

LESSON 4 – JEWISH LITERATURE OF THE TIMES



Assignments: Tapes 7 & 8
Textbook – Chapter 18
Bible: Jude

V) Jewish Literature of The Second Temple Period.

A) Apocryphal Books.

1) What are they?

- (a) A group of 14-15 books written by Jewish authors during last two centuries B.C. (approximately 80% the length of the New Testament).
- (b) These books were included in the Greek translation of the O.T. Scriptures (the Septuagint), but were never accepted by the Jews as part of the Hebrew Bible.
- (c) They are of varying literary types - some being histories, some fictional romances, some ethical treatises, and some additions to Old Testament books.

2) What do they say?

- (a) I Esdras: a parallel account of events recorded in last chapters of 1 Chronicles plus Ezra and Nehemiah.
- (b) II Esdras: an apocalypse describing the answer to the evil world being the advent of a new age introduced by Messiah.
- (c) Tobit: a fictional romantic short story about the trials of a Jew in exile and how he and another Jewess were delivered by the angel "Raphael".
- (d) Judith: another fictional romance about a Jewish heroine who delivers her town from a Babylonian siege by deceiving and decapitating the general.

- (e) Additions to Esther: six passages meant to be inserted at various points in the biblical books; the open references to God and expressions of faith, prayer, etc., indicate desire to make book appear “religious”.

- (f) Song of the Three Children: the prayer of Azariah and a hymn of thanksgiving sung by the three men in Daniel 3.

- (g) Susanna: story of a beautiful and virtuous Jewess falsely accused and framed by two elders, who was later exonerated by the astute legal work of Daniel.

- (h) Bel and the Dragon: Daniel exposes the dishonesty of the priests of Bel and destroys a cult dragon.

- (i) Wisdom of Solomon: similar to Proverbs - the book extols wisdom as was also evidenced in God’s care for Israel.

- (j) Ecclesiasticus: also called “Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach,” bases a successful life on reverence for God and His law and also praises a list of famous men of Israel ending with Simon the Just (200 B.C.).

- (k) Baruch: attributed to scribe of Jeremiah who also adds a letter against idolatry, addresses Jewish captives with exhortation and consolation.

- (l) Prayer of Manasseh: claims to be prayer mentioned in 2 Chronicles 33:11-19; praises God’s majesty and compassion and makes a sincere confession.

- (m) I Maccabees: generally reliable historical work covering events between 175 and 134 B.C.; main source of events surrounding

Antiochus Epiphanes and the Hasmonean resistance.

- (n) II Maccabees: a highly speculative “theological” account of some of same events as I Maccabees, stressing martyrdom and resurrection.

3) What is their history?

- (a) Not quoted in New Testament, but cited by some early church fathers, although not as Scripture.
- (b) Included in Latin Vulgate and later acknowledged by Council of Trent (1546 A.D.) as part of Bible for Roman Catholicism.
- (c) Rejected by Protestant Reformers as not part of Scripture. They appeared, as a separate section, in Luther’s German translation, and in early English versions, including editions of the Authorized Version from 1614-1628. Puritan opposition resulted in its exclusion from AV after 1628.

4) What is their value?

- (a) Problems.

Never accepted by the Jews, they claim no divine inspiration (II Macc 2:24-33 - 15:38,39) They contain numerous historical errors (e.g. Judith), moral and theological errors such as prayers for the dead (II Macc. 12:43-45), and utterly fantastical literary fiction (e.g. Tobit).

- (b) Value

Valuable source providing information about Jewish history and culture during intertestamental period. May possibly be read as religious fiction, occasionally providing edifying stories.

B) Pseudepigraphical Books.

1) What are they?

- (a) A group of around 60 works written by Jews and even later by some Christians during the period from ca. 300 B.C. to c.a. A.D.

- (b) Peculiar characteristic is that they are often attributed to an ancient Hebrew patriarch hence the name “pseud-epi-grapha.”

For example: I, II, III Apocalypse of Enoch, Testaments of Twelve Patriarchs, Martyrdom of Isaiah, etc.

2) What do they say?

- (a) Mostly predictions of an apocalyptic entrance of God into human history or extensive elaboration of biblical events.

- (b) They reflect the views of the varied “sects” that existed during the period.

3) Does the New Testament refer to any of this material?

- (a) Jude 14-16 echoes Enoch 1:9

- (b) Hebrews 11:37 echoes Martyrdom of Isaiah 5:1-16

- (c) Jude 9 (?)

- (d) 1 Peter 3:19(?)

- (e) 2 Timothy 3:8(?)

4) Conclusion: