

# Intertestamental literature and significance

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## Plan

1. Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls
  2. The Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha
  3. Philo and Greek-Influenced Judaism
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## Introduction

The guiding question is: “**What sources do we have from the time between the Testaments?**”

In some Christian traditions, this period is sometimes described as one of “*God’s prophetic silence.*” But historically and culturally, it was far from silent. Jewish communities during this time produced a vast and diverse body of literature reflecting on God, Israel, the covenant, and the hope for God’s future intervention.

Whether God was silent or not is a theological question; historically, the **Jewish people clearly were not silent.** Their writings help us understand the world into which Jesus was born.

**Why should we care about these sources?**

- To better understand **Jewish culture in the time of Jesus**
  - To improve **New Testament exegesis**
  - To understand **the formation and transmission of the biblical canon**
  - To foster better **Catholic–Protestant dialogue ?**
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## 1. Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls

**What happened in Qumran?**

**History & Geography**

- Qumran is an archaeological site near the Dead Sea. Excavations reveal communal structures, including what appears to be a **baptismal/purification pool**, suggesting ritual washing practices.
- Between **1947 and 1956**, more than **900 manuscripts** were discovered in **11 caves** near the site. The last texts were published in 2001 !
- These represent about **445 different texts** (many duplicates).
- The scrolls vary widely in condition; some are nearly complete:

- The **Great Isaiah Scroll**
- The **Rule of the Community**
- The **War Scroll**
- A **Habakkuk Commentary**
- The **Psalms Scroll** (the longest)
- Approximately **nine scrolls** are considered fully preserved, representing about one third of the total text volume.
- Many of the best-preserved manuscripts come from **Cave 1**. Later scholars reconstructed thousands of fragments like a massive puzzle.
- **Dating:** ca. **250 BCE – 50 CE**.

### The Essenes?

- Early scholarship attributed Qumran to the **Essenes**, a Jewish sect described briefly by ancient historians.
- Some mid-20th-century researchers argued that Jesus—or at least John the Baptist—might have been influenced by the Essenes.
- More recent research challenges the Essene hypothesis.  
The debate continues, but **we know very little with certainty** about the Essenes.

## Does it change anything for us?

### 1. For the Bible

- Before the DSS, the **oldest Hebrew manuscripts** were medieval.  
The DSS give us copies of **every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther**, dating from the **2nd century BCE**.
- The expression “**the Law and the Prophets**” appears frequently, and some books circulated in **combined forms** (e.g., Genesis–Exodus), including an early form of the **Pentateuch**.
- Texts were often attributed to authoritative figures: **Moses, David, Samuel, Job, Daniel**, but also **Enoch, Elijah, Elisha**.  
This includes works **not in our Bibles**, known today as *pseudepigrapha* or *apocryphal* writings.
- The DSS confirm that **Ben Sira** and **Tobit** were likely originally written in **Hebrew**, not Greek.
- Most Hebrew manuscripts found are **very close to the Masoretic Text**, even though the MT was finalized in the 10th century CE.

### 2. For understanding Judaism at the time of Jesus

- There was a **shared pool of sacred texts**, but **diverse interpretations** and competing theological schools.
- Qumran represents one such interpretive community.
- Possible connections to the NT world:
  - **John the Baptist:** similarities in ritual washing and ascetic lifestyle

- **Baptism:** Qumran's ritual purity washings may reflect a Jewish background for Christian baptism, though with different meanings (physical cleansing vs. forgiveness of sins).
  - **Scripture fulfillment:** the DSS frequently use "fulfillment" language.
  - **Messianic expectations:** contain rich reflections on messianism and God's coming rule.
  - **Communal meals:** highly structured; may provide background for early Christian practices.
  - **Possible influence on Paul:** dualism (light vs. darkness; truth vs. Belial), the ideal community, and interpretive methods show intriguing parallels.
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## 2. Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

### Apocrypha

The term originally meant "**hidden**", later "**less authoritative**" or even "**to be rejected**".

- **Protestants** call "apocrypha" the books not in the Jewish canon but included in Catholic Bibles.  
**Catholics** call them **Deuterocanonical Books**.
  - Written during the **Intertestamental Period**, including:
    - Tobit
    - Judith
    - Wisdom of Solomon
    - Sirach / Ben Sira
    - Baruch
    - Letter of Jeremiah
    - 1–2 Maccabees
    - Additional works of Esdras/Ezra
    - Prayer of Manasseh
    - Additions to Esther and Daniel
  - Their authority was debated in antiquity, even among Church Fathers.
  - In the **16th century**, the **Council of Trent** declared them fully canonical for the Catholic Church.
  - Protestant reformers:
    - Saw them as lacking Jewish canonical authority
    - Not originally written in Hebrew (or so they thought)
    - Believed they encouraged superstition and mythological thinking
  - By the **18th–19th centuries**, most Protestant Bibles were printed without them.
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### Pseudepigrapha

- Examples include **1 Enoch**, **Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs**, **Jubilees**, **3–4 Maccabees**, **Apocalypse of Abraham**, etc.

- A literary genre that attributes works to ancient figures such as **Moses, Adam, Eve, Solomon**, or the Patriarchs.
- Written mainly in the **Intertestamental Period**; not included in the Jewish canon.
- Some are preserved and used in **Eastern and Orthodox traditions**.
- Themes:
  - **Apocalyptic literature** (e.g., Enoch, Sibylline Oracles, 4 Ezra, Apocalypse of Adam)
  - **Testaments** (e.g., Testaments of the Patriarchs, Testament of Job, Abraham)
  - **Historical expansions & legends** (e.g., Jubilees, Letter of Aristeas, Ascension of Isaiah, Life of Adam and Eve)
  - **Wisdom literature** (e.g., 4 Maccabees)
  - **Prayers, Psalms, and Odes** (e.g., Psalms of Solomon)

They provide unique insights into Jewish theology, angelology, eschatology, and interpretations of Scripture in the centuries before Jesus.

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### 3. Philo and Alexandrian Judaism

Besides Palestinian Judaism, there existed a vibrant **Hellenistic Judaism**, especially in Alexandria.

#### Philo of Alexandria

- Often called the **first Jewish philosopher**.
- Lived in Alexandria, home to a large Jewish population and intense intellectual exchange.
- Represents a Judaism deeply influenced by **Greek philosophy** while remaining committed to Scripture.

#### Allegorical Method & Universality

- Philo interpreted the Hebrew Bible **allegorically**, seeking spiritual and philosophical meanings.
- His audience often did not observe Temple rituals; he sought to show the **universal wisdom** of the Jewish Scriptures.
- Emphasized God's transcendence and the symbolic nature of language.
- For him, deeper meaning (*logos*, wisdom) is essential.

#### Influence on Early Christian Thought

- Early Church Fathers, especially **Origen**, adopted and developed this **allegorical approach**, shaping Christian exegesis in the 2nd–3rd centuries.