

# Spiritual and Religious Thought of the Time of Jesus

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## Plan

1. Where is God? Demons and Angels
  2. What is God waiting for? Eschatology and Messianic Expectations
  3. What should we do? Different Jewish Groups
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## Introduction

In the Old Testament, two major theological tendencies can be identified:

### 1. The Temple Tradition (Priestly)

- God is holy and pure.
- The people must obey the rituals: circumcision, sacrifices, temple worship.

### 2. The Law Tradition (Deuteronomistic)

- God is the God of history, close to His people.
- The people must be faithful by observing the Law: sabbath, morality, justice.

However, throughout history, the Jewish people were repeatedly dominated by foreign powers and suffered tribulations. The surrounding world was impure and wicked. This provoked deep questions:

### Where is God? Has He abandoned us?

This led to two interconnected ideas:

- **God is transcendent and universal**, beyond human reach.  
→ Angels act as intermediaries, but some have become corrupt.
- **God is supposed to save His people**, yet salvation has not yet come.  
→ This suffering must be temporary; true deliverance is approaching.

In the period leading up to Jesus, these two convictions manifested especially through:

- **Angels and demons**: barely present in the OT, but central in Intertestamental Literature, which offers detailed stories, dialogues, and angelic names.
- **Eschatological expectations**: a coming judgment, the Messiah, a new age, a new Kingdom. These themes are clearer in Intertestamental texts than in the OT.

These themes form the **cultural and religious context** of the time of Jesus. New Testament authors often drew from this shared religious vocabulary and imagery.

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## 1. Where Is God? (Demons and Angels)

Intertestamental Literature developed strong angelology and demonology. God seemed more distant; angels and demons appeared more involved in daily events.

"Much of this burgeoning curiosity about the spirit realm can be attributed to a growing tendency to distance God from direct involvement in daily life. His perceived transcendence led many Jews to begin postulating the intermediary role of angels. God was still in control and would bring history to a climax with the destruction of evil, but he had entrusted the administration of the world to angels, and many had gone astray. For the Jews of this period, this belief gave perspective to the problem of their suffering. The illegitimate rule of Palestine by Roman usurpers could now be explained from a demonological perspective; the kingdom of Satan had gained temporary victory."

**Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, InterVarsity Press, 1992.**

Key themes:

- God appears more distant; angels and demons are more active.
- Demons influence nations and individuals.
- Satan and Beliar become distinct, named characters.
- The "Watchers" (from 1 Enoch) explain the origin of evil spirits.

### Examples from Intertestamental Literature

#### *Books of Adam and Eve, 12–16*

12 1 And with a heavy sigh, the devil spake: 'O Adam! all my hostility, envy, and sorrow is for thee, since it is for thee that I have been expelled from my glory, which I possessed in the heavens in the midst of the angels and for thee was I cast out in the earth.' 2 Adam answered, 'What dost thou tell me? 3 What have I done to thee or what is my fault against thee? Seeing that thou hast received no harm or injury from us, why dost thou pursue us?'

13 1 The devil replied, 'Adam, what dost thou tell me? It is for thy sake that I have been hurled from that place. 2 When thou wast formed, I was hurled out of the presence of God and banished from the company of the angels. When God blew into thee the breath of life and thy face and likeness was made in the image of God, Michael also brought thee and made (us) worship thee in the sight of God; and God the Lord spake: Here is Adam. I have made thee in our image and likeness.'

14 1 And Michael went out and called all the angels saying: 'Worship the image of God as the Lord God hath commanded.' 2 And Michael himself worshipped first; then he called me and said: 'Worship the image of God the Lord.' 3 And I answered, 'I have no (need) to worship Adam.' And since Michael kept urging me to worship, I said to him, 'Why dost thou urge

me? I will not worship an inferior and younger being (than I). I am his senior in the Creation, before he was made was I already made. It is his duty to worship me.'

15 1 When the angels, who were under me, heard this, they refused to worship him. 2 And Michael saith, 'Worship the image of God, but if thou wilt not worship him, the Lord God will be wrath with thee.' 3 And I said, 'If He be wrath with me, I will set my seat above the stars of heaven and will be like the Highest.'

16 1 And God the Lord was wrath with me and banished me and my angels from our glory; and on thy account were we expelled from our abodes into this world and hurled on the earth. 2 And straightway we were overcome with grief, since we had been spoiled of so great glory. 3 And we were grieved when we saw thee in such joy and luxury. 4 And with guile I cheated thy wife and caused thee to be expelled through her (doing) from thy joy and luxury, as I have been driven out of my glory.'

### ***Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 2:2***

2 And Manasseh forsook the service of the God of his father, and he served Satan and his angels and his powers.

### ***1 Enoch 61:10–11***

10 And He will summon all the host of the heavens, and all the holy ones above, and the host of God, the Cherubin, Seraphin and Ophanim, and all the angels of power, and all the angels of principalities, 11 and the Elect One, and the other powers on the earth (and) over the water. On that day shall raise one voice, and bless and glorify and exalt in the spirit of faith, and in the spirit of wisdom, and in the spirit of patience, and in the spirit of mercy, and in the spirit of judgement and of peace, and in the spirit of goodness, and shall all say with one voice: "Blessed is He, and may the name of the Lord of Spirits be blessed for ever and ever."

### ***Testament of Benjamin 7:1***

71 Therefore, my children, I tell you, flee the malice of Beliar; for he giveth a sword to them that obey him.

## **Summary**

By the time of Jesus:

- Popular imagination was full of angelic lore and demonology.
- And yet, it's not very important in the NT. It shows that a lot of this was superstition, and it helps us also see how Jesus dealt with such superstition.

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## **2. What Is God Waiting For? (Eschatology and Messianic Expectations)**

## A. Hope of Judgment and a New Age

During this time, the Jewish people endured domination and persecution but held onto God's promises. This produced strong eschatological hope:

- All suffering is part of a larger divine plan.
- **Apocalyptic literature** becomes widespread: visions revealing the end times, judgment, and final redemption.
- The current world-age is ending; God will inaugurate a **new age** marked by justice.
- Judgment separates the present and the new age: the wicked are condemned; the righteous resurrect.
- Apocalyptic writings often take place in either:
  - the author's present ("end times"),
  - or a primordial past (attributed to Enoch, Adam, etc.).
- Compared to much of the OT: stronger **universalism** and **individual moral responsibility**.
- The purpose: encourage perseverance, ethical behavior, and faithfulness.

## Representative Passages

### *Jubilees 50:5*

5 And the jubilees shall pass by, until Israel is cleansed from all guilt of fornication, and uncleanness, and pollution, and sin, and error, and dwells with confidence in all the land, and there shall be no more a Satan or any evil one, and the land shall be clean from that time for evermore.

### *1 Enoch 104:2-3*

2 Be hopeful; for aforesaid ye were put to shame through ill and affliction; but now ye shall shine as the lights of heaven, ye shall shine and ye shall be seen, and the portals of heaven shall be opened to you. 3 And in your cry, cry for judgement, and it shall appear to you; for all your tribulation shall be visited on the rulers, and on all who helped those who plundered you. 4 Be hopeful, and cast not away your hope; for ye shall have great joy as the angels of heaven.

### *2 Baruch 6:8-9*

'Earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the mighty God,  
And receive what I commit to thee,  
And guard them until the last times,  
So that, when thou art ordered, thou mayst restore them,  
So that strangers may not get possession of them.  
9 For the time comes when Jerusalem also will be delivered for a time,  
Until it is said, that it is again restored for ever.'

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## B. Expecting the Messiah

Messianic hope was central, anticipating a divinely anointed king who would bring victory and inaugurate a new era. Different texts expected:

1. **A human, royal Messiah (anointed)** — the son of David.
2. **A supernatural Messiah (anointed)** – the Son of Man (as described in Daniel and Enoch)

Apocalyptic expectation and messianic hope were often intertwined:  
The Messiah would inaugurate or rule the coming age.

## **Texts from Intertestamental Literature**

### ***1 Enoch 52:3–4***

3 And I asked the angel who went with me, saying, ‘What things are these which I have seen in secret?’ 4 And he said unto me: ‘All these things which thou hast seen shall serve the dominion of His Anointed that he may be potent and mighty on the earth.’

### ***1 Enoch 46:2-3***

This is the Son of Man who hath righteousness, with whom dwelleth righteousness, And who revealeth all the treasures of that which is hidden, Because the Lord of Spirits hath chosen him, And whose lot hath the pre-eminence before the Lord of Spirits in uprightness for ever. This Son of man, whom you behold, shall raise up kings and the mighty from their dwelling places, and the powerful from their thrones; shall loosen the bridles of the powerful, and break in pieces the teeth of sinners.

### ***Testament of Judah 24 :1-2***

1 And after these things shall a star arise to you from Jacob in peace, And a man shall arise [from my seed], like the sun of righteousness, walking with the sons of men in meekness and righteousness; And no sin shall be found in him. 2 and the heavens shall be open unto him, To pour out the spirit, (even) the blessing of the Holy Father;

### ***Testament of Reuben 6:8–12***

8 Therefore I command you to hearken to Levi, because he shall know the law of the Lord, and shall give ordinances for judgement and shall sacrifice for all Israel until the consummation of the times, as the anointed High Priest, of whom the Lord spake. 9 I adjure you by the God of heaven to do truth each one unto his neighbour and to entertain love each one for his brother. 10 And draw ye near to Levi in humbleness of heart, that ye may receive a blessing from his mouth. 11 For he shall bless Israel and Judah, because him hath the Lord chosen to be king over all the nation. 12 And bow down before his seed, for on our behalf it will die in wars visible and invisible, and will be among you an eternal king.

## **Parallel Themes in the New Testament**

- Some NT ideas can be found in this Intertestamental literature
- Jude and 2 Peter mention stories that are told in Enoch
- Compare :
  - Rev 9,1 and 1 Enoch 86,1 (and many other examples from Enoch)
    - Revelation 9:1 : A star falls from heaven to earth and is given authority to open “the shaft of the Abyss.”

- 1 Enoch 86:1 : Enoch sees a vision: a star falls from heaven and becomes one of the “fallen” beings who corrupt the earth
- Lk 17,3 and Test. Gad. 6,3
  - Lk 17,3 : “If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.”
  - Test. Gad. 6,3 : “If someone betrays you or sins against you, do not repay him with evil. Rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.”
- Rm 1,32 and Test. Ash. 6,2
  - Rm 1,32 : People not only commit wicked deeds but also “approve those who practice them.”
  - Test. Ash. 6,2 : “There are two ways of doing evil: to do evil yourself and to approve another who does evil.”
- Mt 3,16-17 and 2 Baruch 22:1
  - Mt 3,16-17 : Jesus is baptized → the heavens open → the Spirit descends like a dove → a heavenly voice declares divine sonship.
  - 2 Baruch 22,1 : Baruch sees a vision: the heavens open, and he sees “the host of heaven” and hears a heavenly voice addressing him regarding divine mysteries.

This shows:

- NT authors used the imagery and symbolic language familiar to their audience.
- Intertestamental literature shaped the cultural background of early Christianity.

### 3. What Should We Do? (Different Jewish Religious Groups)

Second-Temple Judaism was not monolithic. Various groups held different interpretations and hopes.

#### Pharisees

- Popular among the people; emphasized obedience to the Law (morality, justice).
- Spiritual heirs of the Hasidim (opposed Hellenization and Hasmonean politics).
- Believed in the resurrection.
- Accepted the Torah, Prophets, and other writings.
- After the destruction of the Temple, they shaped **Rabbinic Judaism**.
- Synagogue structures influenced early Christian gatherings.

#### Sadducees

- Priestly elite connected to the Temple and the Sanhedrin.
- Accepted only the Torah as authoritative.
- Denied the resurrection.
- Disappeared after the destruction of the Temple.

#### Essenes

- Separated from society; strict purity rules.
- Believed the Temple was corrupted.
- Expected an imminent end of the age.
- Anticipated a war of “children of light vs. children of darkness” (cf. Qumran War Scroll).
- Destroyed by the Romans.

## **Zealots**

- Political revolutionaries seeking to overthrow Roman rule.
- Inspired by the Maccabees.
- Also destroyed by Rome.

## **Different Views of the Messiah**

- **Human ruler, Son of David:** Sadducees, Zealots.
- **Spiritual ruler, Son of Man:** Pharisees, Essenes.

## **Alexandrian Judaism**

- Represented especially by **Philo of Alexandria**.
- God is universal; Scripture can be read allegorically like Greek mythology.
- Influenced later Christian exegesis (e.g., Origen).