After your work with your Journal, you will be ready to read the chapter. You will find places where your observations will be confirmed. You may also come upon material that may differ from what you have written. Note these in your Journal. You may wish to report these items to your Discovery group meeting for testing and perhaps for further research and study.

INVENTORY—Measuring your factual knowledge

With each chapter, we have included Inventory, a review of some of the important items given in the chapter. This self-test will help you hold onto facts both old and new, and to store them in a ready place in your mind.

Make Inventory a part of your Journal. The answers to these questions are within the text of the chapter itself. If you find you have overlooked a particular item, a quick review of the chapter should turn up the needed data.

DISCOVERY—Sharing and learning from others

As writing helps us to learn, telling someone else about what we have found makes that discovery a nearly permanent part of our lives. Those who have studied the chapter and recorded their findings will profit from meeting together with others who have done the same. The purpose of the meeting will not be to hear a lecture on the material covered but to review what each person has learned in his or her individual study of the chapter.

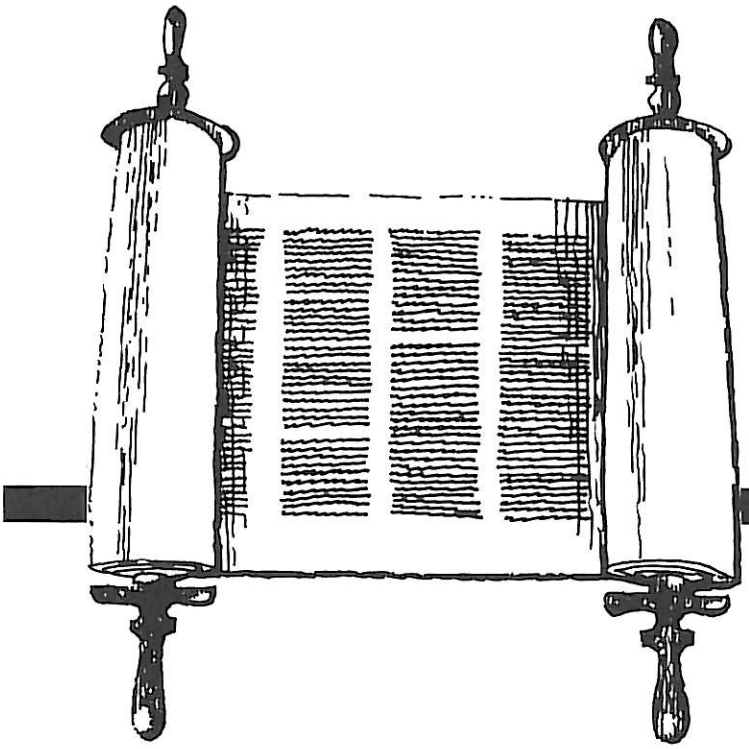
The leader of this session can be a fellow learner and does not need to be one who has mastered all the material. In this class of learners, the members will examine each other on what they have studied and learn from each other. Some groups may want to rotate leadership of the Discovery meetings among some or all of the members of the group.

Start each meeting by collecting each person's leading insight gained from the study of the chapter. Take time to discuss this list, which you may wish to post on a chalkboard or a large sheet of paper.

Then, list each person's chief unanswered question arising out of the study of the chapter. Help each other find answers to these questions. If no answers seem available, check the resource readings or other materials in your church or public library.

Then, discuss the questions and issues suggested in Discovery. Do not feel that you need to cover one chapter in each meeting. You may find it more profitable to spend two sessions on a particular chapter rather than to rush through the book.

Remember that the aim of this study is to learn about the Bible people and the world in which they lived. You will be tempted sometimes to discuss matters of interpretation and application of various biblical teachings. These are important and deserve treatment. But we are better able to deal with these issues once we have broader background in the experiences of the people who first received the revelations recorded in Scripture. Thus, there is value in keeping to the purpose of this particular series of studies.



PART VII

Israel Puts Its Faith Into the Book

CHAPTER 18

The Festival Scrolls

2

Gist

The Festival Scrolls, included in the Writings, the third collection within the Hebrew Scriptures, take us back to earliest uses of some of the Old Testament books. Knowing that they were read at major festivals (or anniversaries) in the life of the Jews, we learn some new things about these special events. But we can learn even more about the meaning of these particular books once we see them used in a living situation. For the festivals are themselves commentaries on the books.

When Ezra, the priest and scribe who led a group of Jews back from exile in Babylon in about 450 B.C., arrived in Jerusalem he gathered the people together in the square before the Water Gate. There he read to them "the law of Moses" (probably the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament—Neh. 8:1). The reading of the Torah made this a special event.

The Scriptures were read on other special occasions. From the practices of later Judaism, we know that certain books were read at some of the major festivals. The writings so used eventually came to be kept together in one place and became known as the Festival Scrolls.

If we list these five scrolls by the historical periods that they represent, they come in this order: Ruth (from the time of the Judges); Song of Songs (associated with Solomon as a young man); Ecclesiastes (linked with Solomon in his old age); Lamentations (from the days following the end of the monarchy and the fall of Jerusalem); and Esther (from the Persian period).

These books did not belong to either the Law or the Prophets. They came from the Writings, a collection which also included the Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel—books that were not classified as inspired until the end of the first century A.D.

The practice of reading one of these scrolls at a festival may have begun even before they became a part of the Old Testament canon, though the evidence of such use only appeared later in the Christian era. But to review these books in the light of the festivals with which they were associated throws light on the books themselves and on the life of God's people.

Song of Songs at Passover: one bride as three persons

While the Passover, associated by Christians with the crucifixion of Jesus, has become known to us as a most solemn event, it had a happier side. This great festival celebrated the escape of the people of God from

the bondage of Egypt. It was also a spring festival noting the glad renewal of nature and the reading of the Song of Songs on the eighth day of Passover was part of that event.

Two passages in the Song of Songs invite us to go out into the countryside and delight in the coming of life (2:10-13; 7:11-13). Throughout, the text refers to flowers, trees, fruits, the produce of the farm, and animals. Yet no one can read any of these passages without an awareness that the passion being called forth is deeper than that which comes from the glint of a bright flower or the scent of blossoms on a fruit tree. Here is nothing less than the rapture of love between a man and a woman, unblushingly exuberant, remarkably free of any hint of shyness.

The desires and sensations of the lovers range from flirtation to lovesickness, speaking candidly about sexual desire and gratification. The spiritual delights of courtship and marriage are all but eclipsed by the sensation of physical joys.

As phrased in the Revised Standard Version, the Song of Songs contains more than thirty songs or song fragments, over three-fourths of which carry allusions that can be related to the marital experience. Yet for all the frankness of the imagery of the Song of Songs, these expressions of joy in the love of a man and a woman for each other are never crude nor improper.

The Song of Songs became a part of the Hebrew Scriptures partly because it was associated with the name of Solomon in the title verse. Even though the songs may have come from the early period of the monarchy, the poems show no evidence that Solomon was their writer. The emotions expressed do not come from the life of a wealthy king living in luxury with a large harem of wives and concubines. Except for one passage which reflects the urban life of Jerusalem (3:6-11), the images are thoroughly rural, probably composed in the northern Israel countryside.

Yet for centuries these songs were interpreted as something other than the rhymes of human love. The verses were treated as allegories. The rabbis and the scribes saw the lover as Yahweh and the beloved as Israel. The stages of courtship were seen as the phases of Israel's history moving from the Exodus toward the coming of the Messiah. It was as a tribute to God's great devotion to the beloved people that the Song of Songs was read at Passover for so many years.

When the Christian church began to read the Song of Songs in its meetings, it continued to read it as an allegory also, but now the bride was the church and the suitor was Christ. Such reading was made possible by kindred images that began to appear in the New Testament (John 3:29; Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 18:23; 21:9; 22:17).

Having discovered the literal meaning of the Song of Songs, the allegorical interpretations may now seem strained. Yet they ought not be dismissed too lightly or the spiritual dimension ignored.

Ruth in Pentecost: blessed by a foreign bride

Seven weeks after the second day of Passover came the Feast of Weeks also known as Pentecost (because it came on the fiftieth day). It celebrated the end of the barley harvest. The Book of Ruth was related to this harvest.

The central scene in this compact short story finds Ruth, the Moabitess, gleaning in the barley field of her mother-in-law's kinsman,

Journal

Read a sample from each of the Festival Scrolls and summarize the chief theme of the section read. Try these chapters:

- **Song of Songs 1**
- **Ruth 1**
- **Lamentations 1**
- **Ecclesiastes 9**
- **Esther 6—7**

Nature in the Song

Flowers
- Henna
- Wild rose
- Lily
- Fig blossoms
- Grape blossoms

Trees
- Pine
- Cedar
- Apple
- Palm

Farm produce
- Raisins
- Nuts
- Pomegranates
- Dates
- Figs
- Wheat
- Wine
- Honey

Animals
- Gazelle
- Stag
- Turtledoves
- Sheep
- Horse

Four Refrains in the Song of Songs

Awakening (2:7; 3:5; 8:4).
Movement (2:17; 4:6).
Possession (2:16; 6:3).
Embrace (2:6; 8:3).

Seed

"I am my beloved's/ and his desire is for me./ Come, my beloved,/ let us go forth into the fields,/ and lodge in the villages;/ let us go out early to the vineyards,/ and see whether the vines have budded,/ whether the grape blossoms have opened/ and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love" (Song of Songs 7:10-12).

Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be Yahweh, who has not left you this day without next of kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him" (Ruth 4:14, 15).

She weeps bitterly in the night,/ tears on her cheeks;/ among all her lovers/ she has none to comfort her;/ all her friends have dealt treacherously with her,/ they have become her enemies (Lam. 1:2).

4

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,/ vanity of vanities! All is vanity (Eccles. 1:2).

"For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14).

Boaz (chap. 2). In fact, the harvest marks the boundaries of the drama, with Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth coming to Bethlehem penniless just as the barley is ripening (1:22). By the time the reaping has ended (a period of about seven weeks), Naomi and Ruth have overcome their crisis (2:23; chap. 3). So, the reading of the Ruth scroll at Pentecost was an obvious and happy choice.

Ruth, the young widow, came to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law, Naomi, also a widow. Naomi had lost her two sons and she was childless, a heavy burden for a woman in Israel. Ruth's problem was also difficult. She was a foreigner.

But Naomi did not despair. She had a plan, however risky, and Ruth was willing to cooperate in the scheme, fragile and unpromising as it may have seemed. As a result of Naomi's plot, Ruth came to the attention of Boaz, a distant relative. He provided aid first in a small way, but eventually he bought Naomi's lost property and married Ruth.

The climax of the tale came when Ruth's baby was placed into the arms of the lonely and child-deprived Naomi who became the child's nurse (4:16).

The book celebrates the acceptance of Ruth into Israel in spite of the fact that she was a foreigner. Not only was she accepted, she was doubly blest because from Obed, her child, came Jesse who was the father of David, the great king of Israel.

The story is a product of the days of the kings, perhaps from the time of Jehoshaphat or Josiah, a time when people began to look back with fondness to the days of David when the kingdom was united and strong. In the waning days of the monarchy people needed reassurance that Yahweh could work behind the scenes in the lives of ordinary people and provide for their needs.

Pentecost recalled the giving of the law to the people of Israel through Moses. In addition to Ruth, Exodus 19 was also read. Eventually, the Jews came to see the law as a gift not only to Israel, but also as a treasure for all the world's peoples.

The entry of Ruth, the Moabitess, into the family of God's people affirmed that other tribes and nations would eventually come into their family. These new members would receive the blessing of the law and would also become a blessing by providing new leadership for God's people.

Lamentations on the ninth of Ab: hope in crisis

Most Jewish festivals were happy times; not so the ninth of the month of Ab. Could it even be called a festival? It was a time for weeping and for wailing.

For this day in Ab (the fifth month in the Hebrew calendar—overlapping with July and August in ours) was the anniversary not only of the fall of the first temple in 587 B.C. It was also the date of the second temple's destruction in A.D. 70.

The tradition was rather firmly fixed that from the time of the end of the second temple, Lamentations was read on the anniversary date in the synagogues of Palestine and wherever Jews resided in Asia, Europe, and Africa.

The five poems of Lamentations were composed in Palestine shortly after the Babylonians had pulled down the first temple. Like laments at a funeral, they recall the misfortunes of Israel from the days of

the untimely death of King Josiah two decades earlier. They recite in brutal detail the carnage of the Babylonian siege, including the starving children and the desperation of extreme hunger that drove some to cannibalism (2:19, 20). The loss of the temple is bitterly lamented (2:7, 8).

The poet cast it all in the language of prayer with confession for the sins of Israel. The people are crushed but not without hope. The crescendo of grief comes to a climax at the very midpoint of the book and then gradually ebbs away, ending at the level of emotion with which the lament began.

The great affirmation of hope comes at this midsection (3:31-36):

> For the Lord will not
> cast off for ever,
> but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion
> according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
> for he does not willingly afflict
> or grieve the sons of men (3:31-32).

Lamentations has long been associated with Jeremiah because the Greek translators of the Old Testament in their Septuagint placed this book after that of Jeremiah, the prophet whose time of ministry included the fall of Jerusalem. Originally, the Lamentations scroll was separate from that of Jeremiah. And while the laments are likely the work of a single author, the writer's personality as revealed in Lamentations seems to point to someone other than Jeremiah.

Tabernacles and Ecclesiastes: smug faith tested

All the other books in the Old Testament affirm God's revealing work which makes the divine will known to people of faith. But Ecclesiastes says that we can expect no such revelation from God. And besides, people using reason cannot come to know God.

What a strange and unorthodox book this is that has found its way into the Bible! Stranger still that it should be read at the Festival of Tabernacles, the occasion at which Ezra once read the Pentateuch.

Like the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes became a part of the Old Testament Scriptures because it was associated with the name of Solomon. But his name does not appear in the book, though it is implied in the first verse as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem." The writer, identified as preacher (or, in Hebrew, *Qoheleth*), does in one biographical note portray himself as "king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1:12—2:26). But in another note, shorter and perhaps more factual, the writer describes himself as a sage and a teacher with no hint of royal office (12:9, 10).

The time of writing seems more likely to have been the third century B.C. The book is part of the wisdom literature that developed in the days of the second temple. The writer champions a spirit of free inquiry in the search for truth, willing even to challenge the religious dogma of his day.

Here is a writer who does not believe that God can be explained by nature (1:5-9; 11:3-8) nor that the meaning of God's will can be found in history (1:4, 10, 11; 4:13-16; 6:10-12; 9:13-15). And touching on the issues discussed by Job, this sober thinker does not see the good rewarded or sinners being punished (7:15; 8:10, 11; 9:1-3).

Qoheleth is a pessimist, seeing death as the final decider of all

Notes on History in Lamentations

Siege (2:22; 3:5,7): 2 Kings 25:1-2.
Famine (1:11, 19; 2:11-12, 19-20; 4:4-5, 9-10): 2 Kings 25:3; Jer. 37:21.
King flees (1:3, 6; 2:2; 4:19-20): 2 Kings 25:4-7.
Looting (2:3-5; 4:11; 5:18): 2 Kings 25:8-9.
Walls fall (2:7-9): 2 Kings 25:10.
Leaders slain (1:15; 2:2, 20; 4:16): 2 Kings 25:18-21; Jer. 39:6.
Exile (1:1, 4-5, 18; 2:9, 14; 3:2, 19; 4:22; 5:2): 2 Kings 25:11-12.
Hope of aid lost (4:17; 5:6): Jer. 27:1-11; 37:5-10.
Scorned by allies (1:2, 8, 17, 19): 2 Kings 24:2; Jer. 40:14.
Judah debased (1:1; 5:8-9): 2 Kings 25:22, 24-25.

values (2:15, 16; 3:19-22; 6:12; 9:2-6, 11, 12; 12:7). But he is also a skeptic, concluding that all is mystery (3:11).

The best thing that a person can do is to make the most of life, and enjoy the world while still alive (2:24-26; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:4-10; 11:7; 12:1-8). Even so, such a one should not lead a life given to pleasure and waste, for it is good that people should help each other (4:7-12).

The words of Ecclesiastes have the same value for us that they had for the faithful who observed the Festival of Tabernacles. Qoheleth does not allow us to be smug about our faith in God's revelation nor to be overconfident in our style of life. Ecclesiastes challenges us always to give the answer of faith but to know also that faith is not in empty words but in life experienced with God.

Esther and the Persian Period

The facts of the Esther story do not measure up with the reality and the data known about the Persian period. Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), the emperor of the narrative, reigned from 486-465 B.C. His chief wife was Hutaosa, not Vashti or Esther. During the seventh year of his reign (2:16), he had little time to choose a new wife while his army was falling defeated before Greek defenders on the island of Salamis. And if Mordecai, Esther's uncle, was carried away from Jerusalem (2:6) in the first Babylonian captivity (597 B.C.), even if he had been an infant at the time, he would have been over 120 years old when appointed prime minister and Esther would have been nearing 100.

Purim and Esther: hard times for persecutors

The threats to the Jews in the days after the Exile took aim at more than their faith. Life and limb were also in danger, especially for those who remained outside Palestine. They lived in pagan societies and often risked persecution. Even in Palestine, God's people had to cope with paganism as their land came under the rule of foreign kings who pressed their strange gods on them.

The story of Esther provided counsel for just such threats. The Esther scroll came with Purim, a festival which may have been brought to Palestine from Babylon after the Exile.

In the story, Esther and her uncle, Mordecai, become a part of the king's court in Persia and so have a chance to save their people from a fearful persecution. They even go one step farther and take vengeance on those who intended to kill them.

The story is told with great skill and artistry. It is a tale that compares with Joseph in Pharaoh's court and with Daniel in the service of Nebuchadnezzar. But unlike Daniel, Esther rises to the place of great power, displacing Vashti as the chief wife of the Persian emperor, all without exposing her Jewishness.

While the tale is set in the Persian period, it seems more likely that this is a historical romance composed with the troubles of the Greek period as a background. The time of the Persian rule was not marked by persecution of the Jews but by an amazing tolerance. For it was a Persian, Cyrus, whose liberal policies of toleration toward foreign peoples allowed the Jews in Babylon to return to Palestine.

Crushing conflict between Jews and pagans came in the following period when the Greek rulers of Palestine worked hard to replace Jewish faith and practice with the culture, language, and religion of Greece. During those years, persecution was becoming part of Jewish experience both inside and outside Palestine. And the tale of Esther and the Feast of Purim seem to have been made for each other, assuring the Jews that they would survive. Esther recites the drama of the Jews being saved from slaughter at the hands of their enemies. The courage of Esther and the wisdom of Mordecai work the miracle.

The date for this new exodus deliverance was set on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, the twelfth month of the Hebrew calendar (9:1, 13)—overlapping with our months of February and March. The feast was called *Purim* because the dates for the persecution had been chosen by the casting of lots, called *Pur* by the Persians (3:7; 9:26).

As observed by the Jews, Purim was a gay and even raucous festival. Mourning was forbidden during this period and wine flowed freely at a night meal that lasted into the hours of the next day. It is thought by some that the name of God was omitted from the Esther story in order to avoid a somber note at the feast. The omission almost caused the book to be excluded from the Hebrew Scriptures.

The feast of Purim stood in sharp contrast to the mournful tones of the ninth of Ab and the reading of Lamentations. The people who had suffered much and who continued to face persecution were allowed a time to escape at least for a few hours from the rigors of their pilgrimage.

Discovery

1. Why was each of the Festival Scrolls chosen for the occasion on which it was read?

2. What did each scroll add to the quality of the festival by its being read?

3. In what way does the festival and its purpose throw new light and understanding on each of these scrolls?

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. *Understanding the Old Testament*. Short reviews of the members of the Festival Scrolls appear on the following pages: Ruth, 492; Song of Songs, 535; Ecclesiastes, 541-47; Esther, 566-69.

Pfeiffer, R. H. "Megilloth," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. 3, page 342. This short entry documents the existence of the Festival Scrolls.

Inventory

1. Name the Festival Scrolls.

2. Name the festivals or special days on which each of the Festival Scrolls was read.

3. To which of the three divisions of the Old Testament do the Festival Scrolls belong?

4. Identify the following names:

Ab
Bethlehem
Boaz
Mordecai
Pur
Qoheleth

CHAPTER 19

The Treasury of Wisdom

8

Gist

As much a part of Hebrew life and thought as the Law and the Prophets was Wisdom, a manner of applying God's will for right living in direct and practical ways. Proverbs builds on the base of righteousness as wisdom and evil as folly, assured that those who choose the right will prosper and sinners will be punished. But Job comes forward to challenge this simple faith with the plight of undeserved suffering. From the Apro-

Three traditions noted in Jeremiah 18:18 guided the life of the Israelites: God's word proclaimed by the prophet; the law taught by the priest; and wisdom imparted by the sage.

So far we have taken account of the Law and the Prophets. But we have not looked, except for Ecclesiastes, at the great treasury in wisdom that came from the sages of Israel and which is set forth in copious variety in the wisdom literature: Proverbs and Job in the Old Testament; and Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha. (For background on the Apocrypha, see "The Church and the Apocrypha—a Special Relationship," in chapter 1.)

As the law was rooted in Moses and Psalms derived sponsorship from David, the wisdom literature claimed the support of Solomon (Prov. 1:1; Eccles. 1:1, 12). While Solomon may have encouraged the work of the sages and may have personally contributed to the writings, the sources of this stream are varied.

Wisdom: the right deed at the right time

In its simplest form, wisdom includes the total life experience that parent passes on to child as a moral legacy. In wider scope, it is the sum of the practical knowledge accumulated in a community that becomes the heritage of future generations. This includes life skills, the ability to cope, and the right deed or word for the present moment.

Seen in this way, wisdom is more than the sum of human endeavor. It comes as a gift from God, in fact, a gift that at times takes on personality.

Wisdom, in simple and yet profound form, appears often as proverbs, summing up in a few words complex human relationships or profound truths. Riddles, fables, and allegories are other forms into which wisdom has been distilled for delivery to coming generations of searchers. But longer discourses have also been used as vehicles for wisdom as shown by the Book of Job. Hymns, prayers, dialogues, and narratives are also used.

Simple distinctions can be made between wisdom and law, and

between wisdom and prophecy, and yet the borders set up are never fixed and the streams often cross and mingle with each other.

Prophecy and law, we might say, are the product of revelation, while wisdom is based on reason, observation, and experience. Reason is a gift from God for the benefit of God's people. If they do not make use of this gift, they offend both themselves and the Creator. For this lack, the fool is roundly scolded in wisdom literature.

Wisdom has a world view based on order. The world is subject to laws fixed by God. These rules can be discovered by the study of the sages who apply reason to every situation and issue.

Of all who are wise, God is the most wise. Wisdom is the first of God's creations. Proverbs 8 celebrates the wisdom that God created (8:22; cf. 3:19, 20; Ps. 104:24). Wisdom is not a being separate from God, but rather a part of the personality of God addressed by the poet with feminine pronouns (Prov. 8:1-3). This is Dame Wisdom, the source of all wisdom poured out on humankind.

Fear of Yahweh is the ground of wisdom. It is the wisdom of God's people that triumphs over the wisdom of sages from other nations. Joseph, Moses and Aaron, and Daniel are among the wisdom heroes of the Old Testament. All of them appeared in the courts of foreign kings and were able to interpret dreams more surely and confound with miracles the wisdom of the pagan teachers. Second Isaiah notes the incompleteness of the wisdom of Babylon (44:25, 26a; 47:10-13).

Yet the wisdom mode was not created by Israel. For wisdom literature was known in Egypt in ancient times. Proverbs 22:17—23:14 have been found to come from an Egyptian source that was recorded in the papers of a minor government official named Amen-em-opet in the twelfth or thirteenth century B.C., long before Israel became a nation. This same Egyptian text was also echoed in Jeremiah 17:5, 6 and later in Psalm 1.

Proverbs: walking right on the narrow way

Typical of much wisdom literature, the Book of Proverbs was designed as a manual for the youth of Israel. It was to help them on the road to success and guide them away from the snares and pitfalls that had led others to ruin. What Proverbs lacks in flair and sparkle it makes up in terms of being down to earth about prudent living and conduct.

Here are warnings about the follies of unchastity and praise for the worth of a good wife as well as many keen insights into human nature. The compressed form of the proverb sometimes shows a great deal of literary excellence and artistry.

Some of the proverbs are undogmatic observations that stimulate further thought and encourage students to test and measure their own experience.

> Even in laughter the heart is sad,
> and the end of joy is grief (14:13).

But other proverbs are more direct, calling for specific action and implying a moral judgment:

> Do not remove an ancient landmark
> or enter the fields of the fatherless;
> for their Redeemer is strong;
> he will plead their cause against you (23:10, 11).

crypha come Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, two wisdom books treasured by the early church. From the latter came the promise of immortality as reward for the righteous.

Journal

What are the recurring themes of the wisdom literature? Read the following passages and record your observations.

Proverbs 1
Proverbs 24
Job 1—4
Job 13
[The following two books are found in the Apocrypha which is included in many Bibles.]
Sirach Prologue
Sirach 38
Sirach 39:1-11
Sirach 44
Wisdom of Solomon 7

Proverbs has little to say about worship and about sacrifice. That is the law's concern. Nor does it mention any of the great events in Israel's history or refer to its popular heroes. It does not speculate on the nation's future, its punishment, or its rewards. Such is the business of the prophets. Nor does Proverbs have any words about personal immortality or resurrection. That will come from later apocalyptic writers. The sages fixed their eyes on the present world.

But like the priests and particularly the prophets, the wisdom teachers do have a concern for justice. They often defend the rights of the poor and oppressed.

> Do not rob the poor, because he is poor,
> or crush the afflicted at the gate;
> for Yahweh will plead their cause
> and despoil of life those who despoil them (22:22, 23).

As the prophets looked to the king to provide leadership in providing justice for the poor, so do the sages:

> By justice a king gives stability to the land,
> but one who exacts gifts ruins it. . . .
> If a king judges the poor with equity
> his throne will be established for ever (29:4, 14).

Proverbs contains material from the early days of the monarchy up until the Persian period and the time of the fifth and fourth century B.C. Although the first nine chapters serve as an introduction to the book, they were written last, coming from the days after the Exile.

Wisdom began with the confidence that people could solve their own problems. It was within their own power to order their conduct to the demands of the world and the natural order. But there are limits. God must be reckoned with and the help of Yahweh will be needed (16:1-9, 33).

The teachers of later days brought a greater awareness of the need for God's help. Earlier sages could say: "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life" (13:14). But a more reflective teacher in later years would correct this to say: "The fear of Yahweh is a fountain of life" (14:27). It took the editors of the post-exilic period to bring the conviction full circle: "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom (9:10; cf. 1:7).

Proverbs reflects the success of Ezekiel's teaching about individual responsibility (Ezek. 18:1-4). He said that a person is rewarded or punished on the basis of his conduct. Thus, righteousness is wisdom and evil is folly. With this strong conviction, the sages followed the orthodoxy of Ezekiel.

But both Ezekiel and the sages of Proverbs were soon to be challenged by Job.

Seed

I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man without sense;/ and lo, it was all overgrown with thorns;/ the ground was covered with nettles,/ and its stone wall was broken down./ Then I saw and considered it;/ I looked and received instruction./ A little sleep, a little slumber,/ a little folding of the hands to rest,/ and poverty will come upon you like a robber,/ and want like an armed man (Prov. 24:30-34).

Wisdom exalts her sons/ and gives help to those who

Job: suffering undeserved

While Proverbs has a simple rule for living—the righteous prosper while the wicked suffer—the Book of Job responds from within the wisdom tradition to challenge this easy faith. In the process, the poet of Job makes a most profound statement about suffering that is undeserved.

Job has been cited as the best of all wisdom literature. In fact, its eloquence makes it one of the finest compositions ever written.

Here the sage explores the question that has puzzled God's faithful for centuries—why do the righteous suffer? But this is more than a discussion of theory. Job faces the problem in his own flesh. Job was a person from the history of Israel who had a reputation as a righteous man. Ezekiel put Job in the company of Noah and Daniel (14:14).

The drama comes to us in three parts: prologue (1:1—2:13), dialogues (3:1—42:6), and epilogue (42:7-17). The first and last are in prose and carry the story of Job from the onset of his plagues to his healing and restoration. The dialogues are given in poetic form and deal deeply with the meaning of suffering.

One side of the dialogue comes from Job's three friends: Eliaphaz, Bildad, and Zophar who come from eastern lands, traditionally the home of wise men. The three friends are supporters of the orthodox view of suffering as advanced by Proverbs and most other wisdom literature: suffering arises from sin. Even though the prologue established Job as blameless, the three friends throughout their long and lofty harangues insist that some secret sin must have brought on the catastrophe that has ruined not only Job's family but Job himself.

In Job's responses we begin to see three sides to the character of God—the God of Power, the God of Justice, and the God of Grace. Job gives his pledge to the God of Power who as Creator works God's will throughout the world and even on Job himself: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (13:15, Anchor Bible).

Here, Job sees God the Slayer as an expression of the God of Power. Job is willing to accept such a God, yet he would like to know the God of Justice; better yet, the God of Grace. But his long search seems to go unrewarded.

Through the long discussions, we come to see the problem of suffering as far more complex than the childlike simple lines sketched by Proverbs. Job can only plead grace from God:

> Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him;
> I must appeal for mercy to my accuser (9:15).

In the end, God takes part in the dialogue. But God does not answer the questions that Job has posed. Rather, God questions Job (chaps. 38-41). The implied response is in terms of God's power. The issues of justice and grace go ignored. The unknown writer may be admitting that the question of suffering as posed by Job has no answer that can be grasped by those of us who are human.

If the believer is to make the pilgrimage from God the Slayer to God the Friend, that journey will have to be made along the road of faith. Reason and wisdom will not carry the seeker that far.

But the epilogue does supply the hint of an answer of undeserved suffering as a means of bringing benefit to others. Here the faint image of the Suffering Servant pierces the fog. Yahweh rebukes Job's three friends because they have accused Job unjustly—an admission in the prose section, at least, that Job is innocent (42:7-10). God instructs the friends to ask Job to pray for their forgiveness. And when Job prays, God forgives (vv. 9, 10).

Though Job does not see himself in the role of a suffering servant (Isa. 53:10-12), we can see the opening wedge in Job's prayers for his

seek her./ Whoever loves her loves life,/ and those who seek her early will be filled with joy./ Whoever holds her fast will obtain glory,/ and the Lord will bless the place she enters (Sirach 4:11-13).

For I know that my Redeemer lives,/ and at last he will stand upon the earth;/ and after my skin has been thus destroyed,/ then from my flesh I shall see God,/ whom I shall see on my side,/ and my eyes shall behold, and not another./ My heart faints within me! (Job 19:25-27).

Do not invite death by the error of your life,/ nor bring on destruction by the work of your hands;/ because God did not make death,/ and he does not delight in the death of the living./ For he created all things that they might exist,/ and the generative forces of the world are wholesome,/ and there is no destructive poison in them;/ and the dominion of Hades is not on earth./ For righteousness is immortal (Wis. of Sol. 1:12-15).

Sirach in the New Testament

Traces of ideas from Sirach abound in the New Testament:

Almsgiving (3:3, 30): Mark 12:33.
Listening and speaking (5:11): James 1:19.
Formalism (7:14): Mark 11:25; 7:34; Rom. 12:15; 8:5; 3:23.
New friends (9:10): Matt. 9:16, 17; Luke 5:39.
Death and wealth (11:19): Luke 12:16-20.
Waywardness (15:11, 12): James 1:13.
Kind words (18:15): James 1:5.
Smooth way (21:10): Matt. 7:13.
Forgiveness (28:2): Matt. 6:12.
Generosity (29:10): James 5:3.
Treasure (29:11): Matt. 6:20.
Parables (39:2, 3): Mark 4:10-13.
History (44—49): Heb. 11:4—12:2.
Invitation to learn (51:23-27): Matt. 11:28-30; 16:24-28.

friends when read against the background of Isaiah's great vision. It is a first faint parable that will later be expanded by the church when it comes to grips with the meaning of Christ's suffering on the cross.

Sirach: wary of the Greek style

Two important examples of wisdom, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, come not from the Old Testament, but from the Apocrypha, that halfway house of biblical literature. Sirach was particularly valued by the early Christian church. In fact, Sirach was also called Ecclesiasticus, meaning "church book," showing that though it was not part of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament, it was welcome in the readings of the church.

Among the more than a dozen books in the Apocrypha, Sirach is unique in that its author is clearly identified: "Jesus the son of Sirach, son of Eleazer, of Jerusalem" (50:27). Possibly to avoid the name of Jesus, the book has become known by the name of the writer's father. The author seems to have been a teacher in Jerusalem at the beginning of the second century B.C.

Sirach's point of view is similar to Proverbs, but being the work of one writer, it is much more even in quality and a much better literary product. The son of Sirach moves beyond Proverbs by identifying wisdom with the law and the prophets (39:1). He also says: "All wisdom is the fear of the Lord,/ and in all wisdom there is the fulfillment of the law" (19:20).

And while Proverbs and Ecclesiastes avoided references to Israelite history, Sirach contains an eloquent tribute in six of its chapters to the heroes of Judah, beginning the call to remembrance with lofty words: "Let us now praise famous men,/ and our fathers in their generations" (44:1).

He holds up for special notice some two dozen of the patriarchs, prophets, and kings. Though they left no memorial, their righteous deeds have preserved their legacy. But he has only qualified praise for Solomon for his building of the temple. The sometimes sponsor of the wisdom tradition stained his honor by yielding to sexual lust, a sin that led to the division of the kingdom (47:12-22).

In his list of famous men, Sirach's most notable omission is Ezra. Sirach, himself a scribe and a teacher, does not acknowledge the work of the first of the scribes and the one who revived the law and gave it place once more in the life of the people of God. Sirach is a partisan for wisdom more than for the law.

As a champion of Jewish wisdom, Sirach does hint that he sees the well-being of the people threatened by a new foe: "Woe to the timid hearts and to slack hands/ and to the sinner who walks along two ways!" (2:12). This has been taken as a reference to the growing number of people in the Jewish community who were imitating the forms of the new Greek culture. He could not understand this interest in Hellenistic lifestyles and in Greek philosophy and religion.

Wisdom, as Sirach saw it, had found a home in Jerusalem where God had established it (24:8-12) and the people of Israel were God's chosen people (17:17).

Luther Hymn

The thanksgiving hymn by Martin Rinkhart, "Now Thank We All Our God," is based on Luther's translation of Sirach 50:22-24.

Wisdom of Solomon: warm to the Greek form

The Greek styles which Sirach opposed began to appear in the Wisdom of Solomon, the second sample of wisdom literature in the Apocrypha.

Written in Alexandria in the last half of the first century B.C., about the time that the Romans became the rulers of Egypt, this book claimed Solomon as its author as did Ecclesiastes. But the form of the book is much different from writings from the early monarchy.

The Hebrew wisdom tradition comes through strong in the Wisdom of Solomon, yet the form in which these thoughts are expressed is an imitation of the style of oration used by Greek scholars. While the writer at times speaks in the name of an ancient king of Israel (7:5; 8:21; 9:7, 8), the accent comes from Greece.

In chapter 9, the voice is that of Solomon contemplating the building of the temple, yet the words speak of wisdom as one of the personalities of God:

> With thee is wisdom, who knows thy works
> and was present when thou didst make the world (9:9).

Such a description of creation set the stage for the Logos doctrine which would appear in the opening chapter of the Gospel of John. The personality of the Logos/Wisdom came to be identified by John as the pre-existent Christ present at creation.

Wisdom of Solomon also responds to the doubts raised by Ecclesiastes. It attacks with a good bit of sarcasm the words of Qoheleth, who was so confident that he had proved that nothing could be proved. Those who reason thus, says the sage of Wisdom of Solomon, "did not know the secret purposes of God" (2:22). That purpose he affirms, for God created persons "for immortality" in the image of the eternal God (v. 23, NEB).

The author of Wisdom of Solomon was the earliest Jewish writer to speak about immortality: "But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,/ and no torment will ever touch them" (3:1). While Proverbs saw that "the teaching of the wise is a fountain of life" (Prov. 13:14) and the gateway to a prudent life on earth, to the writer of Wisdom of Solomon "giving heed to [wisdom's] laws is assurance of immortality" (6:19).

Thus, the writings of the Hebrew scholars were beginning to respond to the coming of Greek culture. But we are ahead of our story. We need to pick up in our coming chapters the historical thread we had been following to find out how the Greek culture came to Palestine and to the community of Jews scattered throughout the world.

Discovery

1. What are the differences between the Law, Prophets, and Wisdom? How are they similar to each other?

2. What was the purpose of the Book of Job? Did it succeed in its purpose? Why or why not?

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "The Beginning of Wisdom," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapter 17, pages 528-62.

Echoes of Wisdom of Solomon

Days of suffering (3:5, 6): 1 Pet. 1:6, 7.
God's armor (5:17-23): Eph. 6:11-17.
Logos/Wisdom in creation (7:21; 8:6; 9:1, 9): John 1:3, 10.
Pure Wisdom (7:22, 23): James 3:17, 18.
Logos/Wisdom in the world (8:3; 9:4): John 1:1, 18.
Logos/Wisdom in God's love (8:4; 9:9-11): John 5:20.
Perishable body (9:15): 2 Cor. 5:5, 7.
Natural revelation (11, 13, 15): Rom. 1:18-23.
Time to repent (11:23; 12:10, 19): Rom. 2:4.
Lost repentance (12:10): Heb. 12:17.
The potter (15:7): Rom. 9:21.

Inventory

1. What three traditions guided Israelite life?
2. Who were the leaders associated with each of these traditions?
3. What are the outstanding examples of wisdom in the Old Testament?
4. What are the examples of wisdom in the Apocrypha?
5. What principle championed by Proverbs was challenged by Job?
6. How did Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon differ in their view of Greek culture?

CHAPTER 20

Another Way of Reading History

Gist

The psalms issued from the life of the covenant people over the course of many generations reflecting their journey through history as well as their inner spiritual pilgrimages. Here are the varied responses of a people growing in covenant with God. Great are their pains; great also their joys. Here too is their allegiance to their royal family, their resistance to paganism, and their devotion to the law.

During World War II, Claus Westermann found himself shut up in a concentration camp in his native Germany. While thus confined, this Bible scholar wrote the first draft of a book on the Psalms. His only resource was Luther's translation of the New Testament and the Psalms.

In this book, *The Praise of God in the Psalms*, Westermann divided all the psalms into two kinds: plea (or petition) and praise. Both elements are often present in the same composition. Of course, the writers of the psalms expressed themselves in many different ways, but all of their work is at root either plea or praise, and praise almost always wins out.

Westermann's work in the classification of the Psalms is a sample of the growing frontier from which new understandings of this important body of Scripture have come in recent years. When we find the way in which a psalm was first used, we have a key that unlocks the meaning and that widens our understanding of the history of the People of Faith.

Psalm discoveries

Almost all the things which we have already learned about the people of Israel can be traced through the psalms and not just in the verses that recite specific historic events. We find the people coming into a new land and meeting a new culture. The idolatry of their new neighbors threatens them, for example, and they campaign vigorously against these false gods in the words of their prayers. They come to adopt kingship as a way of organizing their tribal communities. They seem to accept it wholeheartedly and make it a part of their way of life. They also hear the preaching of the prophets, and see concern for justice and righteousness as God's will.

Psalm types

In the early part of this century, Hermann Gunkel, a German scholar, changed the course of the study of the Psalms by his classification of these songs by literary types. These are the kinds he identified:

Laments
Thanksgiving
Hymns
Communal Laments
Royal Psalms

In addition, he noted several minor types: pilgrimage songs, victory songs, communal thanksgiving, historical, wisdom, and liturgies and dialogues. Other scholars have refined this list and added other types.

Gunkel believed that most of the psalms had their origin in the worship of God in the various sanctuaries of Israel and Judah.

Many, many laments

The laments of individuals are the most numerous of the several types of psalms—there are over fifty, or fully one-third of the entire collection. Laments always move from petition and pleading to an affirmation of confidence that prayer will be answered. The psalms of confidence (still another type) may have originally started out to be psalms of lament, but the expression of assurance grew so strong that it overpowered the entire prayer.

In many of the laments, the central prayer has two parts: a prayer for the individual's own salvation or healing and a prayer for the destruction of the sufferer's enemies. Westermann has called this the double wish. Such is one in Psalm 80:16, 17:

> They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
> may they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance!
> But let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand,
> the son of man whom thou hast made strong for thyself.

The part of the double wish calling for vengeance has been expanded in several psalms (called imprecatory psalms) to the level of curses upon the enemies of an individual or the community. The uttering of curses was once a part of the thought world of the people of Israel and was even used in the covenant ceremony as part of its empowering. (See Deut. 27.)

Private prayers for public use

The laments of the individual have given the Psalter its highly personal tone. While some of them may have begun as private prayers, others were spoken in the places where the community gathered for worship: "In the morning I prepare a sacrifice for thee, and watch . . . [I] will enter thy house,/ I will worship toward thy holy temple . . ." (5:3, 7).

The inner turmoil of the person is expressed in outward signs: "I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;/ all the day I go about mourning" (38:6).

The lamenting person came to the sanctuary where a priest or attendant at the shrine would hear the sufferer's prayer. In one of the best known laments of the individual (also classed as a penitential psalm), we find reference to a ceremony of cleansing:

> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
> wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow (51:7).

Journal

Read each of the following psalms and record your observations in your journal. Note especially what seems to you to have been the occasion that led to the writing of each piece.

Psalm 1
Psalm 15
Psalm 22
Psalm 44
Psalm 45
Psalm 105
Psalm 146

Parts of Israelite Psalms of Lament

Address and Introductory Petition
Lament
Confession of Trust
Petition (Double Wish)
Vow of Praise

Seed

O Yahweh, rebuke me not in thy anger,/ nor chasten me in thy wrath./ Be gracious to me, O Yahweh, for I am languishing;/ O Yahweh, heal me, for my bones are troubled (6:1, 2).

As a hart longs/ for flowing streams,/ so longs my soul/ for thee, O God./ My soul thirsts for God,/ for the living God./ When shall I come and behold/ the face of God? (42:1, 2).

O come, let us sing to Yahweh;/ let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! (95:1).

Five Psalm Books

Jewish tradition says that as Moses gave five books of law to Israel, so David gave five books of psalms to the nation.

The Five Books

Book 1:1-41. All but three ascribed to David. *Yahweh* (LORD) is the preferred divine name.

Book 2: 42-72. *Elohim* (God) is used most often for God.

Book 3: 73-89. Only one title mentions David. *Elohim* used.

Book 4: 90-106.

Book 5: 107-150.

Selah

The meaning of "selah" which appears seventy-one times in thirty-nine psalms is uncertain; perhaps it is a direction to the leader for a pause or for a use of cymbals.

The whole community cries

When the harvest failed, when an epidemic brought widespread suffering and death, and when their enemies made life miserable, the people would fast, weep, and tear their clothes. A prophet or priest would give voice to their common lament as in Psalm 44.

Israel had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hand of an enemy. After reminding God of past acts of deliverance, the people supply a long list of their grievances because they have not been helped this time.

The lament is intended to move God to action. Emotion is strong. Images are bold:

> For our soul is bowed down to the dust;
> our body cleaves to the ground (44:25).

Most communal laments end with a certainty of having been heard, but this psalm which is also a claim to innocence ("we have not forgotten thee,/ or been false to thy covenant" (v. 17), ends with only a faint expression of hope: "Deliver us for the sake of thy steadfast love!" (v. 26).

Much stronger is the note of assurance that ends the lament of the community in Psalm 126:

> He that goes forth weeping,
> bearing the seed for sowing,
> shall come home with shouts of joy,
> bringing his sheaves with him (v. 6).

Even more positive are the prayers in which the lament of the congregation which started out as a petition for help turns into one long affirmation of trust. Such is Psalm 46 which begins, "God is our refuge and strength," and ends with:

> Yahweh of hosts is with us;
> the God of Jacob is our refuge.

The oracle of salvation

All of the laments of the individual end with a note of certainty or a note of praise showing that praise loomed large in Israelite life and worship. Psalm 143 is the only individual lament in which a confession of trust is missing, yet even here amidst the words of pleading appear alternate words of faith: "in thee I put my trust . . . to thee I lift up my soul . . I have fled to thee for refuge. . . . for thou art my God!" (vv. 8-10).

At the other end of this long line of grief is Psalm 22 which begins with those fearsome words of dereliction repeated by Jesus on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It continues through seventeen sentences with the bitterest of complaints, yet ends with ten sentences of almost excessive praise and thanksgiving.

The break in mood comes between verses 21 and 22 and scholars believe that at this point, the priest in the sanctuary spoke words of assurance in what has become known as an "oracle of salvation." Such special words implying that sin has been forgiven and prayer has been heard would explain the sudden and dramatic shift in emotion that appears in so many of the laments in the psalms.

This brings into focus a new understanding of Israelite worship. The spoken prayers of individuals and of the congregation were heard

Superscriptions

Most of the psalms carry titles. These are not part of the song itself, having been added years later at the time the psalms were collected. The New English Bible does not include the titles as part of the text.

David

The name of David appears in seventy-three subtitles. Use of his name is more to honor the king who encouraged the expansion of worship (Ezra 3:10) than to indicate authorship.

by a priest or other attendant, who replied in God's behalf to pledge that sin was forgiven, sickness would be healed, enemies defeated, and crops would be harvested.

Hannah went to the shrine at Shiloh to lament her sterility. She was so distraught that Eli, the priest, believed her to be in a drunken stupor. But when she expressed her grief and desire, Eli said, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made" (1 Sam. 1:17). Immediately, she expressed her gratitude. Her mood changed. Her actions expressed confidence that her prayer would be granted. The words of Eli were for Hannah an oracle of salvation.

Such oracles appear frequently in the prophetic literature (e.g., Isa. 33:10-12), but only rarely in the Psalms where we can only infer their use. One exception appears in Psalm 12:5 in a lament of the community:

> "Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan,
> "I will now arise," says Yahweh;
> "I will place him in the safety for which he longs."
> (See also 60:6-8; 95:8-12.)

Westermann notes that the words "but," "but I," "but thou," and "and now," often signal the change from plea to praise and may also be a sign that an oracle of salvation was spoken. Such expressions appear in: 3:3, 13:5; 20:6; 22:19; 27:6; 52:8; 55:23; 59:8; 64:7; 71:14; 86:15; 102:12, 26-27; 119:67.

Praise better than thanksgiving

Most of the psalms of thanksgiving do not use the word *thank*. Westermann, noting that Hebrew has no word for *thank*, observes that gratitude does not come naturally to human beings. Only after much training were we as children convinced that we ought to say "thank you."

How, without a "thank-you" word, did the Hebrews express gratitude? They didn't say it. They did it. True gratitude to God is not given in words but in the act of giving praise to the Giver. Saying "thank you" is a private act that almost always draws attention to the person saying it. Praise is an act performed in a community among people invited to take part in a celebration. Attention is focused not on the praise giver but on God—the receiver of the praise.

The worshiper brings a sacrifice to the sanctuary and bows low before the altar (138:2). Relatives and friends who expect to take part in the meal that follows the sacrifice are standing nearby (22:25). Before the sacrifice, the grateful person takes a sacred cup and sings a song with a loud voice (116:13). The worshiper may also turn to the bystanders, suggests Gunkel, and say, "Listen to what Yahweh has done for me. Let us praise Yahweh together."

Hymns and words for holy days

A more simple form of the psalm is the hymn which was sung by a choir or by the congregation to praise the deeds of Yahweh. The hymn often ends with a blessing or wish similar to the opening call to worship. Psalm 8 is an example of one such hymn.

Psalm 146 is the first of the five Hallelujah hymns with which the Psalter closes. Each of the five begins with and ends with "Hallelujah" or "Praise Yahweh!" Psalm 146 takes note of Yahweh's special concern for the hungry, the prisoners, the blind, the alien, the widow, and the

Parallelism

In Hebrew poetry, each line relates to the following or previous line which repeats in different words the idea of the line with which it is paired.

Synonymous Parallelism

Psalm 49:1: "Hear" is parallel to "give ear" and the idea of "all peoples" is repeated by "all inhabitants of the world." See: 1:2; 3:1; 18:31; 19:1, 2; 29:1, 2; 46:7.

Antithetic Parallelism

In Proverbs 10:1, contradictory pairs of words are used: "a foolish son" is opposite to "wise son"; "a sorrowful mother" contrasts with "a glad father." See: Ps. 1:6; 20:7, 8.

Synthetic Parallelism

The second line builds on and extends the first: 3:4; 9:3; 22:16; 42:1; 95:3; 103:13.

Meter of Hebrew Poetry

The meter of the psalms does not always survive in translation. Psalm 19:7 does retain the emphasis of the original on its major words, a meter of 3:2:3:2. Meter in other psalms could be 3:3, 2:2, 2:2:2, or 3:2:2.

Authors

The names of the composers of the psalms have long been lost. In the collecting of these writings, the first concern was to preserve this great treasure. The identity of the authors went unrecorded.

Servant Ideal

Note the growth of the understanding of the ideal worshiper as poor, needy, humble, and meek (9:18; 10:17; 25:9; 34:2, 6; 37:11; 40:17; 69:32, 33). From such a model came the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 40—55.

Psalm Twins

Psalm 14 is a member of one of twin psalms. It appears first in Book 1 and then later in Book 2 as Psalm 53. The two are almost identical except for the names given to deity, showing the influence of Yahwist editors in one case and Elohist writers in the second. The other twins are Psalm 40:13-17 and Psalm 70.

Acrostics

Each verse or section beginning with a different Hebrew letter and in alphabetical order as an aid for memorization: 25, 35, 37, 119, 145.

orphan—the people for whom the prophets entreated and to whom Jesus dedicated his ministry.

Festivals, holy days, and other special occasions called for the use of psalms. At some festivals, the ark of the covenant was taken from the sanctuary and carried in procession through the community. The ark represented the presence of God.

In returning the ark to the temple, the priests were met at the gate by the keepers of the shrine who challenged their right to enter in a ritual like that found in Psalm 24:7-10. The priests and bearers of the ark requested entrance to the shrine:

> Lift up your heads, O gates!
> and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
> that the King of glory may come in.

The gatekeepers replied from within the temple:

> Who is the King of glory?

And the people bearing and following the ark gave reply in a way to identify their God and to confess their faith, ending with those triumphant words:

> Yahweh of hosts,
> he is the King of glory!

Psalm 15 represents a similar entrance liturgy. Here the challenge is to the worshipers themselves (as in 24:3-6) to test their fitness to come into the holy place. In reply, they testify to their moral purity, particularly to their honesty in dealing with their neighbors and with the poor. Psalm 15 ends with words of approval from the priest: "He who does these things shall never be moved."

Songs fit for the king

The last class of psalms singled out by Gunkel are the Royal Psalms. These royal hymns indicate the depth of commitment given by the Israelites to kingship in a way not apparent in the historical and prophetic books which reflect misgivings and criticisms about the king and the royal system. (The content of the Royal Psalms and related psalms has been discussed in chapter 12, "The Theology and the Politics of Zion.")

The Royal Psalms were part of the apparatus of the king's court, composed by his courtiers and sung by his servants and loyal subjects. With the words of Psalm 20, they sent the king out to do battle with the nation's enemies. When he returned from a successful campaign, they greeted him with Psalm 18.

When the king took a wife, the ancient words of Psalm 45, which may have been adapted from poetry used for the royal families of the Canaanite city-states, were sung to the new couple. Psalm 132 was sung in the royal court to celebrate the founding of the empire and the building of the temple. The vow which the king made when he was crowned can be found in Psalm 101. Songs used at the king's coronation or at the celebration of his crowning are 2, 21, 72, 110. The Messianic Psalms, the reign of the Lord hymns, and the Songs of Zion are related to the Royal Psalms.

Canaanite strands

Images of Canaanite folk tales were taken over into the songs of the Israelites and fitted to their own understanding of the world and its creation. Psalms 74 and 89 approach this material directly. The essence of the Canaanite tale is that in the beginning the supreme God (Yahweh) did battle with a great multi-headed monster whom Yahweh slew or bound up. That monster is remembered as Leviathan or Rahab.

So, in Psalm 74:13-14, we read of this battle at the time of creation:

> Thou didst divide the sea by thy might;
> thou didst break the heads of the dragons of the waters.
> Thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan,
> thou didst give him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

A similar reference appears in Psalm 89:10:

> Thou didst crush Rahab like a carcass,
> thou didst scatter thy enemies with thy mighty arm.

Even in the opening verses of Genesis, we catch a suggestion of the victory of Yahweh over the forces of chaos and evil before the beginning of creation.

Rooting out idolatry

The Psalms show the depth of the Israelite feeling against their neighbors' idolatry, a practice which threatened the faith of all who worshiped Yahweh. The condemnation of idolatry comes through strong:

> Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows (16:4).
> Thou hatest those who pay regard to vain idols (31:6).
> . . . those who go astray after false gods! (40:4).
> For all the gods of the peoples are idols (96:5).

And in Psalms 115:4-8 and 135:15-18, we find direct attacks on idolatry.

In the history given in Psalm 106, a psalm written during the Exile, we read of the past association of Israel with idolatry. This gives another reason for the concern about paganism: "they served their idols,/ which became a snare to them" (v. 36) and "sacrificed to the idols of Canaan" (v. 38).

To love the law and obey it

Psalm 1 does catch the commitment of the people of faith to "delight in the law of Yahweh" (v. 2). All that follows in the other 149 psalms supports this purpose.

The law is not just an outer expression. It produces sincere confession of sin, a longing for God's mercy, and a desire for cleanness of heart (19:7-14; 25; 51; 106). The people of God are patient in trouble, firm in their trust in God's deliverance, and grateful for God's mercies (25; 37; 40; 123; 124).

But more than these inner qualities was the outward expression of love for the law in faithful obedience (1; 19:7-14; 119). Such persons were the people of faith.

Psalms Outside the Bible

The Egyptians and the Babylonians were also writers of psalms. Their psalms, in fact, are older than the psalms of Israel by more than a thousand years.

Parts of Babylonian Psalms

Address
Praise
Lament
Petition
Vow of Praise

Canaanite Connection

Music and psalm writing flourished under Solomon. Israelite music reached a quality equal to that achieved anywhere in the world, gaining from contacts with Phoenician music. Canaanite psalms were adapted (29, 45, 18), but much poetry was newly composed.

Psalms Outside the Psalms

Song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10); Song of Moses and Miriam (Exod. 15:1-18); Song of Deborah (Judg. 5); Psalm of Jonah (Jon. 2:3-9); and Song of Hezekiah (Isa. 38:10-20).

Discovery

1. List three new discoveries or insights that have come from this study of the Psalms. Why is this discovery important? How has it changed or added to your knowledge?

2. Where are the unexplored frontiers in our study of the Psalms? On what items would you like more information? Explore ways to get additional information.

3. How do the Psalms add to our knowledge of Israelite history? What do they tell us about Israel and idolatry? about kingship in Israel? about God's concern for the poor and the oppressed?

4. Over one-third of the Psalms are psalms of lament. What might this tell us about the nature and need for worship in the Israelite experience? How has this shaped our first impressions of the Psalms?

5. How does the classification of the Psalms by literary types help our understanding of the Psalms?

Inventory

1. List the five types of psalms and identify two psalms that you think best fit each classification.

2. Describe the chief feature of Hebrew poetry and find three examples not given in the chapter.

3. How do the Psalms of Lament almost always end? Examine several such psalms and write out two such endings that illustrate this type most clearly.

4. Read the following Psalms of Lament and mark the place where the oracle of salvation may have been spoken by the priest which changed the mood of the prayer: Psalms 13, 28, 130.

Resources

The following books and articles will be helpful for a further study of the Psalms:

Anderson, Bernhard W. "The Praises of Israel," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapter 16, pages 502-27.

Gunkel, Hermann. *The Psalms*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1930 and 1967.

Westermann, Claus. *The Praise of God in the Psalms*. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1961.

The following articles in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* will also be helpful:

Hempel, Johannes, "Psalms, Book of," Volume 3, pp. 942-58.

Westermann, Claus, "Psalms, Book of," Supplement, pp. 705-10.

Werner, Eric, "Music," Volume 3, pp. 457-69.

Individual Thanksgiving

18, 30, 32, 34, 41, 66, 92, 116, 118, 138. Also 40:2-12.

Communal Thanksgiving

65, 67, 75, 107, 124, 129. Also 66:8-12.

Individual Laments

These psalms represent this kind of lament: 3, 5, 6, 7, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 28, 31, 35, 38, 39, 42, 43, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, 140, 141, 142, 143. Also 27:7-14.

Communal Laments

44, 74, 79, 80, 83. Also 58, 106, 125.

Psalms of Confidence

4, 11, 16, 23, 62, 131. Also 27:1-6.

Pilgrimage Songs

84, 122.

Imprecatory Psalms

35, 52, 58, 59, 69, 109.

Victory Songs

Contained within: 46, 48, 66, 76, 118.

History of Salvation

78, 105, 106, 111, 114, 149. Also 68.

Penitential Psalms

6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143.

Psalms Quoted in the New Testament

2, 8, 16, 17, 22, 27, 31, 38, 41, 42, 69, 80, 110, 118.

Prophetic Psalms

14, 50, 53, 75, 81.

Psalms of Nature

19, 29, 104, 148.

Psalms of Innocence

7, 17, 26, 27, 44, 59.

Wisdom Psalms

1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133.

Lord of Creation and History

33, 65, 103, 115, 135, 136, 146, 147, 148.

Liturgies and Dialogues

15, 24, 121, 134.

Hymns

100, 113, 117, 145, 150.

Hymns of Creation

8, 29, 104. Also 19:1-6.

Hymns of Zion

15, 24, 46, 48, 68, 76, 84, 87, 122, 134.

Reign of the Lord Hymns

93, 96, 97, 98, 99.

Messianic Psalms

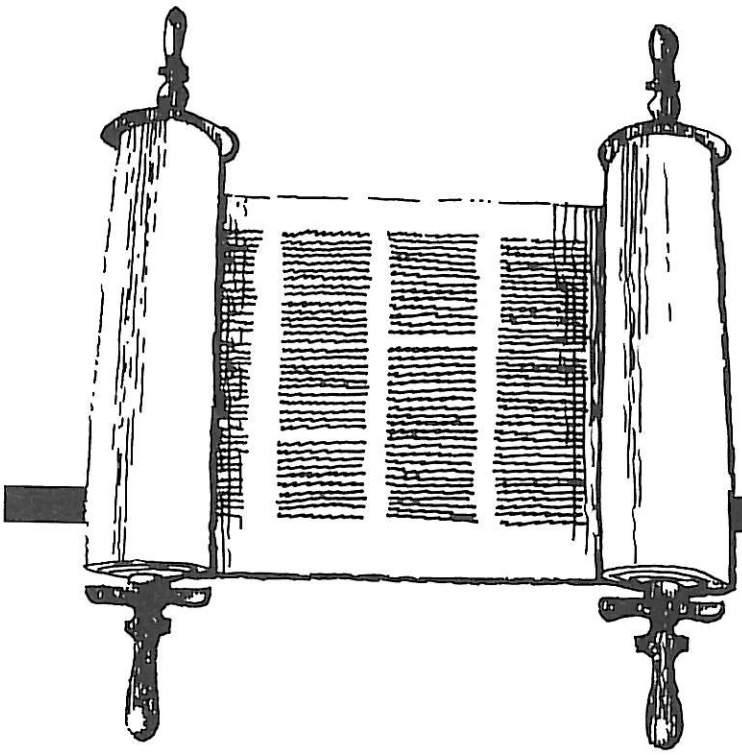
2, 8, 16, 20, 21, 22, 45, 46, 47, 48, 67, 68, 72, 89, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 110, 118, 132.

Royal Psalms

2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 61, 63, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144. Also 3, 22, 27, 41, 54, 57, 59, 86, 91, 92, 102, 127, 130, 138, 143.

Enthronement Psalms

47, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99.



PART VIII

Hanging Tough in Hard Times

CHAPTER 21

Visionaries and Revolutionaries

Gist

Much of the period between the close of the Old Testament record and the beginning of the New Testament events belonged to the Greeks. They added the Persian title over Asia to their earlier conquests in Europe. Even more than the Babylonians and Persians, the Greek rulers pressed their culture and religion on the Jews, who resisted every effort to make Yahweh a member of the Greek family of gods. In the process, the

After telling us how Jerusalem had been restored under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah in the fifth century B.C., the biblical records are blank for most of the fourth century B.C. We know that the Persians still continued to control Judah as well as Syria, Galilee, Transjordan, and Egypt. Babylon, where a large Jewish community continued to flourish, was also part of the Persian domain. But we know little of what was happening in these Jewish communities in Babylon, in Palestine, and at other places.

On the international scene, we know that the Persians were reaching out toward the west for new lands to conquer. But there they ran up against the Greeks. Darius had tried to invade Greece in 490 B.C., but was turned back at Marathon by the troops of Athens. Xerxes, his son (known as Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther), drove deeper into Greece and burned the Acropolis in Athens. But soon after this, in 480, his army was trapped and destroyed on the Greek island of Salamis. That ended the Persian dream of conquest in Europe.

Western Asia in the grip of Greece

But it was just the beginning for Greece. Within the next 150 years, united under Alexander who came from the province of Macedonia, Greece took on the world. Alexander quickly gained control over Asia Minor. Then, he began a drive toward the east.

Alexander appeared in Phoenicia and captured its city-states, including Tyre. After that, he moved south through Gaza. Egypt lost no time surrendering to the Greek forces. The year was 332 B.C. The small states of Judah and Samaria had nothing to gain by remaining with Persia. They too accepted the new Greek rulers without resisting.

Alexander treated the Jews kindly because he needed their cooperation in his drive toward the Persian centers of power in the east. He even enlarged Judean territory, giving Jerusalem control over cities that had earlier been part of the province of Samaria.

Alexander's drive toward Mesopotamia began in 331. He met the Persian forces at the Tigris River and cut them down. He moved on to take Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis. By 327 B.C., Alexander had carried

his campaign as far as the Indus River in India. At that point, his tired and homesick soldiers rebelled and would go no farther.

In five short years, Alexander had rolled across western Asia and taken firm control of all its lands. His empire had already included nations in Europe and northern Africa. Never before had such a large area of the world come under the influence of a single culture in such a short time.

Greece had conquered more than the physical resources of land, cities, and temples. It had subdued the realm of the spirit as well. Language, religion, education, and art in the conquered lands gave way rapidly to the Greek language, Greek religion, and Greek art. But not everywhere. Of all the peoples conquered by Greece, only the Jews survived culturally. Yet they won their victory only after a long and bloody struggle.

Greeks desecrated the temple with the abomination of desolation. The outrage sparked a drive for Jewish independence led by the family of the Maccabees. In this desperate struggle, the Book of Daniel provided examples of moral courage undergirded by a promise that God would eventually step into the turmoil and set things right. This hope was called apocalyptic.

Two Greek powers do battle over Judea

Alexander died in Babylon in 323 B.C. at the age of thirty-three. The gains of his lightning strike across western Asia had yet to be welded together. So his empire fell apart almost as quickly as it had been cobbled together. Three of his generals divided the shaky empire amongst themselves, splitting it into three parts.

Though the parts of Alexander's empire were often at war with each other, on one matter they continued to be united: Greek culture and religion would come first in their lands. Almost overnight, Greek became the chief language of all the conquered nations. New cities, such as Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt, were built as regional capitals. Though far from the land of Greece, these were genuine Greek cities. In fact, Alexandria surpassed the cities of the homeland and turned into the cultural center for the entire empire.

In the dividing of Alexander's empire, General Seleucus took over in Babylon and General Ptolemy got Egypt. That was clear and undisputed—a Greek state hovered over Mesopotamia and another straddled the River Nile. Western Asia had returned to its age-old divisions that had existed from before the time of Abraham and Sarah. And once again, Palestine had to pay the price for being caught in the middle between two rival powers. Both Seleucus and Ptolemy wanted to control the land that David had once ruled.

The Jews, of course, leaned toward Babylon. In Palestine, they now spoke Aramaic, Babylon's language, which since the time of the restoration had begun to replace ancient Hebrew. The Jews in Egypt were gradually turning to the Greek language.

But it was Ptolemy who first reached Jerusalem after the death of Alexander. So, in the beginning, the Greek power from Egypt held sway over Palestine. But this rule could not stand undisputed for long. In 312 B.C., Seleucus from Syria began to edge nearer and nearer toward Jerusalem. For a hundred years, Palestine was the battleground between the two Greek powers. The Jews in Jerusalem had to play one side off against the other. This went on for most of the third century B.C.

For a time, it seemed that Judea would end up in the sphere of the Ptolemies of Egypt. The Jewish community in Egypt was growing in influence. It translated the Hebrew Scriptures and other writings into Greek (the Septuagint). This opened up communication between Jews and non-Jews. It also meant that the Jews of Egypt were opening

Journal

Read the following passages and summarize in two or three sentences the events in each chapter:

Daniel 1—3
Daniel 7
1 Maccabees 1—4
2 Maccabees 7

themselves ever more to Greek culture. If Egypt had maintained its hold on Palestine, Judaism might have been completely taken over by Greek ways, via the Alexandrian Jews from Egypt.

But the Seleucid Greeks were gaining political and military power at a rate greater than the Ptolemies in Egypt. In 201 B.C., Antiochus III, also called Antiochus the Great, a Seleucid king, invaded Palestine and destroyed the Egyptian army. That put an end to the hopes of the Ptolemies for Judea.

Jews play Greek games in Jerusalem gymnasium

Antiochus III granted freedom to the Jews to determine their own affairs in Jerusalem. So, for a time, it seemed that they were at least as secure under the Seleucid empire as they had once been under the protection of the Persian kings.

But Antiochus got himself into trouble and that made life worse for the Jews. Having beaten Egypt, Antiochus saw himself as the major promoter of the Greek cause. He felt ready to take on the rising new power in Europe: Rome.

Strong as he was, Antiochus was no match for the growing might of the Roman legions. The Romans slammed the door of Europe as firmly in the face of the Seleucids as Greece had shut out the Persians 300 years earlier. Antiochus went down to a crushing defeat in 190 B.C. at Magnesia between Sardis and Smyrna in Asia Minor.

This setback for the Seleucid empire worked a hardship on the Jews. The Seleucid kings needed to raise funds to pay an annual tribute to Rome, one of the penalties for losing the war. Things came to a head under Antiochus IV who came to the throne in Antioch in 175 B.C. Finding that the empire was beginning to fall apart in the face of the growing strength of Rome, the new king, who would later call himself Antiochus Epiphanes ("the manifest god"), knew he had to do something dramatic to tie his empire together.

But first of all, Antiochus needed money. He had taken note of the various temples in his empire and saw that they had large reserves of gold besides valuable vessels and furnishings. He started out plundering temples in Syria and Babylon. Then he fixed his eye on Jerusalem. At the same time, he wanted to use Greek culture to bind his empire together. He built Greek cities throughout his realm giving their citizens special privileges.

A Greek gymnasium was built in Jerusalem and young Jewish men came to learn in it. Even some of the priests, neglecting their duties in the temple, began to visit this special center of the new culture. Greek sports and games were part of the program of the gymnasium but it was also a center for Greek learning and fashions of dress. Homage to the Greek gods was also part of the discipline.

While the priests and the ruling families were divided over whether to support the gymnasium, it soon became a thriving center of Greek influence within Jerusalem itself. It became a stark assault on Jerusalem's Jewishness. Since the players of Greek games wore no clothes while engaging in their games, many Jews were embarrassed by the mark of their circumision. Some men resorted to surgery to disguise the sign of the ancient covenant, a compromise seen as apostasy by conservative Jews.

In 169 B.C., Antiochus invaded Egypt and subdued the rulers of

Seed

Now in the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah, and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets (1 Macc. 1:54, 55).

But Maccabeus gathered his men together, to the number of six thousand, and exhorted them . . . keeping before their eyes the lawless outrage which the Gentiles

the house of Ptolemy. On his way back to Syria, Antiochus came to Jerusalem, and with the plotting of some traitorous priests, plundered the temple, removed the sacred furniture, and stripped the temple facade of its gold leaf (1 Macc. 1:17-24; 2 Macc. 5:15-21).

Antiochus puts a pig on the altar

At the same time, Antiochus began, in Jerusalem, a determined campaign of Hellenization (intending to shape Judea along Greek lines—Hellas being the name the Greeks applied to themselves). The priests had little choice but to comply. But the people resented the new moves to turn Jerusalem into a completely Greek city.

When the Jews rebelled, Antiochus sent one of his generals against the city with a large force. The battle-hardened soldiers treated the city brutally, slaughtering many people, looting shops and homes, and pulling down the city walls. Near the site of David's palace, they built a military garrison which soon became a fortified Greek colony.

Antiochus issued orders forbidding the practice of Judaism (1 Macc. 1:41-64; 2 Macc. 6:1-11). Sacrifices were forbidden and observances of the Sabbath and all festivals were banned. Copies of the Torah were destroyed and the circumcision of children was not allowed. All these bans against the religion of Judaism were backed by the death penalty for disobedience.

Pagan altars were erected throughout the land and unclean animals were offered to them. The Jews were forced to eat swine's flesh or be killed (2 Macc. 6:18-31).

The ultimate insult took place in December 167 B.C. An altar to Zeus, the chief god of the Greeks, was set up in the temple and swine's flesh offered on it. The Jews called this the abomination of desolation (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; 1 Macc. 1:54; cf. Dan. 8:13; Mark 13:14). Jews were made to take part in the feast of Bacchus, the god of wine, and in the monthly sacrifice in the king's honor (2 Macc. 6:3-7).

Antiochus had made his point. He intended to show that the Greek culture was superior in every way to Judaism. And he believed he had the power to carry out his wishes. Other nations, stronger and larger, had followed his lead. Why should this small country stand in his way?

He called himself Epiphanes, because like other kings, he believed that he was a god. Antiochus felt he was doing an honor to the Jews if they could only see it from his point of view. He was not trying to get rid of the God of the Jews. He only intended to make Yahweh a part of the family of Greek gods.

The Seleucid king must have been confounded by the resistance that arose to meet his policies. After years of living with the Canaanites and the Babylonians, the Jews had developed a deep opposition to idols that they would not easily set aside. Groups kept the Sabbath secretly and did not defend themselves when discovered and attacked because it was a holy day (1 Macc. 2:29-38; 2 Macc. 6:11). Women circumcised their sons even under threat of death (1 Macc. 1:60, 61; 2 Macc. 6:10). The leaders of the resistance and their followers were called the Hasidim (the pious, the loyal ones).

Daniel deals with a king gone mad

It was about this time that a book appeared that promised deliverance at the hands of a redeemer that God would send them. The

had committed against the holy place, and the torture of the derided city, and besides, the overthrow of their ancestral way of life. "For they trust in arms and acts of daring," he said, "but we trust in the Almighty God, who is able with a single nod to strike down those who are coming against us and even the whole world" (2 Macc. 8:16-18).

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever (Dan. 12:2, 3).

Each man sat under his vine and his fig tree,/ and there was none to make them afraid" (1 Macc. 14:12).

promise gave the people courage to hang on and to continue faithful to God. And should they die before deliverance would come, they would have immortal life.

The book was Daniel. The first half (chaps. 1—6) contained the stirring tales about Daniel and his friends in the court of Babylon during the days of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius. The people of Jerusalem quickly noted that the trials of Daniel and his friends were much like the troubles they were facing—being forced to eat food that was ceremonially unclean and ordered to worship a pagan king or an image that the king had set up. And though for their faithfulness to the Torah, these true Hebrews were thrown into a den of lions or into a fiery furnace, they survived.

The Jews of Judea had wanted to be obedient both to their king and to their God. But after the abomination of desolation, they despaired. They could see in Nebuchadnezzar and in the other kings of the Daniel stories the figure of Antiochus Epiphanes who had blasphemed God, persecuted the Hasidim, defiled the temple, suspended sacrifices, and abolished the law (7:21, 25; 8:9-13; 9:17, 27; 11:31; 12:11).

Because of his excesses and extreme actions, Antiochus came to be known by some as a madman. Nebuchadnezzar, the readers of Daniel discovered, had also been like that. Because of his evil ways, Nebuchadnezzar was for a time driven out from his court to eat grass like an ox (Dan. 4:33).

Daniel's Four Visions

The Four Beasts (7:1-28)
The Ram and the He-goat (8:1-27)
The Seventy Weeks (9:1-27)
The Revelation of the Angel (10:1—12:13)

The second half of Daniel is a collection of four visions in which history is reviewed in terms of symbols and images. Beginning with the days of Babylon's empire, the survey moves up to the time of Antiochus and just a few years beyond when God would intervene. The first vision of four beasts represents four world empires: Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. From the fourth beast comes a large horn that makes a large boast, a boast as outrageous as Antiochus's claim to be a god (7:8, 20). For a short time, the people of God would be delivered into the hands of this king, but afterward, they would be saved (7:21, 22).

The other visions, stated as prophecy, give additional details about the history that had led up to the persecution suffered in Judea during the reign of Antiochus. In each case, divine help saved the people of God. The he-goat of the second vision is Alexander (8:5-8). The "king of the south" and the "king of the north" who appear in the fourth vision are the Ptolemaic king of Egypt (the south) and the king of the Seleucid dynasty from Syria (the north) (11:5, 6). The struggle between the Ptolemy kings and the Seleucid kings is described in a thinly veiled account that ends in a reference to the desecration of the temple (11:31-39).

But in each vision appears a reminder of the mad Antiochus Epiphanes: the boasting horn of the first vision, the blaspheming little horn of the second, "the prince who shall come" in the third, and the furious "king of the north" in the fourth (7:8; 8:11, 12; 9:26; 11:15).

Waiting for God to break through

Daniel is named with Noah and Job in Ezekiel 14:14 as one of the ancient heroes of Israel, perhaps a patriarch from the days before Abraham. He is later cited as an unusually wise person (Ezek. 28:3). And when he appears in the Book of Daniel, he uses his wisdom to solve riddles and interpret visions. But it is his righteousness more than his

wisdom that commended him to the Jews who first read about him in this book. He remained true to the law and to God. Thus, he survived.

Though the Book of Daniel has the form of prophecy and though it features the deeds of a wise man, it is neither prophecy nor wisdom literature. It is an apocalypse. In the days following the Exile, the hopes for a restoration of a kingdom equal to the glory of that of David and Solomon had begun to fade. The hope for deliverance seemed dark indeed. Second Zechariah, Joel, and the disciples of Second Isaiah could only hope for an outside force that would break into history and restore the kingdom.

Now, in the even darker days of Antiochus Epiphanes, the apocalyptic message appeared again and in more detail. In Daniel's first vision, the people saw that the kingdom to come after the days of the four beasts would be set up by God as an everlasting domain (7:18). The persecuting king in the second vision would be broken "but, by no human hand" (8:25). In the last week of the third vision, the persecutor would be struck down (9:27).

The vision of the four beasts corresponds with the four metals of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (2:32, 33) in which the image was destroyed by a "stone . . . cut out by no human hand" (2:34, 45) and "the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (2:35). This was the kingdom that God would set up which would never be destroyed. It would stand forever (2:44).

The apocalyptic vision grew out of the prophetic conviction that history was under the control of God. But unlike the prophets, the preachers of the apocalyptic saw the solution to the troubles of the world coming from the outside. People within this world could not bring about change. They could only have faith that they would be delivered.

The message of Daniel to the loyal Jews was to stand firm. Some would have to pay with their lives, but they had the assurance that they would be raised to everlasting life (12:1-4), to become a part of the victory that God would shortly bring.

The writer of Daniel was likely one of the Hasidim, one who was resisting the persecution of Antiochus and doing everything possible to encourage others to do the same. At the time of this writing, the persecution was most fierce.

A little help from the Maccabees goes far

A veiled reference to the Jewish resistance to the persecution of Antiochus appears in the Book of Daniel. The writer says, "When they fall, they shall receive a little help" (11:34). The "little help" was the Jewish revolt led by Judas Maccabeus.

The uprising began with Mattathias who defied Antiochus's decree that altars be erected in every Judean town and that sacrifices be offered to the Greek gods. When the king's officer picked Mattathias to take the lead in the worship in his village, he refused. When another Jew stepped forward to make the offering, Mattathias killed both the Jew and the king's officer right by the altar.

That was the opening blow in the revolt of the Jews against the Seleucid kings. Mattathias and his five sons fled to the hills and invited all Jews who had a zeal for the law and for the covenant to join them. It turned into a guerrilla war waged against the Seleucid Greeks and those

Jews who supported Hellenistic ways in place of Jewish religion (1 Macc. 2:44-48).

The rebelling Jews destroyed the pagan altars and forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys they found. Being practical fighters, they suspended the Sabbath regulations for the duration of their struggle, so they could defend themselves on the holy days.

Shortly after the start of the revolt, Mattathias, already an old man, died, and the leadership of the campaign fell to his third son, Judas, who was nicknamed Maccabeus (1 Macc. 2:4), meaning "mallet-headed." Though a physical characteristic might have been the source of this nickname, it was later taken to refer to his vigor as a leader and as "the hammerer" of the enemy. The war that ensued became known as the Maccabean war and that time in history was called the Maccabean period.

Judas turned the Jewish resistance movement into a full-scale struggle for independence. Though he was reckless, he succeeded. He harried the Greek army units already in the country and then ambushed the reinforcements sent into Judah by Antiochus to quell the rebellion.

Fortunately for the Jews, Antiochus had far more serious problems to deal with on his eastern border where the warring Parthians were attacking him. He could not spare any units from his main army to settle the Jewish unrest. Even so, Judas Maccabeus and his followers were gravely outnumbered. But they waged such an aggressive campaign that in a short time, they outmaneuvered the forces sent against them, defeating them soundly.

Hanukkah

It was at the time of this winter festival that commemorated the dedication of the temple restored from the abominations of Antiochus that Jesus made one of his several visits to Jerusalem (John 10:22).

Judas marched in triumph toward Jerusalem and bottled up the Seleucid oppressors in their fortress. He began the work of cleaning up the desecrated temple in December 164, B.C., three years after its repulsive defilement (1 Macc. 4:36-39). The defiled altar was torn down and a new one built in its place. All materials associated with the cult of Zeus were removed. Priests who had remained loyal to God were installed in the temple service. Ever since, the restoration of the temple has been celebrated each year as the Feast of Hanukkah (Dedication).

At this point, the Old Testament period closes. But this was only the beginning of the Jewish struggle for independence. If we were to leave the story now, we would miss learning about the religious freedom and political independence that came for the first time since the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar 450 years earlier.

Maccabees foreshadow the messianic age

The record of that heroic period is carried by two of the four apocryphal books that carry the name of the Maccabees. The early Christian church cherished these records because of their witness to the faith and loyalty of God's people in the face of persecution and martyrdom. In the Apocrypha, we find 1 and 2 Maccabees; 3 and 4 Maccabees, with a related theme, are in the Pseudepigrapha.

First Maccabees is modeled on the books of Kings and Chronicles. The book gives a history of the period that began with the efforts of the Seleucid kings to turn Judea into a Greek province. The revolt that followed was led not only by Judas Maccabeus (3:1—9:22) but after him by two of his brothers: Jonathan (9:23—12:53) and Simon (13:1—16:17). After them, Judea was ruled for a time by Simon's son, John.

The book also took up from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah which brought the history of the Jews up through the Persian period. First Maccabees adds the story of God's people during the Greek era. Its message is much the same as that of Ezra-Nehemiah, affirming that God is in control of history, that God was watching over the people just as in other hard times.

First Maccabees recalls the examples of Abraham, Joseph, Phinehas, Joshua, Caleb, David, Elijah, and Daniel who were faithful to God and bravely faced many dangers (2:51-60). This proved that God would fight for them in the present struggle: "It is not on the size of the army that victory depends, but strength comes from Heaven" (3:19).

The Maccabees saw themselves as the agents of God's salvation from pagan oppressors. They burned with zeal for the Torah as did Phinehas in the days of Moses (2:26; cf. Num. 25:6-15). Judas was seen as the "savior of Israel" (9:21) in the tradition of the judges and kings of old (Judg. 3:9; 2 Kings 13:5). Jonathan, Judas's brother, judged the people at Michmash much as another Jonathan had served Israel at that spot (1 Macc. 9:73; cf. 1 Sam. 14:1-5).

During their time, the Maccabees did more than just restore religious freedom to the Jews; they also enlarged the borders of Judea, appealing to prophecies that foretold that Edom, Philistia, Ammon, and Moab would once more be part of the domain of Israel (1 Macc. 5:65, 68; Isa. 11:14; Obad. 21). It seemed that the messianic age was about to return and Simon was praised with messianic language equal to that used by the prophets (1 Macc. 14:4-15; cf. Mic. 4:4; Zech. 8:4-6, 12).

Martyrdom upgraded by the Maccabees

Second Maccabees covers much the same period as that covered by 1 Maccabees but with special emphasis on martyrdom and resurrection. It ponders the meanings of the events of the period and speaks about the greatness of the temple, and about the power and the justice of God. Angels are given special attention.

This book claims to have condensed a five-volume history of the period written by Jason of Cyrene (2:23), a book now lost. The book also shows that it had been influenced by Daniel, carrying on Daniel's belief in the resurrection of the dead. The martyrs in 2 Maccabees face death with the same brave faith as that of Daniel and his three friends (6:10—7:42; 14:37-46). For example, seven brothers and their mother were ordered by the Greek officers to eat swine's flesh. When they refused, they were brutally tortured. Then, the soldiers began to kill them one by one. As the second brother was dying, he said to his executioner, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws" (7:9).

Even though the period was one of much military activity, the writer saw that it was God who fought for them. Judas contrasted the faith of the pagans with the faith of God's people. He said, "For they trust to arms and acts of daring . . . but we trust in the Almighty God, who is able with a single nod to strike down those who are coming against us and even the whole world" (8:18).

Like the prophets, 2 Maccabees saw suffering brought upon the nation because the priests had taken on Greek customs and compro-

Inventory

Identify:

- **Alexander**
- **Alexandria**
- **Antioch**
- **Antiochus the Great**
- **Antiochus Epiphanes**
- **Daniel**
- **Hasidim**
- **Judas Maccabeus**
- **Mattathias**
- **Ptolemy**
- **Seleucus**
- **Zeus**

Explain:

- **Abomination of desolation**
- **Apocalypse**
- **Gymnasium**
- **Hellenization**

mised with pagans. But even in punishing the people, God continued to be gracious: "He never withdraws his mercy from us. Though he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people" (6:16).

Discovery

1. Who in the Grecian period were the visionaries? Who were the revolutionaries?

2. List the pressures put on the Jews to take on the culture of Greece. Order these on a scale from the most serious to the least important pressures.

3. Name the experiences and lessons from Israelite history that enabled the Jews to resist the massive assault on their faith and life.

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "The Unfulfilled Drama," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapter 18, pages 563-600.

CHAPTER 22

The Hidden Books of the Second Temple

When the Jews of Alexandria in Egypt, in about the third century B.C., decided to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek for the benefit of their children and their neighbors who knew no Hebrew, they included a number of books not considered by the Jews of Palestine as having authority. But at that time, the process of canonizing the Old Testament was not complete.

What books belonged to the Law and the Prophets was clearly understood. But no firm agreement had been reached about the large group of books called the Writings. This latter group included such works as Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and Daniel. While it was becoming clear that Psalms would be counted in, many books were as yet neither in nor out.

The Greek translators of what came to be called the Septuagint added more books than eventually would become part of the Hebrew canon—fifteen extra books or parts of books. It was a council of rabbis meeting in the Palestinian town of Jamnia in A.D. 90, that finally set the limits of the Hebrew Bible—the Old Testament as we know it today. These Jews in Palestine omitted these extra books now known as the Apocrypha.

Special revelation from hidden books

But the extra books continued to be copied with the Septuagint. Those early Christians who came from Greek-speaking synagogues were familiar with them and treasured them. In fact, the Christians continued to read these books during the early centuries of the life of the church even though the Jews had banned these books and eventually forgot about them.

Some of these books were apocalyptic. With the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the rabbis felt that the apocalyptic hope had proved false. They also feared that some of the extra books might carry Christian ideas into the synagogue.

Apocrypha means "hidden," a title implying that the books contained a special kind of wisdom. It was, in a sense, a title of honor because it suggested that the Apocrypha could impart a special authority to its readers. Later, because of the aura of secrecy that became attached to the books, they came to be regarded, without good reason, as heretical.

When the Apocrypha and other books of the biblical period are ignored, the church loses the wisdom and understanding of the age in which they were written, making part of history, rather than the books,

Gist

New light for the understanding of the Old Testament but especially for the New Testament can be found in both the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, collections of writings from the biblical period. They supply additional facts about the feelings, the fear, and the faith of communities that nurtured the early church, adding another dimension to our own reading of the inspired texts of the Bible.

truly a hidden age. To ignore the Apocrypha is to suffer a real loss. For then we have lost information that could fill out our knowledge of the New Testament. The same applies to the larger collection of books called the Pseudepigrapha, books that were not included in the Septuagint but which appeared in various communities from 200 B.C. to A.D. 100.

We have already looked at four of the fifteen items included in the Apocrypha: Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon (chapter 19), 1 and 2 Maccabees (chapter 21). A brief review of the other eleven books of the Apocrypha follows.

First Esdras—glory in the temple

Most closely related to the Old Testament is 1 Esdras. Its unknown author repeats material that appeared in several of the historical books: 2 Chronicles 35:1—36:23, all of Ezra, and Nehemiah 7:38—8:12. The writer wanted to glorify Ezra, the law, and the worship of God in the temple. Josiah and Zerubbabel got special mention for their reform of Israelite worship.

The book contains a tale, not found in the Old Testament, from the court of Darius, the Persian king. According to the story, three Jewish pages stage a competition for an award from the king. Each tries to convince Darius about the source of true wisdom. Zerubbabel wins and claims for his prize the king's permission for the Jews to return home and rebuild Jerusalem (1 Esd. 3:1—5:6).

Second Esdras—visions of Messiah

Unlike 1 Esdras, the kinship of 2 Esdras is with the New Testament, closely echoing many of its passages. While much of its material is from the pre-Christian period, the book was not completed until some time in the first century A.D.

Most of the book is a Jewish apocalypse. The heart of the book is seven revelations (chaps. 3—14) in which the visionary writer sees the secrets and mysteries of the world, especially as they have to do with the fall of Jerusalem and the wickedness of Rome (identified as Babylon). The visions speak of One who will come from the line of David in the last days to set things right in Zion (12:32). In another vision, the Messiah comes as a man rising "out of the heart of the sea" (13:3).

Second Esdras was popular in the early church and translated into various languages during the early centuries of the Christian era. The phrases "everlasting rest" and "eternal light" from 2:34, 35 soon became part of the prayers and meditations of the church.

Tobit—grassroots piety

The most popular story in the Apocrypha is a romantic tale of an Israelite family living in Nineveh. The time is the eighth century B.C. Tobit and his family are from the tribes of northern Israel and have been carried away by the Assyrians after the fall of Samaria in 722.

Though Tobit is forced to live in a pagan land, he does not eat non-kosher food (1:10, 11) and is always careful to aid the poor and to bury the homeless dead (1:17). But he has become blind and fears he will die.

Tobias, Tobit's son, comes to the rescue. Aided by the angel Raphael, Tobias goes on a trip and finds money for his family and healing for his father's blind eyes. With magic potions that seem to be lifted directly from the Arabian Nights, he also drives out an evil spirit who had

Journal

Write out in two or three sentences the main insights that you find in the following passages from the Apocrypha:

1 Esdras 3:1—5:6
2 Esdras 11—12
2 Esdras 14
Judith 16:1-17
Susanna
Bel and the Dragon
Prayer of Manasseh

Seed

When the young man went out, he lifted up his face to heaven toward Jerusalem, and praised the King of heaven, saying, "From thee is the victory; from thee is wisdom; and thine is the glory. I am thy servant. Blessed art thou, who hast given me wisdom; I give thee thanks, O Lord of our fathers" (1 Esd. 4:58-60).

"Await your shepherd; he will give you everlasting rest, because he who will come at the end of the age is close at hand. Be ready for

killed seven young men who had in turn married a young woman named Sarah.

Tobit is a slice of life from the Jewish communities in the countries outside of Palestine in the second century B.C. It reproduces the piety and moral teaching that must have been common to Jewish homes in New Testament times.

Judith—true believers as winners

Like Tobit, Judith is an adventure, a historical novel set in the days of the Assyrians when Nebuchadnezzar was out to subdue the Israelites. Nebuchadnezzar's general, Holofernes, finds his campaign blocked by the resistance of a town in the central hills of Palestine. Called Bethulia, the town seems to have been modeled on Shechem.

Holofernes lays siege to the town to starve its people into surrender. But Judith, a beautiful and religiously strict widow, contrives a plan to drive the Assyrians away. With her maid she enters the Assyrian camp, where Holofernes invites her to a private feast in his tent. When he falls asleep filled with rich food, Judith beheads him with his own sword. Dropping her trophy into the bag in which she had carried the kosher food that has sustained her while in the pagan camp, she slips away.

When the Assyrian soldiers find the headless corpse of their leader, they flee in terror and thus the siege is ended. "And no one ever again spread terror among the people of Israel in the days of Judith, or for a long time after her death" (16:25).

Written during the early days of the Maccabean revolt, between 150 and 125 B.C., the writer meant to encourage the Jews to resist their Gentile oppressors. Nebuchadnezzar, as in the Book of Daniel, is to be identified with Antiochus Epiphanes, for it was the latter king and not Nebuchadnezzar who wanted "to destroy all the gods of the land, so that all nations should worship [the king] only, and all their tongues and tribes should call upon him as god" (3:8).

Additions to Esther—improving a queen's image

When the Book of Esther was translated into Greek, slightly more than 100 verses were added to the book. Some of the additions were likely added by the scholar who translated the book from Hebrew, around 100 B.C. His aim was to supply what many found lacking in the book—a religious dimension and a mention of the name of God.

Here are the prayers of Mordecai and Esther (13:8—14:19). Whereas Esther, in the Hebrew text, gave no evidence of her Jewish consciousness, she now speaks with a bias against idols, reveres the temple, abhors "the bed of the uncircumcised" (4:15), and avoids all food not kosher (14:17).

Baruch—a fountain for repentance

This short book was written in the name of Baruch, the secretary and disciple of Jeremiah. It is, in part, an elaboration of material that appears elsewhere in the Old Testament. A confession of sins and a prayer for forgiveness (1:15—3:8) expands the prayer in Daniel 9:4-19 to fifty-four verses. The phrase "confusion of face" (1:15) has been taken over from Daniel 9:7, 8.

A poetic section on the "fountain of wisdom" (3:12) encouraged

the rewards of the kingdom, because the eternal light will shine upon you for evermore" (2 Esd. 2:34-35).

"Prayer is good when accompanied by fasting, almsgiving, and righteousness. . . . Those who perform deeds of charity and of righteousness will have fulness of life; but those who commit sin are the enemies of their own lives" (Tobit 12:8-10).

At that hour, that Son of Man was given a name, in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits. . . . He will become a staff for the righteous ones in order that they may lean on him and not fall. He is the light of the gentiles and he will become the hope of those who are sick in their hearts (1 Enoch 48:2, 4, translated by E. Isaac).

I acted in piety and truth all my days./ The Lord I loved with all my strength;/ likewise, I loved every human being as I love my children./ You do these as well, my children,/ . . . / and no act of human evil will have power over you (Testament of Issachar 7:6-7, from the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, translated by H. C. Kee).

In you we have put our trust, because, behold, your Law is with us,/ and we know that we do not fall as long as we keep your statutes./ We shall always be blessed; at least, we did not mingle with the nations (2 Baruch 48:22-23, translated by A. F. J. Klijn).

I said in my heart, "What is this inequality of activity which my father is doing? Is it not he rather who is god for his gods, because they come into being from his sculpting, his planing, and

his skill? They ought to honor my father because they are his work" (Apocalypse of Abraham 3:2-4, translated by R. Rubinkiewicz).

And he will redeem their souls from the day of death, for the whole creation that came from the dead earth will be subject to the power of death. But those who reflect upon the knowledge of the eternal God in their hearts will not perish (Apocalypse of Adam 6:2-3, translated by G. Macrae).

God's people to find true wisdom in the Torah (the commandments of God) (4:1-4).

The book must have been composed during a time of stress in the Jewish community, perhaps toward the end of the Maccabean period in the first or second century B.C. The writer called the people to repent and turn to God as Baruch and Jeremiah had called others in the days when Jerusalem was defeated and its people taken into captivity. The writer's hope for Judah was still for the return of the exiles: "Behold, your sons are coming,/ whom you sent away;/ they are coming, gathered from east and west" (4:37).

Letter of Jeremiah—idols debunked

This short essay, which has sometimes been added to Baruch as its last chapter, is an attack on idolatry. Perhaps inspired by Jeremiah 10:11, it gave the exiles a response when asked to worship in pagan temples: "The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens."

The writer feared that during the Greek period, God's people would yield to the temptation to worship at pagan shrines. Therefore, he held up to them the follies of idolatry ever returning to the refrain: "From this you will know that they are not gods; so do not fear them" (v. 23; cf. vv. 16, 29, 40, 44, 49, 52, 56, 65, 69).

Song of the Three Young Men—faith cools the furnace

This short piece has a long title: "The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men." It is the first of three items in the Apocrypha which were added to the Book of Daniel in the Greek versions of the Old Testament.

This material was added in Daniel 3 after verse 23. Azariah (better known to us as Abednego) was one of the three friends of Daniel sentenced to the fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar because he would not worship the golden image that the king had set up.

To the first readers of this tract, Nebuchadnezzar represented Antiochus Epiphanes, who had ordered the Jews to worship the images of the Greek gods which he had erected. Thus, they could take courage that they also would be delivered in their own generations. "Let all who do harm to thy servants be put to shame. . . . Let them know that thou art the Lord, the only God,/ glorious over the whole world" (vv. 20, 22).

Susanna—saved by Daniel's detective work

Of the three additions to Daniel, Susanna is the literary gem, among the finest of short stories in world literature, and perhaps the world's first detective story. It provided an arena to show that Daniel, even as a youth, was a wise man.

Susanna, the lovely wife of Joakim, is falsely accused of adultery by two elders who had plotted to seduce her. When she repulses them, their cry of adultery was to be their revenge. Susanna is about to be found guilty by the court, when Daniel steps forward, cross-examines the treacherous elders, and shows that they are lying.

Bel and the Dragon—false gods foiled

The third addition to Daniel makes fun of idolatry with two tales in which Daniel again displays his shrewdness, this time during the reign of Cyrus, the Persian.

Certain priests claimed that the image of Bel was indeed a real god. Each night, the god consumed all the food offered to it in the temple during the day. But through a sly trick, Daniel shows that it was the priests who were eating the food when the temple doors were locked.

In another case, the Babylonians were worshiping a dragon as a living god. But Daniel said that he would slay the dragon and thus prove that it was no god. When he did, the angry people forced the king to throw Daniel into a den of lions, but once more, Daniel survived, even after a six-day test.

Prayer of Manasseh—confession for hardened idolaters

Manasseh, that most wicked of Judean kings, introduced the vilest forms of idolatry into the temple and, thus, reversed the reforms of his father, Hezekiah. As punishment, Manasseh was taken captive by the Assyrians and dragged to Babylon in chains. There, he prayed a prayer of repentance to God. As a result, he was returned to Jerusalem and restored to his throne (2 Chron. 33:11-13).

The Prayer of Manasseh forms a masterpiece of penitence. Here were words to express the repentance of those who during later years had also been drawn into the error of idolatry.

The outside books—the Pseudepigrapha

Second Esdras concludes with a vision in which Ezra supervises the writings of the Scriptures. He dictated to five scribes for forty days, at the end of which time they had created ninety-four books (2 Esdras 14:37-48). Twenty-four of these books made up the Hebrew Old Testament which Ezra was instructed to make public: "let the worthy and unworthy read them" (v. 45).

But the other seventy were not to be made public: "keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people. For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom and the river of knowledge" (vv. 46-47).

If within this seventy are counted the fifteen books of the Apocrypha, this means there were more than fifty books known during the intertestamental period (200 B.C.—A.D. 200) that were considered valuable even though not included in the canon of Scripture.

For a long time, a number of these works were known to scholars in a collection called the Pseudepigrapha. Other books and parts of books have been discovered in recent years among the Dead Sea Scrolls, so that the number of books outside the canon may be approaching the seventy mark.

The term "pseudepigraphic" means "false title" referring to the fact that some of the writings in this group were said to have been written by such persons as Adam, Enoch, Moses, Isaiah, and other Old Testament greats. In ancient times, this was a proper device used by writers to bring their concerns to the attention of an audience. Theirs was a day when the older an idea could be shown to be, the higher the regard it received. To associate a doctrine with Adam, for example, was an assured way of winning a hearing for it.

But not all the works in the collection are of this nature. Some are simply anonymous, written by persons unknown. Their works include apocalypses, legendary histories, psalms, and wisdom literature. The rabbis knew these books as the "outside books" which would be a far better name than Pseudepigrapha—and easier to spell as well. We might also consider them part of the Apocrypha, differing only in that they had never been published in a collection between the Old and New Testaments.

Enoch—son of man imagery

Enoch, a large book of 108 chapters was well known to Jews and later to Christians. It is an important apocalyptic work and an interpretation of the history of God's people. It finds the presence of sin in the marriage of the heavenly and earthly beings mentioned in Genesis 6:2, which accounts for the origin of demons on the earth.

Like all apocalypses, Enoch predicts a coming judgment led by the Son of Man (46:1), a term later used by Jesus to describe his own role. However, in Enoch, the Son of Man, though named Messiah and the Elect One, is a mysterious, angel-like figure not portrayed in human form.

The source of this image is in Daniel's reference to "one like a son of man" (Dan. 7:13) but also has roots in the Suffering Servant (Isa. 42:1; 53:11). In Enoch, the Son of Man is the exalted and angelic protector of Israel. He executes judgment against kings and the persecutors of the righteous.

Jubilees—walling out the Gentiles

The writer of Jubilees meant to do for Genesis what the writers of Chronicles had done for the books of Samuel and Kings. He hoped to show that the law was carefully observed by the patriarchs and their families. The book parallels Genesis 1:1—Exodus 14:31, omitting material that would show the ancestors of Israel in a poor light.

Written in the last half of the second century B.C., it divided the whole history of the world into "jubilee" periods: cycles of seven years multiplied by seven, a revelation said to have been given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

The writer's intention was to draw a sharp line between Jews and Gentiles, hoping to save Judaism from the demoralizing effects of Greek culture. He gave us a good picture of Jewish life and thought in the two centuries before the Christian era.

Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs—confessions of sins

Inspired by the deathbed messages of Jacob (Gen. 49), Moses (Deut. 33), Joshua (Josh. 23—24), and David (1 KIngs 2), the writer of this tract went on to fill out the record with the last words of each of the twelve sons of Jacob. He gave some history about each of them, material closely related to Enoch and Jubilees.

Some of the speeches, like the Prayer of Manasseh, contain confessions of sin, showing that this form of prayer had growing value among the Jews in the days of the Greek empire.

Psalms of Solomon—a messiah for Gentiles too

The Psalms of Solomon have been modeled on the Psalms of the Old Testament, but are not the work of Solomon. Probably written by the

Pharisees, these psalms have notes for musical settings, evidence that these verses were sung in the synagogue.

Some of the eighteen hymns speak of a Messiah, whom God corrects as the "son of his love," as a "first-born" (13:8; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14), and as the "only begotten son" (18:4). The Messiah represented all of Israel, with the expectation that this person would rule over both Jews and Gentiles.

Assumption of Moses—undying as Elijah

A book that probably includes another called the Testament of Moses, the Assumption of Moses carries the legend that Moses, like Elijah, ascended directly into heaven. That this idea was widely known is shown by the reference in Jude 9 about the dispute between the archangel Michael and the devil for the body of Moses.

The assumption (or ascension) of Moses seems implied also in Mark 9:4 as Moses appears with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. And some interpreters have identified the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3 as Moses and Elijah.

Moses gives a charge to Joshua in this book in which he predicts that the end of days for Israel will be marked by a time of repentance. Another sign will be the reign of evil kings, an apparent reference to the Seleucid rulers. The apocalypse given here was written in the Maccabean period and revised in the first century A.D. It makes no mention of a Messiah. Instead, we see the archangel Michael subduing the devil.

Apocalypse of Baruch—the future turns on the Torah

Within these eighty-seven chapters is a prayer uttered by Baruch, the disciple of Jeremiah. He extols the law and says the righteous will be resurrected because they kept the law. The wicked will be punished because they neglected the law (chaps. 47—52).

Sometimes called Second Baruch to set it apart from the writing in the Apocrypha that also uses the name of Jeremiah's student, this book was written after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The writer, who refers to the Romans as Babylonians, had messianic expectations. The stress on the keeping of the law shows that this witness had concerns related to those of the Pharisees.

Apocalypse of Abraham—long a foe of idols

This book was written to show how Abraham fought against idols. After his conversion as a youth, Abraham became convinced that there was but one God. So, he began an attack on the extremes and evils of idolatry that he saw all around him.

Abraham was deeply concerned about the problem of evil and divine justice. He found the source of evil in the devil who appeared under the name of Azazel, although we are not told from where this evil one came.

From inside Palestine—five more books

All of the outside books mentioned so far seem to have come from Jewish communities in Palestine. The following five had a similar origin.

The Life of Adam and Eve is one of several books that enlarges on the life of the parents of the race. Written early in the Christian era, it

speaks repeatedly about final judgment and the resurrection, but it does not mention the Messiah.

The Martyrdom of Isaiah, written in the first century B.C., became part of a later Christian writing called *The Ascension of Isaiah*. In the earlier work, we are told that King Manasseh ordered Isaiah executed by being sawn apart (5:11-14), an incident also noted in Hebrews 11:37.

Lives of the Prophets contains the "remaining acts and words" of Jeremiah, most of a legendary nature and composed in the first century A.D. Paralipomena means "things omitted or left behind."

Testament of Job embellishes the Book of Job with a number of fanciful tales.

Third Maccabees— God protects the oppressed

Third Maccabees and the books that follow are works written outside Palestine.

Though it comes third in the series of books carrying the Maccabean name, the events chronicled here took place before 2 Maccabees. The Jews in Egypt suffered persecution under the rule of the Ptolemy kings, one of whom tried to exclude Jews from citizenship in Alexandria if they did not sacrifice in the royal temples.

The writer tries to explain that while the Jews are a unique people, they intend to be loyal to the Egyptian government. At the same time, they know that if they are steadfast in their faith, would-be persecutors will not oppress them. They will be protected by God, the "eternal saviour of Israel" (7:16).

Fourth Maccabees—martyrs prove the greatness of the law

Like 3 Maccabees, this book is really not a part of the Maccabean history, but an encounter of the Hebrew wisdom tradition with Greek philosophy. It was written in the first half of the first century A.D. (sometime between A.D. 18 and 37).

"On the Supremacy of Reason," which has sometimes been used as its title, better describes its theme. Its point is that the law really represents true philosophy: "Reason, then, is the intellect choosing with correct judgment the life of wisdom; wisdom is the knowledge of things human and divine and their cause. Such wisdom is education in the law, through which we learn things divine reverently and human advantageously" (1:16-17, translated by Moses Hadas).

Proof of the superiority of the law is in the courage of the martyrs who died for their faith during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. For the martyrs, reason is stronger than human passions. Their blood has the power to dissolve tyranny, to cleanse the nation, and to renew the observance of the law (1:11; 17:21; 18:4). The martyrs have shown that "the Hebrews alone are invincible in virtue's cause" (9:18).

The writer affirms the teaching of Socrates, the great Greek philosopher, that it is better to suffer evil than to do evil. He sees that the evildoer is more miserable than the one who has been hurt (9:30).

Aristeas—booster for the Torah

A Jewish writer from Alexandria in Egypt set out to tell a romanticized version of how the Torah came to be translated into Greek. It happened, said Aristeas, who claimed to have been an eyewitness and a participant, during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283-247 B.C.).

The Jerusalem high priest, at the request of the Alexandrian library, sent seventy-two scholars to Egypt, who made the Greek translation in just seventy-two days. The king was pleased and the Alexandrian Jews were grateful.

The story is fanciful and tells us much about the eagerness of the Jews to make their way in a Grecian world by showing that the Jewish heritage, particularly the Torah, was superior in every way to Greek philosophy. But in the process, Greek and Jewish traditions were being intertwined.

Apocalypse of Adam—sample of spiritualism

This book only came to light in 1958 when it was discovered in a large collection of papyrus scrolls unearthed in Egypt at Nag Hammadi in 1946. It had been written in Coptic, an ancient Egyptian language.

This tract is an example of Gnostic thought, a spiritualist religion that appeared in Christian communities in the second century A.D., but which appeared earlier in Jewish writings.

Questions Addressed by the Queen and Answers Given by Solomon

More of the ever popular stories of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba appear in this book. It is an example of the riddle form in wisdom literature.

Sibylline Oracles—Greek in place of Hebrew verse

In this collection of fifteen books, we have the gathered prophecies and wise sayings from both Jewish and Christian sources, all written in Greek verse form. Sibyl was a Greek prophet. Her oracles were reported throughout the Greek and Roman world. Those writings inspired these Christian and Jewish imitations, showing that Jews could not separate themselves from the literary climate in which they lived.

From Alexandria and other sources

An early hymnbook, *Odes of Solomon* put the joyful thanksgiving of early Jewish Christians into language similar to that found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Testament of Abraham gives us some of the events related to the death of Abraham. The angel Michael comes for Abraham's soul, but the great pioneer refuses to die and the angel is too shy to insist.

The Ladder of Jacob turns Jacob's vision at Bethel into a futuristic vision that included the Romans.

Also known as the Slavonic Book of Enoch or 2 Enoch, *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch* was written at Alexandria during the first century A.D. It describes Enoch's ascension through the seven heavens and the revelations given to him along the way.

The Story of Joseph and Asenath, probably written in Egypt, tells of the conversion of Asenath and her later marriage to Joseph. This was a document meant to serve as a missionary tract to attract Egyptians to Judaism.

Students of the Bible benefit from every item of information they can glean from whatever source it might come. The study of the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha have proved most fruitful during recent years.

Inventory

What do the following words mean?

- **Apocrypha**
- **Jubilee**
- **Pseudepigrapha**
- **Torah**
- **Wisdom literature**

Identify these people:

- **Antiochus Epiphanes**
- **Azariah**
- **Baruch**
- **Bel**
- **Holofernes**
- **Judith**
- **Manasseh**
- **Sibyl**
- **Socrates**
- **Susanna**
- **Tobit**
- **Tobias**

Discovery

1. List three ideas that have come to you as a result of this survey of the hidden books. What meaning do each of these ideas have for your understanding of the biblical period of history?

2. Contrast the books of canonized Scripture (Old and New Testament) with these uncanonized or partly canonized hidden and outside books. How are they similar? How are they different?

Resources

The Apocrypha is available as part of certain editions of some of the most commonly used English translations and versions of the Bible: King James Version, American Revised Version, Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, New American Bible, Jerusalem Bible, and Today's English Version.

Charlesworth, James H. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1983 and 1984. Two volumes. Volume I: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments. Volume II: Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Other Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works.

Fritsch, Charles T. "Apocrypha" and "Pseudepigrapha," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Volume I, pp. 161-66; Volume III, pp. 960-64. See also separate entries for the various books in each collection.

CHAPTER 23

Setting the Stage for the New Covenant

When we arrive in the world of the New Testament, we soon discover that we're really not far from the province of the Old. For almost at once, we meet the Torah. Very soon, we are overshadowed by the temple. And the dream of a return to kingship has not been forgotten.

Far from being left behind, the Old Testament has come into the New Testament world ahead of us. But now we meet new names like Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, and Zealots. We hear of synagogues and of scribes. And from other sources we are told of Essenes and Gnostics. But even these are rooted in the Old Testament world.

Days of home rule with the Hasmoneans

After the successful revolt of Judas Maccabeus against the Seleucid Greeks of Syria, the Jews experienced a measure of home rule. For about a hundred years, a series of kings from the priestly Hasmonean family ruled over Judea. (See "A Little Help From the Maccabees Goes Far" in chapter 21.) The period was marked by a heated rivalry between two parties: the Pharisees and their opponents, the Sadducees. Their constant bickering, marked by deceit and wholesale murder, finally brought an end to the short period of independence and the beginning of Roman rule.

The best known of the Hasmonean priest-kings was John Hyrcanus (135-104 B.C.) who moved to reconquer more land and enlarge the country to the borders that it had during the days of David. The Pharisees objected to the involvement of priests in such military activity. They noted that because David had been a fighting man, he had not been allowed to build the temple (1 Chron. 28:3).

During the campaigns of John Hyrcanus, the Jews destroyed the temple which the Samaritans had built at Mount Gerizim early in the Greek period. This outrage in about 128 B.C. only heightened the hostility between the Judeans and Samaritans. It put an end to any hope for a healing of the great division in the family of Israel that went as far back as the days following the death of Solomon.

A later Hasmonean ruler was Salome Alexandra (76-67 B.C.). One of the leading Pharisees of the day was her brother (Simon ben Shetach). Through this family, the Pharisees became influential in government, replacing the Sadducees who had been close to previous rulers because they, like the Hasmoneans, came from priestly families.

Gist

Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, Zealots, and Essenes play key parts in the course of New Testament events. All of them have roots in the Old Testament, but the waning years of the Greek empire and the coming of Roman rule fixed their roles. By teaching the Law in the synagogues, the Pharisees along with the scribes put the ancient covenant at the center of Jewish life, forming a bulwark against such pagan temptations as Stoicism and Gnosticism. More rigorous and

sectarian in promoting the Law were the Essenes who eventually withdrew from society to build a more disciplined society at Qumran. The Zealots chose to defend the Jewish community with the political and military acts which the Pharisees avoided. The Sadducees chose to cooperate with the foreign forces because they valued the temple as well as the Torah as the essence of their heritage.

Journal

Five of the groups that shaped the life of first century Palestine are mentioned or alluded to in the passages listed below. Read them and write a paragraph about each group as these records describe them. Leave space between each paragraph. After you have studied this chapter, add some new insights gained.

Hasidim: 1 Macc. 2:42-51

Pharisees: Matt. 23:1-3

Sadducees: Matt. 22:23-28; Luke 20:27-33; Acts 4:1-3; 23:6-10

Essenes: Col. 2:16-23

Gnostics: 1 John 2:22-25; 4:1-3; 1 Tim. 4:35; 6:20

Two appeals to Rome a loss for all Judea

The struggle between the Pharisees and Sadducees for power in Judea became so fierce that eventually both sides appealed to an outside power to settle their feud. But they both petitioned the same outsider—General Pompey, the Roman military governor based in Damascus.

Pompey chose not to take sides. Instead, in 63 B.C., he invaded Jerusalem and claimed it for the Roman emperor. He stormed through the gates of the temple and into the Holy of Holies. However, he did not remove any of the sacred vessels or violate the temple further.

From that time on, the real power in Judea belonged to the Romans. They appointed as high priests and governors those Jews who would bend themselves to the Roman will. One who ruled Judea for the Romans for many years was Herod the Great, a member of a family linked to the former Hasmonean kings. Herod took hold of Jerusalem in 37 B.C. and was partial to the Pharisees because they were popular with the people. Thus the Pharisees were important shapers of the New Testament period.

Hasidim—lay guardians of the law's purity

The Pharisees had a kinship with the Hasidim who appeared in the time of the Maccabeans. (See "Antiochus Puts a Pig on the Altar," chapter 19.) The Hasidim ("the pious people"), utterly loyal to the law of Moses, had formed the backbone of the resistance to the inroads being made by the Greek kings who ruled Palestine and the Greek culture that had begun to seep into all phases of Jewish life from language to dress to religion.

For the most part, these guardians of the purity of the Law were lay people, not priests. While they may have had some contact with the priests (the Maccabees themselves came from a priestly family), the Hasidim opposed those priests who had betrayed the faith by cooperating with their Greek oppressors (1 Macc. 7:12-17).

The Hasidim had supported the rebellion against the Seleucid Greeks led by Judas Maccabeus and his family. But they were cool to the Hasmoneans who inherited the power of the Maccabean victory and who set themselves up as a new royal family. Even though the hope for a return of kingship had been a force in Jewish thinking from the day Jerusalem fell to Babylon, the Exile experience gave the Law new power as the memory of kingly power faded.

Although the Hasmoneans improved the status of the priests and even revived the ancient office of high priest, priestly rule in the century before the birth of Christ seemed to the Hasidim and their successors—the Pharisees, the Zealots, and the Essenes—a pale substitute for the authority of the Law. Kings and priests were easily swayed by the temptations of Greek glory and power. The law of Moses was not so easily moved.

From the Hasidim came the Pharisees, lay leaders who saw themselves as defenders of the ancient law of Judaism and the covenant with Yahweh that it embodied. Priests dissatisfied with the compromises being made by the ruling priestly class were certainly among those who joined the ranks of the Pharisees.

Center of gravity in the Torah

While the Second Temple stood at the center of Jerusalem and became the source of power for the petty kings and priestly pretenders who hovered around it, the center of gravity of Jewish life was no longer in the temple. For it was Torah and not the temple that had kept Judaism alive during the dark years of the Exile. After the Jews had returned to Palestine and rebuilt the temple, they soon discovered that they were no longer the people of a shrine but they were the people of a book.

It was the Torah that reminded them of the old stories of God's covenant and of God's acts of salvation. The Law more than the temple told them who they were. Indeed, they found the Torah to be for them the "Book of Life." Whereas the temple was fixed in one spot and the faithful had to travel many miles to sense the special presence of God, the Torah could be carried to Palestine, to Babylon, to Egypt—to anywhere in the world. The temple in Jerusalem could be desecrated by a pagan king like Antiochus Epiphanes, interrupting the worship at the temple, but the Law would always be available.

The conviction grew that it was the neglect of the Torah that led to the fall of Jerusalem and the judgment of the Exile. Thus more attention needed to be given to the study and the keeping of the Law so that such a crushing discipline might never visit them again. Their experience in history and their misery during the Exile was overwhelming evidence of the great danger of neglecting the covenant.

Gradually, the Torah created a new community with a circle of defenders in the scribes who were willing to risk life and limb not only to protect the Law, but to assure that it not be demeaned by neglect. The scribes, who eventually merged with the Pharisees, had their origin in the wisdom tradition of Proverbs (Sirach 38:24—39:16) and in the example of Ezra, who so zealously promoted the Law (Ezra 7:12). Their task was to help the people understand the Law (Neh. 8:7). They also mounted a rigorous defense of Jewish life against the power of Greek culture.

Unwritten law that was a revolution

But the careful study of the Law by these zealous scribes showed that the Torah did not speak to all the questions raised by a new age. The Law needed to be adapted to changing conditions. Gradually, a body of oral interpretation grew up around the Torah that began to have authority equal to the written word. Such was the case alluded to in Mark 7:1-8, where the oral tradition required a ritual washing of hands. This simplified the stricter command of the written law which in these cases required that the whole body be washed.

To guard the oral traditions soon became a duty as urgent as the protection of the written law. The Pharisees, by developing an oral unwritten code to bring the written law up to date, found a creative way to keep the Law alive. And in so doing, they kept the historical covenant on which the Law was based at the center of Jewish life.

While the written Law was fixed and unchangeable (not an iota could be altered), the Pharisees through their teachings were expanding the scope of the Law. Though they were not a new order of prophets, like the prophets before them, they spoke the will of God. They became lawgivers somewhat after the order of Moses. In every generation, the

Pharisees "sat in the seat of Moses," a phrase that even Jesus applied to them (Matt. 23:1-3).

Yet the Pharisees never confused the oral tradition and the written Law. They knew the Torah as teaching, statutes, judgments, testimonies, and precepts. They never applied these terms to their oral traditions which they knew only as decrees and ordinances. Their oral teaching was given in generalities, never tied to historical events or persons as was the Torah.

The Pharisees, while they were not revolutionists, were still revolutionary in their openness to new light. With their understanding of the development of oral tradition within their own generation, they were open to such new doctrines as the resurrection, even though it was not taught in the Torah.

Hallmark of the Pharisees in the synagogue

The most important contribution of the Pharisees was the synagogue. It provided a place where the people of faith might come together for the reading of Scripture, for prayer, and for mutual support. It was not a temple nor was it intended to take the place of the temple. The Law did not allow for any other sanctuary except the one in Jerusalem.

Yet the synagogue did provide the faithful with an experience of God through the saying of prayers. While we do not know the precise origins of the synagogue, we know that the synagogue prayers paralleled the worship in the temple. As sacrifice was offered daily in the temple in the morning and the evening for all the people, prayers were offered in the synagogue and the first chapter of Genesis was read.

The beginnings of the synagogue likely go back to the period of the Exile in Babylon where Jews surely gathered together to pray and read the Law (Ezek. 8:1; 14:1; 33:30, 31). As the Law grew in importance for the life of the people, the synagogue as a place for its reading and study must have spread. In the century before the birth of Christ, synagogues were a part of every town with a Jewish community.

Synagogue of the Pharisees

The synagogue was a uniquely Pharisaic institution. No Sadducees were ever found in it. In the earliest reference to a synagogue, we discover that it was an assembly of scribes (1 Macc. 7:12).

Grace and works in the right order

For centuries, Pharisees have been demeaned as petty legalists who taught salvation by works. Worse, they have been targeted as hypocrites who missed the meaning of God's revelation.

As the leading teachers in Israel, they always kept grace and works in the right order. Basic to their faith in God was the understanding that obedience to the Law could in no way win the favor of God. Rather, it was only through the grace and mercy of God that Israel had been chosen. The keeping of the Law was the joyful response of the people to God's grace. Obedience defined the believer's place in the covenant, a position which could not and need not be earned because it was a gift from God.

Quite clearly, the Law was important to the Pharisees. But it was important because it meant covenant and grace. God had given the Law following the choosing of Israel. The Law carried the assurance that God would maintain the election of Israel as well as the expectation that the chosen people would do God's will.

This covenant carried the understanding that God rewards obedience and punishes sin. It was also a promise that opened the way of salvation for those who had sinned and fallen away from their relation-

Seed

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20).

For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the traditions of the elders . . . and there are many other traditions which they observe. . . . (Mark 7:3, 4).

One sabbath when he went to dine at the house of

ship with God: to accept the grace and mercy of God in faith and respond to God's love in grateful obedience to the will of God as defined in the Law. The Pharisees were clear that atonement was through God's mercy and not by human effort.

The bitter controversy that arose between the church and the synagogue in the early years of the Christian era has left us with a largely negative view of the Pharisees. A more careful study of their history shows that they were as faithful as the prophets who came before them in maintaining the integrity of the covenant of old.

Sadducean protectors of the Pentateuch

The power of the Pharisees was such that they could establish themselves as spokesmen for the Law, a right that had formerly been in the hands of the priests. The priests, who were limited to the confines of the temple, were allowed only to preside over the flow of rituals. But they still saw themselves as protectors of the written Law against the inroads of the oral tradition.

The priestly party came to be called the Sadducees, a name that came from Zadok, who was Solomon's chief priest (1 Kings 1:8; 2:35) and the father of the line of Jerusalem priests. It was this priestly group that provided leadership for the Jews during the dark days of the Exile and even during the discouraging years afterward.

The Sadducees, like the Pharisees, had a strong commitment to the Torah. They were even more strict than the Pharisees for they honored only the written Law. They granted no power to the oral traditions being collected by the Pharisees. And they rejected new doctrines developed since the time of the Exile such as resurrection after death, belief in angels, and speculations of the apocalyptic kind which looked for the coming of a supernatural event of deliverance (Matt. 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 4:1, 2; 23:8). These doctrines and notions were not found in the Pentateuch, and for this reason, the Sadducees rejected them. So the Sadducees were, in a sense, conservatives in matters of doctrine when compared with the Pharisees.

They were also interested in the temple cult and especially concerned to see that the rituals of the temple were carried out by qualified priests. This was their highest concern. They were willing to make almost any compromise to make sure that temple worship and ritual stayed in place. Thus they cooperated with the worldly Hasmonean priest-kings (with whom the Sadducees shared a common world view) as well as with the Roman rulers and their puppets.

Many cultures blending in one language

With the coming of the Romans, Judea was again part of a world empire. Yet the domain of Rome was not much different from the Greek empire of which they had so long been a part. Though Rome had taken over the Greek holdings in western Asia and in Egypt, Greek culture and language had in more than two centuries become so deeply set that it would take much more than an army and a military governor to root them out.

Most of the civil service for the Roman government in western Asia and Egypt was staffed by Greeks, making Greek the official language for the region. The kind of Greek that was spoken was called "Koine" which means common—it was the language spoken by people

a ruler who belonged to the Pharisees, they were watching him (Luke 14:1).

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night . . . (John 3:1).

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial." And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all (Acts 23:6-8).

And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he called apostles . . . and Simon who was called the Zealot . . . (Luke 6:13, 15).

of all classes. It was neither a literary language nor was it the classical Greek of Athens. But it was the Greek that provided the bridge for contact between the various national groups in Asia. Widely used, Koine Greek was a robust and colorful language, yet simple. It became a keen instrument for the later evangelistic efforts of the early church.

The Greek language was the bearer of several cultures—not just the culture of the Grecian homeland. During the centuries that the Greeks were in Asia, they were also shaped by the religions of Asia. These cults gained followings in both Greece and in Rome. So through the Greek language all kinds of religions and philosophies—from Babylon, Phoenicia, Egypt, and other places—circulated widely.

Many of these religions began to blend into each other. The gods of one nation were seen as the same as the gods of all other places. Some even saw the various gods as the expression of the one divine being who ruled the universe, showing a tendency toward monotheism.

The religion and astrology of Babylon which gained a wide following led people to become fatalistic, feeling that their future had been decided by the stars. Various mystery rites were undertaken to break the hold of fate.

Between the Testaments

B.C.

- **175-164: Antiochus IV (Epiphanes)**
- **167: Maccabees revolt against Seleucid Greeks**
- **167-63: Hasmonean kings: time of independence**
- **135: John Hyrcanus**
- **67: Salome Alexandra**
- **63: Rome gains Syria and Palestine**
- **37-A.D. 4: Herod the Great governs Palestine for Rome**

Seeing the world through gloomy eyes

Stoicism was the most popular philosophy of the day. It had been taught by Zeno of Phoenicia, and had won many followers among the Greeks. At its heart was individualism. Where the Greeks had once looked forward to the ideal city-state, the disorder and chaos of a military empire inspired no visions of a community of peace and order. Out of despair and pessimism about a better world, each individual was driven to make the best of life, paying attention mainly to manners and personal conduct.

One response to Stoicism was Gnosticism. It too was pessimistic about a better world which had for so long been the goal of the Greek philosophers. The world, in fact, was seen by the Gnostics as an evil place. The only salvation from this world was through a special knowledge (*gnosis* in Greek, and hence the name of the movement) that would be revealed in a mysterious way. In spite of its appeal to knowledge, Gnosticism's wisdom, rather than giving facts or evidence, was mere mysticism based on the idea that the person is trapped in an evil body and held down by evil powers.

Faith's zeal drawn to heaven's battlefield

The world view of Judaism in the Roman period was fired by apocalypticism—the belief that the struggles on this earth were only shadows of the battles being fought in heaven, wars whose victories would benefit the faithful people of God on earth (Dan. 10:10-21). It was this kind of hope that provided the zeal for the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Greek kings and enabled the Jews to win their independence.

But in the days that followed, some Jews took the apocalyptic vision more strictly than others. Whereas some, like the Pharisees, were willing to cooperate with pagan forces such as the Romans in order to maintain their community life, others resisted all alien forces or withdrew from society. These were the Zealots and the Essenes.

Covenant for the people of the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Essenes, like the Pharisees, had their origin in the Hasidim, the pious zealots for the Law. When the Pharisees shared power with the Hasmonean royal house during the reign of Salome Alexandra, the Essenes objected to such a compromise with rulers who did not strictly observe the Torah.

In about 76 B.C., the Essenes withdrew from society and went into the desert to establish a proper religious community. The place where they gathered was Qumran, on the barren hills on the west side of the Dead Sea. Theirs was a highly moral community in which the rituals of the Pentateuch were carefully observed. They lived a strict monastic life under the rule of priests and elders. They saw themselves as the holy remnant of Israel, a nucleus of God's people ready for the end times.

They called themselves people of the new covenant. This covenant was both a renewal of the old covenant that God had made with the people and the eternal covenant which should take effect at the end of days.

It is not likely that all the Essenes lived at Qumran. They were aggressive as missionaries and established many new communities, particularly during the reign of Herod the Great. Since they felt that contact with Gentiles and those who did not observe the laws of purity would bring contamination, they avoided the larger towns and cities, but they probably had followers in most of the villages and towns of Palestine.

Though they regarded the temple most highly, the Essenes would not go near it while it was in the charge of the priests appointed by the Hasmonean family. When Herod the Great ruled over Palestine, he was careful to win the favor of the Essenes. During Herod's long reign, the Essenes left Qumran and returned to Jerusalem and worshiped at the temple. Herod had installed a line of priests with credentials approved by the Essenes.

We can learn a great deal about these people from the Dead Sea Scrolls which include the writings they collected, copied, and studied most diligently at Qumran. One of their purposes in the study of the Scriptures was to show that all prophecy was being fulfilled in their day. They thought the end times were near, seeing them in terms of the holy wars of the Old Testament. They were careful to obey the laws of purity as preparation for their part in that approaching conflict which would require sacred people with clean bodies and pure hearts (Exod. 19:10-16; Ezek. 44:9-31; Deut. 23:10-14).

Of the stuff of martyrs made

Following the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C., the Essenes in Jerusalem returned to Qumran to avoid contact with the Romans who came to Palestine to exercise their power more directly.

Those who opposed the Romans more openly were the Zealots. This group appeared first in 6 B.C. as a resistance movement led by Judas the Galilean. It was in this year that Judea was made a Roman province.

In their beliefs, the Zealots were close to the Pharisees. They observed the Sabbath strictly and were most rigorous in their practice of the rules of purity. They required circumcision even of the heathen.

Inventory

Identify the following:

Antiochus Epiphanes
Dead Sea Scrolls
Essenes
Gnostics
Hasidim
Hasmoneans
Herod the Great
Judas the Galilean
Koine
Maccabees
Mount Gerizim
Pentateuch
Pharisees
Pompey
Qumran
Sadducees
Seat of Moses
Sicarii
Stoicism
Torah
Zealots
Zeno

They interpreted the First Commandment to mean that no one but God could be honored as king. Therefore they could accept no pagan as their ruler. They would pay no taxes to the emperor because this would be idolatry and disloyalty to Yahweh. As devout patriots, they found the Roman occupation of their country galling and humiliating.

The Zealots expected that military force would have to be used against the heathen in their land as well as against those Jews who did not keep God's law. The models for their zeal were Phinehas and Elijah, and, of course, the Maccabees. They scorned death and accepted martyrdom willingly. Though vastly outnumbered and not well armed, they attacked the foe with reckless abandon believing that God would come to their aid.

These guerrilla fighters received broad support from the youth and common people of Palestine because they were also concerned about injustice and oppression. When they conquered Jerusalem in the Jewish Revolt of A.D. 66, they destroyed the records of debt. Later, one of the Zealot leaders set all the Jewish slaves free.

The Zealots were, from time to time, active in harassing Roman garrisons and troop movements. One of their bands was known as the Sicarii ("the daggers") because of their secret attacks. The Romans called them "robbers."

When the golden eagle at the temple gate fell

It was in the year 4 B.C., near the end of the reign of Herod the Great and about the time of the birth of Jesus, that the Pharisees, who like the Essenes had been favored by Herod, turned against Herod. They worked with members of Herod's household in an effort to gain his overthrow.

They also encouraged their students to cut down the golden eagle that Herod had put up over the main entrance to the temple as a sign of Roman might. The high priest Matthias, it is said, was also involved in the conspiracy.

Herod promptly replaced Matthias with another priest, an appointment resisted by the people. Eventually, Herod caught the leaders of the attack on the Roman standard and buried them alive.

The curtain was coming down on the era of the Old Testament and a new drama was about to begin. It was in this year that Jesus of Nazareth was born.

Discovery

1. Describe in twenty-five to fifty words some things that people in Palestine in the first century B.C. and first century A.D. were thinking about. What seems to have been their world view?

2. Three things that belonged to Jewish life were king, Law, and temple.

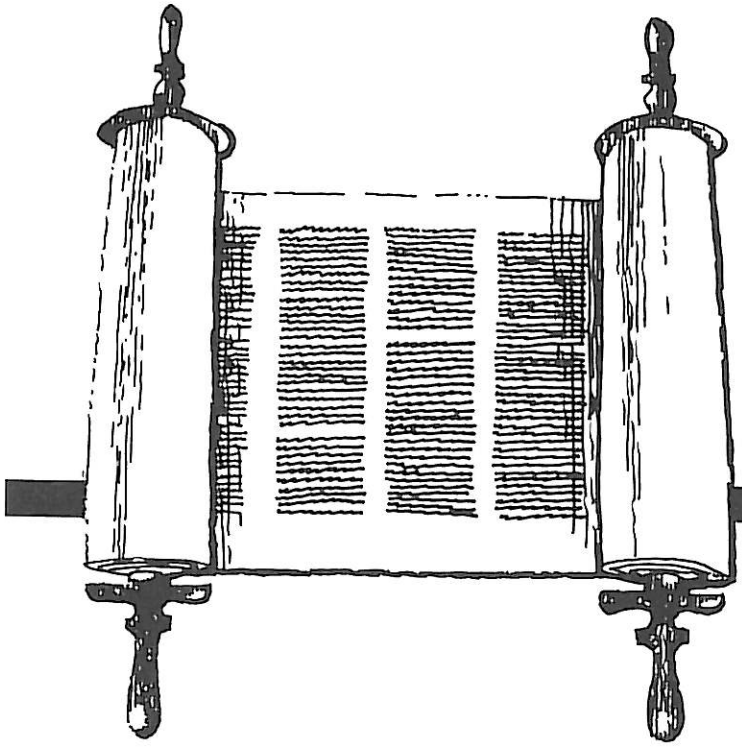
Rank these as they might have been rated by the following:

Essenes Zealots
Herod
Pharisees
Sadducees

3. What was the Pharisees' understanding of grace and works? How does this differ from the general idea of the teaching of the Pharisees? Why has the image of the Pharisees been so negative?

Resources

Kee, Howard Clark; Franklin W. Young; and Karlfried Froehlich. "The Search for Community in the Graeco-Roman World" and "The Search for Community in Israel." *Understanding the New Testament*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall. Second Edition, 1965. Chapters 1 and 2, pages 3-51. New editions of this textbook appeared in 1973 and 1983. Chapter titles and page reference in these later versions may vary.



PART IX

New Creation and New People

CHAPTER 24

The New Testament and the New Testament People

Gist

The New Testament cannot be separated from the people who for so many years carried that which is now written of the acts and sayings of Jesus as an oral tradition in their sermons and exhortations. Except for the letters of Paul, this remembrance of God's special revelation remained unwritten until after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. All during this time, the gospel was being transmitted with authority through the lives and

First came the New Testament people—then came the New Testament. Though these people had their roots in the Old Testament, something new happened to them that changed everything. It opened up the Old Testament to them. They felt that the Old had come to life in Jesus. They had no intention of creating a new body of Scripture. The Old Testament which told them so much about the meaning of what was happening to them seemed quite enough for them. Their experience with Jesus Christ filled them with new enthusiasm and turned their attention in a different direction.

Besides, they had no time to write down their insights. They were busy going to their neighbors as evangelists and to other communities as missionaries, telling the good news they had learned. Though unintended by them, the New Testament grew out of their mission, under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Many in the making of new writings

What, then, is the New Testament? It is a book, but it is also a collection of books. It contains different kinds of writing. The Gospels deal with the life and teachings of Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles brings us a history of the early church. The Epistles, many of them either personal letters or writings directed to a special group of people at a particular time, show the New Testament beginning to grow out of the experience of a people putting their faith into action.

Some of the Epistles were more self-conscious. For example, Romans and Hebrews, carefully written documents, define the reasons for faith. Revelation stands by itself in the New Testament as a special type of writing to deal with a crisis in the life of the church, a time when the church was under persecution.

The style of writing differs from book to book, even within the Gospels. Mark is action packed; Jesus and the disciples are always doing things and going places. John is also full of action, but the writer reflects at length on the meaning of events and ideas. In the Epistles, we deal less with actions and more with symbols and ideas—applications of the gospel.

Within each book are smaller sections of different materials: prayers, songs, proverbs, parables, debates, adventures, Old Testament quotations, and many other items that come to us fresh from the life of first-century Christians. The different kinds of materials is exceeded only by the variety of the people who were involved in the making of the New Testament.

Breaking into the middle of the story

On first turning to the New Testament, one may expect to find a rather clearly stated history of the Christian movement in the first century. Reading about the life of Jesus in the first four books of the New Testament, one feels one is starting with the earliest chapter in the life of the New Testament people. Yet in reading the Gospels, we are really breaking into the middle of the story.

The Gospels, like the rest of the New Testament, do give us the history of the church but they don't do it in the way our newspapers report on the burning of a barn in the next county or on the wedding of a relative.

These are events told long after they actually took place. Except for the writings of Paul, none of the New Testament took written form until after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, forty years after the crucifixion. Should we want to give an account of how World War II began, an event now as far separated from us as was the crucifixion from the writers of the first Gospels, and if few newspapers or books had been published during all those years, we would be in the same spot as the Christians of the first century.

We would certainly be able to give a true account of those years, for we or people still alive would recollect all the important events of those painful times. But instead of a direct report of day-to-day events, time would be condensed and sometimes shortened. Our report would also be enriched by all the things that have happened to us and all the things that we have felt since World War II—the cold war, the arms race, the rise of nuclear power, and the Vietnam War—even though we might never mention these things directly.

This model will help us read the New Testament with more depth—with one eye on the report that is being given, and one eye on the New Testament people whose lives are in the story they are telling us.

Their lives are in the story

These people, the disciples of the early church, knew they had a treasure both in the words Jesus had spoken to them and the revelation that had come to them as they lived with him. But the information they had was not a curiosity—rather it was something that urgently needed sharing with others. The time was short. Influenced by the apocalyptic teachings current in the Jewish community during those days, they saw the death and resurrection of Jesus as the first sign for the soon-to-come end of the age.

They were expecting the second coming of Jesus almost any moment. To prepare for this event, it would be necessary for people to follow the instructions that had been given by Jesus during his earthly ministry. They saw themselves as the community of the End Time. They had experienced the first act of the divine drama which would soon reach its climax in the return of Jesus to judge the world.

It seems that the first congregations of Christians were for the most part unlettered people, not inclined to writing. Even if there were writers among them, the task of writing things down was not seen as important. More pressing was the task of reaching as many people as possible with the words of Jesus before the end of the world and the return of Jesus.

So, they preached. And since many of them were eyewitnesses of

deeds of the believers. The Holy Spirit added insights and meanings from the words of Jesus that had earlier gone unnoted and which then became part of their testimony. When the words of the sermons and exhortations were finally entrusted to paper, the authority of the oral tradition passed to the written word.

Journal

Open your Bible to the New Testament and page through it.

1. What are the different forms of written materials that appear in the New Testament? (Example: parables; name five other forms.)

2. What seems to be the order in which the books of the New Testament were written?

3. Who were the people who wrote the materials we find in the New Testament?

the great events that had taken place, they had special reasons to want to tell of what they had seen. Thus, in the beginning, the message of the New Testament, like the first words of the prophets of the Old Testament, circulated in oral form. The heart of this oral New Testament was the gospel. In fact, the first meaning of gospel was the preaching of Jesus (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; 26:13; Mark 14:9).

The gospel that the early church proclaimed contained a historical center, a report of God's revelation through Jesus' life and teaching, his death, and his resurrection and ascension. It also told of the Spirit that was given to the church, and how the witness-martyrs suffered and died as Jesus had suffered and died.

The sermon was their mission

As Jesus had proclaimed the kingdom of God, so the early Christians proclaimed Jesus as the person through whom God had taken action for the salvation of all peoples. And the major form of the early church's proclamation was the sermon. "I preached to you the gospel," Paul says to one of the early congregations (1 Cor. 15:1). To another group, he speaks of "the word of faith which we preach" (Rom. 10:8).

The sermon was not just an important part of the mission of the early church. It *was* the mission. And as we discover from a careful reading of the Acts of the Apostles, the sermon defined the content and form of the church's work.

The first early Christian sermon we hear is from Peter: "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2:22-24; see also Acts 3:13-16; 5:30, 31; 10:37-41; 13:23).

Closely tied to this preaching of the gospel were the proofs from the Hebrew Scriptures that were always given along with the sermon (Acts 2:25-28; 3:22-25; 10:43a; 13:32-37). And this was followed by a call to repentance (Acts 2:38-40; 3:17-21; 10:42, 43b; 13:38-41).

The gospel which Peter preached was the same as that proclaimed by Paul. On its message, the early church was in full agreement. Paul gives the outline of his sermon in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5:

> Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.
> He was buried.
> He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.
> He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.

Such sermons shaped the church that was being born: "so we preach and so you believed" (1 Cor. 15:11). This preaching also became the basis for the teaching ministry of the church.

Gospel stories explain the theme

If we look for the material that filled out the outlines of the sermons given by Peter and Paul, we will find it in the Gospels. Here is the account of the life of Jesus with the kinds of materials that would be used in a sermon: short stories about what Jesus did and said, recitals of what he

Seed

And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:42).

Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more (1 Thess. 4:1).

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater bur-

said in answer to various questions, parables (sermon illustrations!), and a report on the crucifixion and resurrection.

When we look at the sermon material in the Gospels, we feel something of the mood of these New Testament preachers. Most easily discovered are the short stories (often called pericopes by Bible scholars) that early Christians must have used in their sermons. Examples of some of these items can be found in the Gospel of Mark:

The Healing of the Paralytic, 2:1-12
The Question of Fasting, 2:18-22
The Rubbing of the Ears of Corn, 2:23-28
The Healing of the Withered Hand, 3:1-5
The Relatives of Jesus, 3:20, 21; 31-35
Blessing the Children, 10:13-16
The Tribute Money, 12:13-17
The Anointing in Bethany, 14:3-9

We can almost hear these passages being preached. They are simple accounts, short and to the point, illustrating the theme of the proclamation but not taking a hearer's attention away from the main thread of the message. The persons who first used these items in sermons were the eyewitnesses to the ministry of Jesus. Those who heard the words of Jesus remembered them and when some of them later became preachers, they used the stories in the same way. So, the message of Jesus was preserved.

Mark contains many other types of materials, most of which were also used in the preaching of the church. The long narrative of the death and crucifixion of Jesus certainly represents the main part of the sermons that the early Christians preached.

It is in Mark that the word *gospel*, which was first applied to oral preaching, is now applied to the written record of that preaching. The "gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1) here means the record written in that book. What is written is in itself a sermon because it contains the remembrance of the church about Jesus Christ, it appeals to the Old Testament record, and it is a call to respond to that faith.

Mark's Gospel, like the Gospel of Luke, was written that its readers might "know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed" (1:4) and that a response might be made—"that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31).

den than these necessary things . . . (Acts 15:28).

And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that [Jesus Christ] is the one ordained by God to be the judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42).

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13).

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13).

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:22-24).

The exhorting form for converts

From the materials that we find in the New Testament, we discover that the early church was a teaching as well as a preaching church. Much in the New Testament does not fit into the sermon outline that Peter, Paul, and other preachers used. Rather, it is teaching and instruction, sometimes called exhortation.

We find this material especially in the letters of Paul, which often end with a teaching section (Rom. 12, 13; Gal. 5:13—6:7; Col. 3, 4; 1 Thess. 4:1-12; 5:1-22; and many other passages). The same form appears throughout Hebrews and 1 Peter. James is given over almost entirely to such instruction. Rather than dealing with matters of doctrine, these exhortations treat practical matters such as marriage, faithfulness, and celibacy (1 Cor. 7); interpersonal relations (Rom. 12:19-21; 14:1—

New Testament Writings

We cannot be conclusive when dating the books of the New Testament. The best that we can do is to try to locate them in the decade or decades of the first century of the life of the early church. Following is one effort to date the time and sequence in which the books were written. (Additional comments on dating will be given in following chapters as these books are reviewed.)

A.D.

50-60
1 Thessalonians
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Philippians
Philemon
Galatians
Romans

70. FALL OF JERUSALEM

70-90
2 Thessalonians
Colossians
Ephesians
Mark
Matthew
Luke-Acts
Hebrews

80-100
John
Epistles of John

90-100
Revelation

90-140
Pastoral Epistles
1 Peter
James
Jude
2 Peter

15:7; 1 Thess. 3:6-10; Heb. 12:1-12); and love (Gal. 5:13,14).

This instruction was part of the missionary endeavor of the early churches. Once people had heard the preaching of the early church leaders and had accepted the gospel, they needed to know how they ought to live. This the church needed to teach to its converts.

These instructions grew out of the teaching and practice of Jesus, as the disciples and early church remembered them (1 Cor. 7:10; 1 Thess. 4:1, 2). Some of them carry the clear echo of the words of Jesus. For example, "Bless those who persecute you" (Rom. 12:14) comes from the familiar words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:44). When the new converts are told to swear "neither by heaven nor by the earth" (James 5:12) this also has a similar source (Matt. 5:34-36).

Living and making history

Though for almost a half century the church did not write down its remembrances of Jesus and his words, this memory was being kept alive in the preaching and teaching of the church. The words and works of Jesus inspired the church to great deeds of faith and courage.

As the church lived out the gospel, it came to new understandings of the meaning of the mission of Jesus. And it was natural that they should add their new understandings to their sermons which proclaimed the gospel. For those things which they now saw more clearly they knew to be the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

We see this work of interpretation in the sermon that Peter preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) where he quotes from the prophet Joel (Acts 2:17-21 = Joel 2:28-32). Peter adds a Christian interpretation to the ancient prophecy to show how Joel's words applied to the first century in Judea. In Acts 2:17, he inserts "in the last days" and "God declares" to his version of Joel 2:28. Thus, he claims that the church fulfilled that prophecy. Other examples can be seen in verses 18 and 19.

In reciting the history of Jesus in its sermons, the church was both living that history once again and making history. The ritual of observing the Last Supper was another way that the Christians preached about the central event in the life of Jesus.

Teaching at the supper about suffering

In the sermon acted out in the Lord's Supper, we find the church proclaiming the suffering and death of Jesus as a redemptive act. They used the words of Jesus, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). Part of their proclamation may also have included another saying, "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45).

In the course of its preaching, the church began to see the form of the suffering event in the life of Jesus appearing in the lives of its own members. For example, Luke's Gospel follows the account of the Gospel of Mark in writing about the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. But while Mark recounts the episode of the false witnesses who said they heard Jesus say he would destroy the temple and build another in three days (Mark 14:57, 58), Luke omits this detail in his account of the crucifixion (Luke 22:71). Instead, Luke puts it in his report of the trial of Stephen (Acts 6:13, 14). Thus, the martyrdom experienced in the life of the church became a symbol and a new kind of sermon on the meaning of the death of Christ for the believers.

When we read what the New Testament people have written about Jesus, we know that what they have to say had been a part of their sermons and their teaching for several decades. Their testimony is a part of their witness.

The new prophetic age

We don't know how it happened that the oral gospels of the preaching and teaching of the early church became the written gospels of the New Testament. It is quite likely that the first Gospel, which was the Gospel of Mark, was written to provide a supplement to the preaching of the church, perhaps giving those charged with preaching a source of the most important material about the ministry and crucifixion of Jesus.

But what was intended only to be a help to the oral tradition and to the preaching of the gospel soon became a substitute. What happened here was similar to what happened to the prophets once their words were written down. The day of the prophets came to an end, for the written prophetic word carried authority as the word of God more fully than the spoken prophetic word ever had.

So, in the course of time—after a long time of testing—the church came to have its own authoritative books that would be called the New Testament. The making of the new body of Scripture paralleled in many ways the forming of the Old Testament, for the New Testament people also shared in the traditions of Judaism.

The New Testament comes to us as a great treasure. It is not a gift bereft of its givers, for with the New Testament come the New Testament people. We are richer because thus we have two gifts where we might have expected only one.

Inventory

1. What are the different forms of written materials that appear in the New Testament?

2. What was the date of the fall of Jerusalem?

3. What parts of the New Testament were written before the fall of Jerusalem? What parts of the New Testament were written after the fall of Jerusalem?

4. What were two forms in which the New Testament material was carried in oral form before it was written?

Discovery

1. Think about the history of your congregation. How old was your congregation before its history was put into written form? Why was it not done sooner? If your congregation is less than twenty-five years old, likely no history has been written. Why? Reflect on the similarities and differences between the writing of a congregational history and the writing of the New Testament.

2. Pick out an event from the history of your family, your congregation, or your community. How would the writing of this event differ if written today than if written immediately at the time of the event?

3. How does the discussion of the way past events are remembered apply or not apply to the oral tradition that became the written form of the New Testament?

Resources

Kee, Young, and Froehlich. "The New Testament and Its Convictions." *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapter 3. Pages 52-73.

CHAPTER 25

The Gospel Carried from Jerusalem to Rome

Gist

Greek-speaking Jewish Christians, after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 recorded the growth of the Christian movement beginning in Jerusalem and increasing in ever widening circles until its members could be found in every part of the world of the Roman Empire. Peter, Stephen, and Philip were among the early leaders, but it was Paul who was most successful in bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to people of non-Jewish background. These Christians expe-

Down came the walls of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The holy place of Judaism and the courts sacred to the Christians were set afire by an avenging Roman army out to crush a Jewish rebellion.

This second destruction of the temple was every bit as shattering as had been the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians six and one-half centuries earlier. It changed the course of both Jewish and Christian life in amazing ways.

Out of the ashes of the temple—the New Testament

Yet the shock delivered by the fall of the holy city caused much of the New Testament to take shape. The gospel about Jesus which had been passed on by word of mouth was now written down on paper. The letters of Paul which had been written earlier were now collected and shared with the scattered congregations.

So much had happened in less than a half century—the coming of Jesus, the rapid spread of the church, the rise of Greek-speaking Jewish leadership, and non-Jews joining the church in droves—that the story just had to be told. Few people understood the difference between Christians and Jews. The Romans certainly did not. Someone had to explain. So, the Acts of the Apostles appeared to answer the questions.

Acts is a history of the early church, but it is more than a neutral record. It is an account written by those Christians who survived the fall of the temple. The writers were the Greek-speaking Jews who had first led the mission to the non-Jews—the people the Jews called Gentiles.

Travelers facing distant cities

Acts is Part 2 of a two-part book, the first unit being the Gospel of Luke. Like Luke, it is a book in which the main characters are travelers. Acts traces the travels of many of the early leaders of the church, but gives most of its space to the journeys of Paul, who appeared first in Jerusalem (7:58; 8:1) as an enemy of the church. After his conversion, Paul became the church's leading missionary, traveling widely in Asia and in Europe. And just as forthrightly as had Jesus, Paul eventually set his face toward a distant city—Rome (Acts 19:21).

When Paul arrived in Rome, the goal of carrying the gospel from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria to the ends of the earth (1:8) had been reached, for, even though he was in shackles, Paul was preaching in Rome "quite openly and unhindered" (28:31). The missionary movement to the Gentiles begun by the Greek-speaking Jews had suc-

ceeded. The writer of Acts was part of that mission effort, and his book tells us how the triumph came.

rienced the Holy Spirit leading them from place to place. Persecution seemed not to be a hindrance to them but the occasion for winning more converts, as their message about a new age and a new way of life was accepted with eagerness. The covenant of old was now a new covenant that included people from every nation.

Winning favor with the Romans

Besides reporting the gospel's success, the writer of Acts wanted to reach those Roman rulers who thought the Christians were just like the Jews. In his first speech in Acts, Paul noted the guilt of the Jews in rejecting Jesus and the witness of the Christians to a gospel of resurrection and forgiveness (13:16-41).

Though attacked often by the Jews and sometimes by Gentiles, the church had the blessing of God. Signs of this favor were found in wonders and signs done by the apostles (2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12) and by the harm that came to those who opposed them (12:20-23; 13:8-11).

While the Jews persecuted the church and tried to put an end to its mission, the record of Luke-Acts showed that when Romans examined the charges against the Christians, they found no offense. Pilate declared Jesus innocent (Acts 3:13; Luke 23:4, 14, 20, 22).

Later Roman officials could find no guilt in Paul (Acts 13:12; 18:14, 15; 24:22, 26; 25:25). Even Herod and his people agreed on the rightness of the Christian cause (Luke 23:6-12, 15; Acts 26:32). When the Romans did take action against the Christians, it was only because they had been pressured by the Jews (Luke 23:23; Acts 12:2; 24:27).

Acts notes with some pride that many Gentiles, notably some of the rich and the powerful, thought well of the Christian movement (17:4, 12, 34; 19:31). Even officers of Gentile cities honored the Christian missionaries and saw that they were protected (8:27; 13:7, 12; 28:7).

True to the heritage of Israel

Before the Jews had rebelled against Rome, their religion had been recognized by the Romans. So, it was helpful for the Christians to show that the church was a proper and faithful fulfillment of Judaism. Christian belief in the resurrection, for example, was similar to Jewish views on the subject (23:6-9; 24:15; 26:6-8).

The promise of a prophet like Moses and an heir to David had been fulfilled in Jesus (2:29-32; 3:22-26). Therefore, the church was in the true tradition of Israel.

Awaiting the return of Jesus

When first we meet the Christians in the Book of Acts they are a party of rural Jewish disciples who thought of themselves as living in the end time of their world. They were Palestinians who spoke Aramaic. With their teacher, they had preached about the coming kingdom of God in the villages of Galilee.

After the crucifixion of Jesus, these believers found themselves in Jerusalem. Here, they began their mission, working no longer in the countryside but in a complex and bustling city.

The church of Jewish Christians, though at first only a minority within Judaism, proved an attractive community to the oppressed and fearful. Many found love and acceptance there. The Christians supported each other and shared their goods (2:43-47; 4:32-37).

This community in Jerusalem was waiting for the return of Jesus, an event which they were sure would soon take place (1:11). In the

Journal

1. Read Acts 1—4. Note that one of the themes for this book is in 1:8. Note other themes that might serve as outlines for a history of the early church.

2. Read Acts 6 and 7:51-60. Note the ways that the trial and death of Stephen seem similar to the trial and death of Jesus.

3. Compare the three accounts of the conversion of Paul: 9:1-22; 22:4-16; 26:9-18. What things must have seemed important to the person who recorded this event?

4. Contrast Luke 9:51 with Acts 19:21. What are the similarities between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of Paul?

5. Compare Acts 15:1-29 with Galatians 2:1-10. How are they different? How do you account for the differences?

meantime, they both worshiped at the temple with other Jews and held their own religious services in their homes.

Spirit baptism as a link to Jesus

The Book of Acts opens with the ascension of Jesus followed by the gift of the Spirit which was to be a signal of the Lord's return (1:8, 11). It was the experience of the Spirit that captured the attention of the church. The Spirit attracted new members, gave the disciples power to work miracles, and provided wisdom and courage to witness.

The descent of the Spirit on the church of Pentecost (2:1-42) was likened to baptism (1:5). So, the ministry of the church began with a baptism and in this way paralleled the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. The gift of tongues was a symbol of the worldwide witness to reach to the "ends of the earth" (1:8).

These new Christians were led by God. Peter did not plan to visit Cornelius nor did Philip have any notion of making contact with the Ethiopian. Yet both were guided in a special way. Thus they knew the Holy Spirit was at work (10:1-48; 8:26-40). Persecution could not hold them back. It only spread the gospel even further.

The Spirit worked not only through the apostles and elders who served as the leaders of the church, but also through the entire community. When choices or decisions needed to be made, it was the "whole church" that acted (1:23-26; 6:5; 15:22).

In its life this congregation reflected the same care that Jesus had for the poor and the outcast. Philip did not hesitate to share the gospel with the Ethiopian minister of finance who as a eunuch, a mutilated man, would not have been welcomed in a Jewish synagogue. But Philip baptized him (8:38).

Hellenists at home in Greek ways

This caring ministry within the group more than the persecution from without changed the life of the early Aramaic-speaking Palestinian church most dramatically. For more than two centuries before Pentecost, Jerusalem had been home to multitudes of Jews who had made Greek their first language and who had taken on many of the ways of the Greeks. They were the Hellenists (6:1). They felt at home in the world of the Greek culture that stretched from Jerusalem to Rome. Jerusalem had a number of synagogues for Greek-speaking Jews. Members of these communities were finding their way into the Christian church.

The need to make sure that the Greek-speaking Jewish members of the congregation got their fair share of relief goods brought new leaders to the fore (6:1-6). By the time of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the leadership of the church had passed almost completely into the hands of the Greek-speaking Jews and their Gentile converts.

Cities torn by war and famine

Cities all over Asia had communities of Greek-speaking peoples with their marketplaces and forums, theaters and baths, soldiers and slaves, and neighborhoods of ethnic peoples including Jews and their synagogues. Ever since the Exile, there had been more Jews outside Judea than within its borders.

Growing in popularity in these Hellenist communities in Asia were the mystery cult religions with their stories of heroes and heroines, their

Acts of the Apostles/An Outline

1:1-26: The Spirit Ministers Through the Church
2:1-47: The Spirit Descends on the Church
3:1—5:42: The Church in Jerusalem
6:1—9:31: The Church Moving Into Judea and Samaria
9:32—12:24: The Church Moving Into the Gentile World
12:25—19:20: The Church Moving to the "End of the Earth"
19:21—28:16: Paul Journeys to Rome

sacred meals and shrines, and their myths of fertility. Interest in new religions was high and many Greeks from non-Jewish background were finding their way to the synagogues where they would later hear about Jesus.

The Greeks had an ideal of a good and happy life but what they found in their cities was something quite different. Too many people living in one place put a strain on the food supply system of the surrounding countryside. Frequent famines brought suffering which was surpassed only by the horror of the wars that had raged almost continually until the Roman Empire subdued the feuding nations and brought an uneasy peace to the world shortly before the birth of Jesus.

When the people in these cities heard from the Christians about a new age and a new way of life, they accepted with eagerness. The message of Jesus brought new hope to these non-Jewish persons. In turn, the gospel itself took on new meaning as it entered the life of these Hellenist people with their different language and ways of looking at the world.

Christ and Lord made new

It was these new Greek-speaking believers who brought a new name for Jesus into the speech of the church and changed the meaning of another. *Christ* became the Greek word for the Hebrew name "Messiah." But removed from its history, it lost some of its force becoming more of a second name for Jesus than the title of the "anointed one of God."

Lord, the second title added to the name of Jesus, had been the word chosen by the Jews when Yahweh as the name of God seemed too holy to pronounce. *Lord* in Greek usage was a common title of honor applied not only to gods, but also to emperors and kings, as well as to people with power and authority. The confession that Jesus was Christ and Lord had a different and a less precise meaning in the mouths of the Greek-speaking Christian than in the minds of the first believers in Jerusalem.

Greek Jewish Christians lead in mission

As opposition from the Jewish community began to mount, it focused first on Stephen, a member of the Greek-speaking part of the church, who spoke out against the temple and the traditions of its supporters (7:44-53). These Christians were less like the traditional Jews of Jerusalem and so they were the first to be driven out.

The coming of persecution to the church in Jerusalem was the beginning of the mission to "Judea and Samaria" (8:1), carrying out the prophecy with which the book opened of how the church would grow (1;8). The leaders in this mission endeavor were the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians represented by Philip, after the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:5).

A new name for the believers too

The Christian mission to the non-Jewish (Gentile) world found its first opening in Antioch (11:19-21). This was a major turning point in the life of the Jesus people. The fact that the disciples were called Christians for the first time in Antioch signals the special and extraordinary event that it really was.

Names in Acts

Christian is used twice: 11:26; 26:28. Other names for the followers of Jesus were: "disciples" (6:1, 2, 7), "disciples of the Lord" (9:1), "saints" (9:13, 32, 41; 26:10), and "those who believed" (2:44; 4:32; 22:19).

Gospel is used only twice to refer to the message the believers carried (15:7; 20:24). The most common name is "the word" (4:4; 6:4); "thy word" (4:29); "the word of God" (4:31; 6:2, 7; 8:14); and "the word of the Lord" (8:25).

Church appears often, both for a local group and for the total body of believers (5:11; 11:22; 14:23). An appealing name is "the way of the Lord [or of God]" (18:25, 26) or "the Way" (9:2; 19:9, 23).

Summaries in Acts

Each section in the Acts of the Apostles closes with a summary statement. For a digest of this book, read:

2:43-47
9:31
12:24
15:35
19:20

Seed

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses (2:32).

And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their posses-

sions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (2:43-47).

And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles (8:1b).

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (13:2).

And [Paul] lived [in Rome] two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching abut the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered (28:30, 31).

The leading evangelist from the Greek-speaking Jewish Christian group was Paul, a late convert to the faith of Jesus of Nazareth. Born in Tarsus, a Greek city in Asia Minor, Paul had been a Pharisee educated at Jerusalem in the traditions of Judaism. His zeal for Judaism caused him to persecute the Christians, an act which led to his conversion and an acceptance of the Jesus he had at first rejected (Acts 22:3-5; Gal. 1:13, 14).

When Paul as a Christian preached in Jerusalem and his witness met with hostility, he took up his work outside of Palestine (9:28-30; 11:25, 26). Eventually, the church in Antioch sent Paul and his friend Barnabas on to other communities to tell the good news about Jesus (13:1-3). Thus, the missionary journeys of Paul had their beginning.

Acts presents the work of Paul in the form of three tours: 13:13—14:28; 15:36—18:21; 18:23—19:19. Paul was probably not the only one of the Greek-speaking disciples to go about Asia and on into Europe preaching the gospel. But through his leadership, he left his mark on the church.

When Paul and his team looked beyond the borders of Asia, the Holy Spirit was active in leading them toward Europe (16:6-10). And thus the prediction was finally fulfilled that the gospel was to be carried to Rome.

Along the way, many new congregations were formed and many new people became members of the body of believers. Some of these had been Jews and members of the synagogues in the many cities of Asia. Others were Gentiles who had heard of the religion of the Jews, but had never become members of the synagogue. Attracted by the preaching of Paul and others of the Greek-speaking Jewish Christian missionaries, they joined the church. The great response to the mission to the Gentiles took everyone by surprise. And its success was the cause for crisis.

Mission crisis faced at Jerusalem

The admission of non-Jews to the fellowship of the church quickly became a point of disagreement. The Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem felt strongly that such persons must first become Jews before they could be part of the Christian circle. Up until that time, the Jesus community had included only Jews.

Should Gentiles become Jews before they became Christians? This controversy led to the crucial Jerusalem Conference mentioned in Acts 15:1-29 and also in Galatians 2:1-10. Here Paul fought for his view of the faith and for the mission to the Gentile world. A compromise was struck between the two parties. Paul and his disciples would go to the Gentiles; Peter and the other Jewish Christians would minister to the Jews (Gal. 2:7-9).

The problem of table fellowship between Jew and Gentile was not so easily settled (Gal. 2:11, 12). The historic patterns of separation of the Israelites from pagans could not be quickly set aside even for Christian converts from non-Jewish cultures. The bid for tolerance suggested in Acts (15:28, 29) was an agreement not reached until many years later, perhaps after the fall of Jerusalem when the authority of the Palestinian church had waned and the Greek-speaking Christians were the leaders of the church.

The account in Acts was written long after the conference, and in

Emperors in Rome

Tiberius (A.D. 14-37): reigned during Jesus' ministry (Luke 3:1).

Caligula (37-41): "mad emperor"; posted his flag in the Jerusalem temple and provoked a riot.

Claudius (41-54): expelled Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2).

Nero (54-68): troubled ruler who ended his life in suicide; may have started great fire in Rome (A.D. 63) for which he blamed and killed many Christians, including (perhaps) Paul.

a time when the solution had been generally accepted. From that perspective, the winners were the Greek-speaking Jewish missionaries to the Gentiles, rather than the conservative Palestinian Christians who looked in the Jewish community for converts. While the mission to the Gentiles had been a great success, the mission to the Jews had been a failure. The communities of Gentile Christians were growing in spirit and enthusiasm.

Scriptures tell the Christian story

But people outside the church could not tell the difference between the two kinds of Christians. The Romans could not even tell the difference between Jews and Christians. With Jews in disfavor in the empire after the Jewish rebellion of A.D. 66-70, the Christians needed to show how they were different from the Jews. Yet the Christians were out of favor with the Jews who mistrusted them. For this reason they turned to writing their story to prove to both Romans and to the Jews their faithfulness to God's leading. Thus the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles came to be written.

The understanding of the New Testament lies in an understanding of the world in which it took its shape. This was the special world of the first century—an age in which the number of the disciples of Jesus had been swelled enormously by Greek-speaking members, many of them of non-Jewish origin.

It was a time of peril when the temple, the symbol of God's presence had been lost and the reasons for a belief in the promises of Jesus were being severely tested. This crisis became also a time of faith, and it is this faith which we find in the New Testament.

Discovery

1. Consider the impact that the fall of Jerusalem in the days of the Babylonians had on Israel. What books were written? How was faith in God tested? How was the impact of the fall of Jerusalem in the days of the Romans on Christians and on Jews the same? How was it different?

2. What facts and events contributed most to the rapid spread of Christianity in the first century?

3. Where do you find reflected in the Acts interpretations that might have been made by the church in the period after the fall of Jerusalem and after the rise of the Greek-speaking Christian community?

Resources

Kee, Young, and Froehlich. "Paul Among the Apostles" and "Paul, the Pioneer." *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapters 7 and 8. Pages 147-90.

Inventory

1. Identify:
Antioch
Barnabas
Hellenists
Palestinians
Paul
Pharisees
Philip
Samaritans
Stephen
Tarsus

2. What is the companion book to the Acts of the Apostles?

3. According to Acts, how many missionary journeys did Paul make?

4. Who were the people who spoke the following languages: Greek? Aramaic? What was the source of Aramaic?

5. From which of the two major Christian communities of the first century did the writer of the Acts of the Apostles come?

6. About when was the Book of Acts written and for what reasons?

7. What changes did Greek-speaking Christians bring to the vocabulary of the gospel?

8. What are the dates for the Jewish Revolt and the date for the fall of Jerusalem?

After the Fall of Jerusalem

The Acts of the Apostles, though written after the Roman pillage of the temple, says nothing directly about that great hurt. Of course, it only carries the story of the remarkable spread of the Christian gospel up to about A.D. 60, the year that Paul arrived in Rome at the end of his long mission journeys.

Suggested Resources

Books

Alexander, David and Pat. *Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973.

Anderson, Bernhard W. *Understanding the Old Testament*. Third Edition. Englewood Cliffs, N.M.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

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Magnuson, Magnus. *Archaeology of the Bible*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977.

May, Herbert G. *Oxford Bible Atlas*. Second Edition (paper). London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Miller, Madeleine S. and J. Lane. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. Eighth Edition. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Schroeder, David. *Learning to Know the Bible*. Newton: Faith and Life Press; Scottdale: Herald Press, 1966.

Audio visuals

Abingdon Bible Map Transparencies for overhead projector

Set 1. Palestine — Old Testament

1A Physical Map of Palestine
1B The Exodus
1C The Kingdom of Saul
1D The Empire of David and Solomon
1E The Kingdom of Israel and Judah

$13.95 from Abingdon Press, 201 Eighth Avenue, Nashville, TN 37202, (615) 749-6301.

Our Bible: How It Came to Us

3-part black and white motion picture from ABS
Part 1 - Formation of the Bible - 25 minutes
Part 2 - The Bible Crosses Europe - 24 minutes
Part 3 - Making of the English Bible - 35 minutes

How Our Bible Came to Us

5-part filmstrip (46 minutes total) from ABS, AVL
Part 1 - The Bible Is Put Into Writing - 7½ minutes
Part 2 - The Bible Crosses Europe - 9 minutes
Part 3 - The Bible Comes to England - 11 minutes
Part 4 - The Bible Comes to America - 10 minutes
Part 5 - The Bible in the World Today - 8½ minutes

The Dead Sea Scrolls and Our Scriptures

82-frame color filmstrip, script, 1958. AVL

How the Old Testament Came to Be

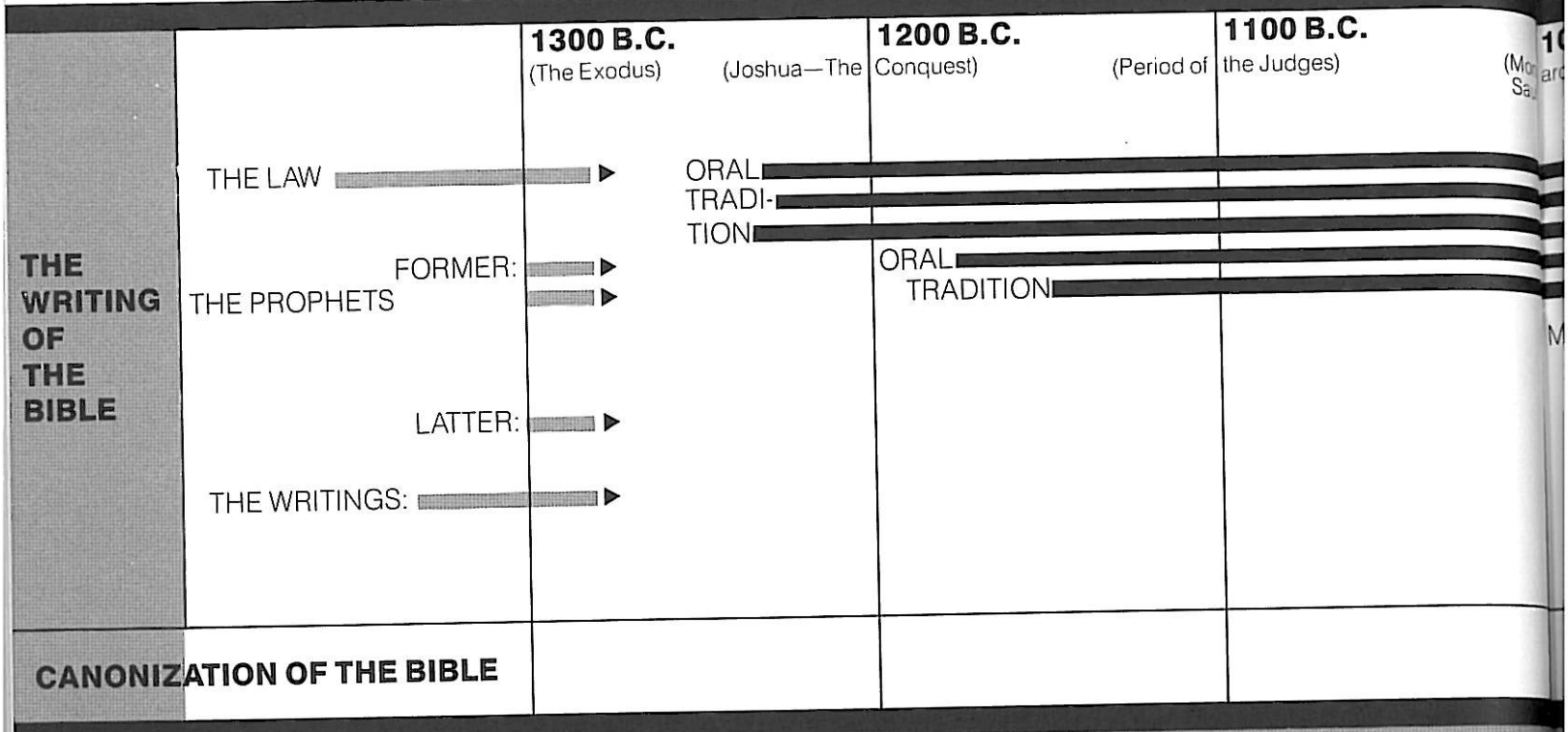
76-frame color filmstrip, script, 1958. AVL

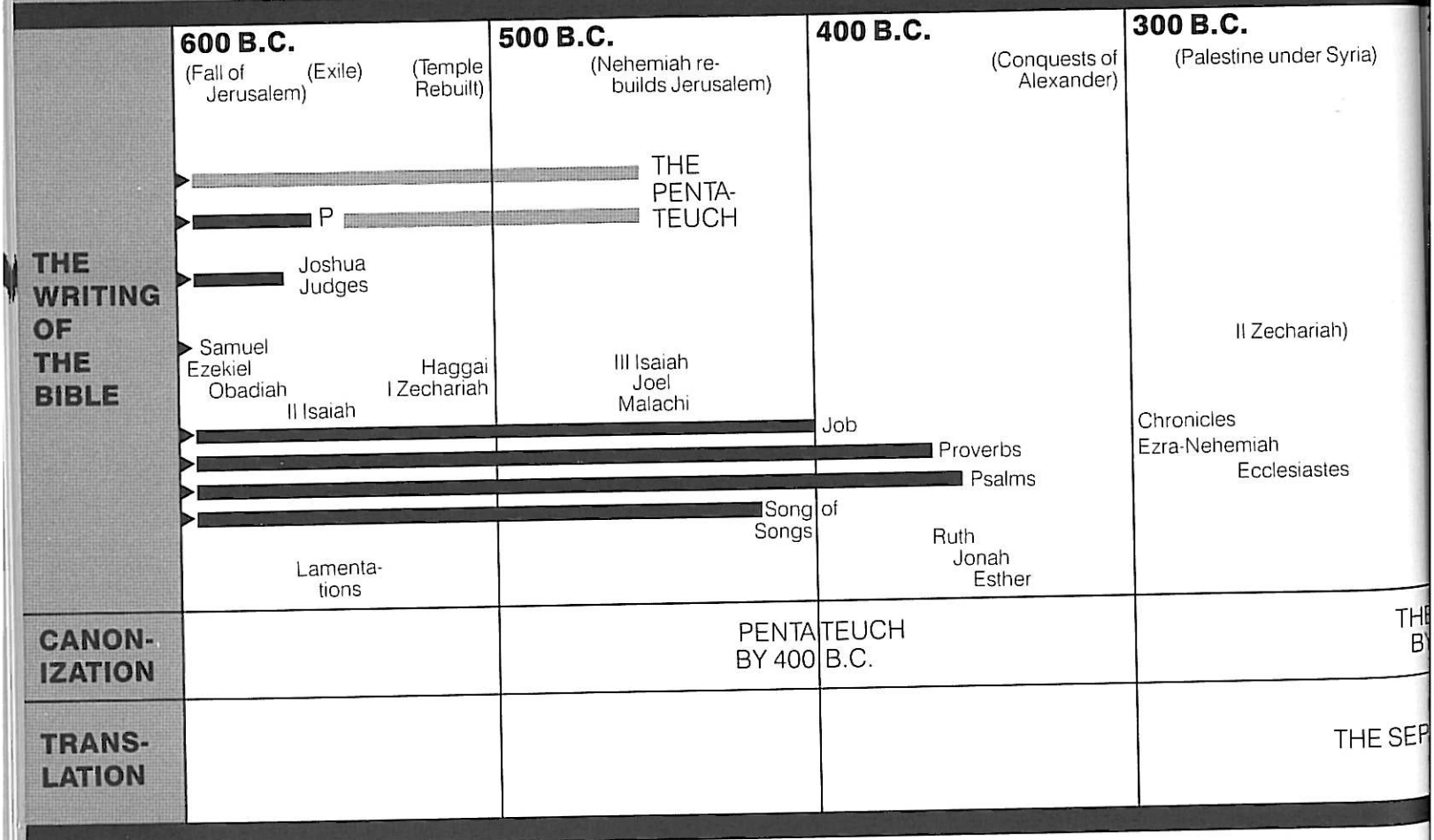
A Survey of the Bible

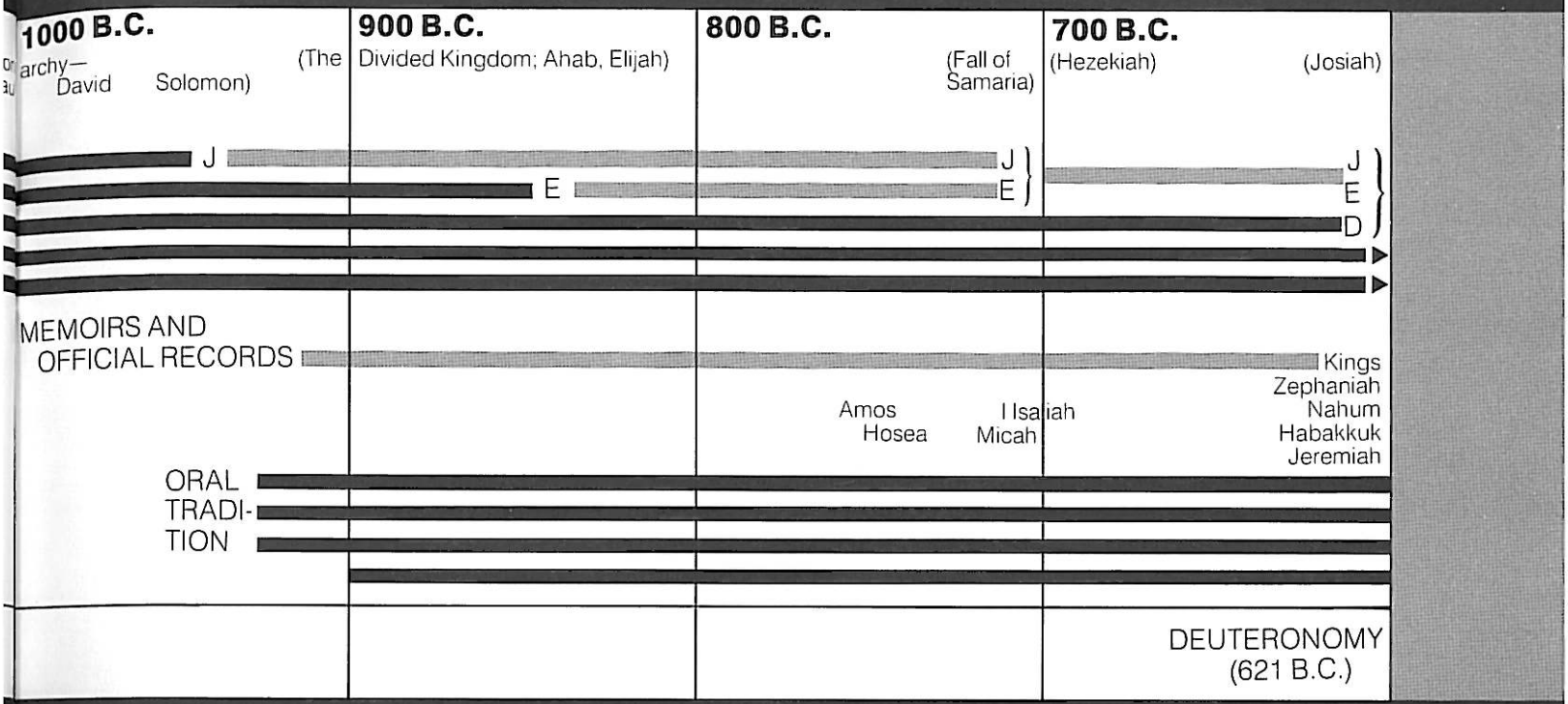
40-frame color filmstrip, record, script. AVL

American Bible Society (ABS): Write to Film Rentals, Audio Visuals, 1111 Lancaster Avenue, Rosemont, PA 19010
Audio Visual Library (AVL): Box 347, Newton, KS 67114

Time Line of the Bible






1000 B.C.
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David
Solomon)
(The
900 B.C.
Divided Kingdom; Ahab, Elijah)
800 B.C.
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Samaria)
700 B.C.
(Hezekiah)
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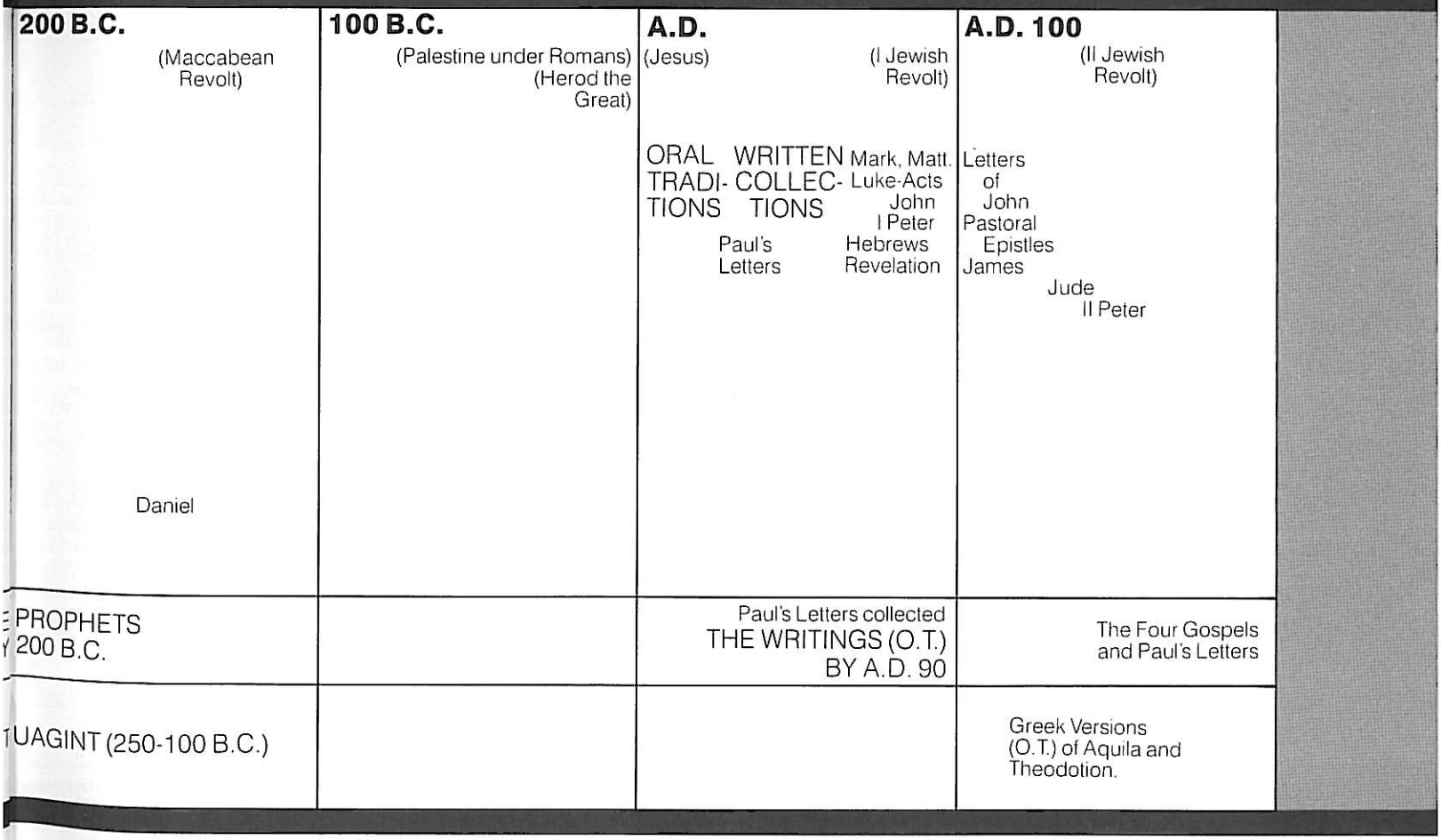
200 B.C.
(Maccabean
Revolt)
100 B.C.
(Palestine under Romans)
(Herod the
Great)
A.D.
(Jesus)
(I Jewish
Revolt)
A.D. 100
(II Jewish
Revolt)
ORAL
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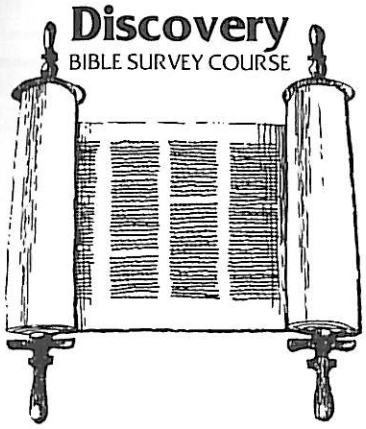
Mark, Matt.
Luke-Acts
John
I Peter
Hebrews
Revelation
Paul's
Letters
Letters
of
John
Pastoral
Epistles
James
Jude
II Peter
Daniel
PROPHETS
200 B.C.
Paul's Letters collected
THE WRITINGS (O.T.)
BY A.D. 90
The Four Gospels
and Paul's Letters
UAGINT (250-100 B.C.)
Greek Versions
(O.T.) of Aquila and
Theodotion.



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Chapter 2. Lands Around the Bible
Chapter 3. Eyes of Faith to See the World

Part II Journey of Faith Across the Fertile Crescent

Chapter 4. The Founding Families and Joseph
Chapter 5. The Shape of the Promised Land

Part III The People Meet the God Who Acts

Chapter 6. The Founding Events
Chapter 7. The Covenant for a People Under God
Chapter 8. Broken Pots and Clay Tablets

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Chapter 12. The Theology and Politics of Zion

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Chapter 15. Covenant Renewed and Covenant New

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Chapter 30. The New Moses
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Chapter 33. Hope in the Hour of Persecution
Chapter 34. The Gospel for All the World

ISBN 0-87303-096-6