

The Bible as Literatures 2006

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1200 BCE. The first words of the Bible are about to be spoken. They are not, “In the beginning God created the heaven and earth.” They are “Who will go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them?” That is the opening of the book of Judges -- where the war God Yahweh leads his people on a holy campaign to cleanse the land of Israel from people and practices deemed to be impure.

Who were the people who wrote Judges and why did they preserve its violent, disturbing stories? When did they write? For whom? Where were they drawing their material from? What ideas were original? Which were borrowed? How were Judges and the books that follow written? How was the text preserved? What was the role of the text in the community? What literary forms were they inventing? How did the text come to us? What was the actual order in which the texts were produced? How did they influence each other? How do we know what we know about the answers to these questions?

These are the kinds of questions I have been investigating with my students for many years. It takes a certain kind of insanity to decide to teach the Bible in one semester, but that’s what I’ve been doing. Most universities take a year each for the Old and New Testaments, but no one except an aspiring biblical scholar or cleric is going to spend two years on Bible study. Moreover those courses don’t give an overview of the Bible as a whole. I thought it was important for students to understand the text that has shaped our culture and civilization more than any other. My students appreciate this: whether they’re in the arts or sciences they want an overview of the Bible.

This outline follows a radical course radical, looking at the biblical texts *in the order in which they were actually produced*. My students see how the Bible grew and evolved over the centuries. The approach helps us understand in literary terms what the Bible is, how it was built and why, and it enables us to decipher the different keys and strains of its language and shows how the different authors were influenced by one another.

Phase One: Incipient Israel

The literary basis of the Bible was laid long after 1800 BCE, the time of Abraham, the wandering Aramaean who is revered as the primordial patriarch of Israel. Even the exodus from Egypt (c. 1300 BCE) was a distant memory for the clans of people who settled in the land of the Canaanites and claimed common descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their Hebrew was a Semitic language akin to Aramaic with elements of Canaanite grammar and vocabulary added in. Like a young child, Israel’s earliest recollection did not directly include their parents or their coming into the world. Those were pictures that were filled out later. What Israel remembered directly, in the earliest sources of the Bible, was the place it first grew up in: the land they called Israel and its earlier inhabitants called Canaan. The story of how the war-god Yahweh helped his twelve clans (or “tribes”) of people conquer the land he promised them, and inflicted punishment on anyone who abrogated the basics of his agreement with them (the covenant) is the opening episode in the story of the Bible.

The initial community that produced these texts in Hebrew (developing the Hebrew language as they were settling the land and developing these books) was a confederation of clans that gathered to make war. Stories from the earliest sources in the Bible (detectable in their style of Hebrew, their patterns of thought, and their historical allusions) depict a decentralized social structure. Central leadership was lacking, and clans allied for purposes of war under charismatic military adventurers called “judges.” Their policies could be ruthless, a frequently set one clan at war against another. Some judges were also prophets, or at least consulted with prophets: by means of sacrifice, music, and trance, they claimed to speak for Yahweh, the god who linked the clans. But priestly sacrifice was also undertaken by many people from the clan of Levi, who were also known to experiment in the rituals of their surrounding culture. They settled in what we mostly now call the highlands of territorial Israel -- Samaria and Galilee. Principally an oral culture, this phase of Israel’s existence nonetheless produced the beginnings of a literature, some of which may have been consigned to writing.

1800 BCE Abraham

1300 BCE the Exodus

Judges 2-3, 4-5, 6-9, 11, 13-16, 17-18, 19-21; Joshua 1-8, 9-11, 18, 20, 24; 1 Samuel 1-15

John Bright, *A History of Israel*, chapters 1-4

Judges 21:21-25

You will see – and look, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, you come out from the vineyards, and seize yourselves every man his woman from the daughters of Shiloh and go to the land of Benjamin. And if their fathers or brothers come to contend with us, we shall say to them, Show them favor, because we did not take for each man his woman in the war, but you provide them for them, according to the time you were guilty. And the sons of Benjamin did so, and took women for their number from the dancers that they robbed, and they went and returned to their inheritance, and built their cities and dwelled in them. The sons of Israel roamed from there in that time, each man to his clan and his family, and they departed from there each man to his inheritance. In those days there was not a king in Israel: each man did right in his own eyes.

Phase Two: The Classic Monarchy

The war god led his people personally into battle, enthroned on a wheeled box, the Ark of the Covenant. The text's next stage of development reflects the painful disaster of that ark being captured in the midst of Israel's defeat, and the winding road that brought it back into their possession. Recovering the ark involved developing national institutions: chiefly monarchy and law. The Davidic dynasty brought with it a revised understanding of the divine covenant (including the promise that God would never abandon David's dynasty), and a powerful scribal class. Scribes were now not only the privileged group that happened to be able to write, but also the intellectual branch of the royal propaganda machine: Israel's first historians.

David cleverly legitimated his reign by means of regular consultation with the prophets who had once been oracles, judges, and warlords. They were still in many ways comparable to the mantic sages of Canaan, using their prophetic trance and ecstatic sacrifice to divine the future. Divination became one means by which Israel's foreign, domestic and sacrificial policy was set.

The prophets with their oracular powers emerged literally as kingmakers (and breakers) during this period, but the influence of monarchy was irresistible even for them. The reigns of David (1010-970 BCE) and Solomon (970-922 BCE) saw a period of equilibrium among king, priests, prophets, and scribes. Their alliance produced the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible later attributed to Moses), which tells the story of Israel from the creation of the first human couple to Israel's inheritance of the land. This is the source called "J," a work of political theology, poetry, history, and myth that is reflected in many parts of the Pentateuch, an intellectual monument to the extent of the influence of David and Solomon over Israel.

But the Davidic monarchy by no means succeeded in reducing all the prophets of Yahweh to royal chaplains. Tension and conflict remained, and some prophets resisted the claim that Levitical priests were uniquely qualified to offer sacrifice. The prophets themselves persistently engaged in the sacrificial act, by going to local mountaintops to sacrifice to Yahweh. The prophets are charismatic, recognized simply by their infusion with the spirit of God. The priesthood, on the other hand, became an institution in its own right once the Temple emerged. The Levites wrote themselves into their priestly handbook of oral law (the basis of the book of Leviticus), establishing their exclusive sacrificial power on the basis of genealogical descent. While rest of the clans laid claim to specific, territorial possessions within Israel, the Levites enjoyed a much richer inheritance: the wealth of the Temple. And among the Levites only one family, the family friendliest to David, could serve as high priests -- the Zadokites.

1010-970 BCE King David

970-922 BCE King Solomon

1 Samuel 15-31; 2 Samuel 1, 3, 6-7, 11-20, 24; 1 Kings 2-3, 5-11; Genesis 2:4b-4; 11:1-9, 12

John Bright, *A History of Israel*, chapters 5-6

2 Samuel 11: 12-17

David said to Uriah, Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will dispatch you. Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the next. David invited him, and he ate before him and drank. He made him drunk. He went out in the evening to sleep in his bed with the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. In the morning David wrote a scroll to Joab, sent by Uriah's hand. He wrote in the scroll, "Put Uriah in the forefront of violent battle. Withdraw from him: he will be hit, and die."

Phase Three: Chapter Three: Division and Prophecy

The power of the Davidic dynasty and its lust to erect monuments to itself resulted in perhaps the most shameful institution of Israel's history: the enslavement of peoples of the other Israelite clans by the Judeans (David's own clan). The result of that self-indulgent display of arrogance and the suffering slavery involved was revolution, guided for the most part by a loose band of prophets, outlaws, and opportunists. Solomon's son Rehoboam, refusing to relent in the practice of enslaving his own people, was unable to hold Israel together. After the revolution of 922 BCE, the name "Israel" went to the revolutionaries, because all that was left to the house of David was the territory of Judah itself. Bereft of the support and wealth of the north clans, Jerusalem proved easy picking for Pharaohs who pillaged the city, confiscating the ark. Meanwhile, Israel prospered under powerful monarchs who encouraged both trade and religious syncretism with surrounding peoples. Because these kings introduced foreign gods into their country, the prophets increasingly opposed them, and their fundamental message was put into writing for the first time: only complete loyalty to Yahweh could ensure Israel's survival. Any other course, they claimed, would inevitably bring disaster.

The perceived abuses of the Israelite monarchy in the north, then, set in motion the forces that would elevate prophecy into a powerful although marginal institution. During the period of the judges, it had been one of the few centripetal powers in Israel. Eclipsed during David's successful legitimation of his reign, it came to independent voice again after the secession of the north from the south, especially during the reign of Ahab. The prophetic activities of Elijah and Elisha became characteristic of prophecy forever after, involving a dedication to vision and access to the "Chariot" of God's presence, an often strident demand for social justice, overt resistance to the political rule of the house of Ahab and its successors, a violent opposition to idolatry, and a cogent expression of Yahweh's objection to Israelite practice. Part of the literary work of the prophetic movement was a recasting of the entire story of Israel from its beginning. This is the "Elohists" source of the entire Pentateuch, so-called because God is not called "Yahweh" from the beginning, but "*Elohim*" (which in Hebrew means "God[s]," a plural of majesty). For this source, Yahweh only revealed his personal name to Moses, who is portrayed as a prophet comparable to Elijah. One hallmark of this evolving prophetic message was that of the impending doom of the north, taken to be a soon to be exacted vengeance for the prophets as well as just satisfaction for Yahweh's justice.

922 BCE
722 BCE

1 Kings 11-12, 14-16, 17.1-2 Kings 11; Genesis 15, 22, 32-33, 37-50, Exodus 1-4, 19-20, 24, 32, Numbers 11; Amos 1-2, 8, Hosea 1-2, 8, Micah 3-4; Deuteronomy 14-18, Nahum, Zephaniah

John Bright, *A History of Israel*, chapter 7

1 Kings 12:26-32

Jeroboam said in his heart, "The kingdom might now return to the house of David. If this people goes up to make sacrifices in the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem, the heart of this people will return to their lord, to Rehoboam the king of Judah, and they will kill me, and return to Rehoboam king of Judah. Then the king took advice and made two calves of gold, and said to them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Look -- your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." And he set the one in Bethel, and the other he placed in Dan. And this act became a sin: because the people went to the one, to Dan. And he made houses for high places and made priests from various people that were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam made a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast that is in Judah, and he went upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made, and he appointed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made.

Amos 2:6-8

So says Yahweh: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not withhold. They have sold the righteous for silver, the needy for sandals. They trample on the head of the poor in the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the meek. A man and his father go to the same woman, to profane my holy name, and on pawned clothing they turn aside to every altar. They drink confiscated wine in the house of their gods."

Phase Four: Destruction and Invention

While Israel prospered, Yahweh's prophets could easily be dismissed as cranks; in any case, monarchs could always consult with other prophets. But in 722 BCE, the powerful northern kingdom was broken by the invasion of the Assyrians, and their policy of cultural genocide: moving conquered peoples from their own lands, and settling strangers in their place. Northern Israel, along with "Galilee of the nations," became a foreign province. In the south, Judah escaped Israel's fate, through a combination of good fortune (the preoccupation of Assyria with greater powers) and its own relative insignificance in Assyrian eyes. That enabled Yahweh's prophets in Judah (some of whom had actually from the north) to draw together the writings of their great predecessors in the north and the south, and the rewrite history according to the principle that Yahweh rewarded loyalty to him with prosperity, and punished rebellion with exile. Ironically, just as that work was completed (chiefly represented by the book of Deuteronomy) and was embraced by King Josiah as a matter of state policy, the surrounding powers closed in on Israel. Josiah himself was killed in 609 BCE at Meggido (which gave its name to ultimate disaster), and then the new empire of Babylonia besieged and destroyed Jerusalem itself in 587 BCE.

The Babylonians pursued the same policy of dispersing enemies that the Assyrians had. Prominent prophets and priests found themselves with the family in exile in Babylon. Desperation made them cooperate in a way they never had in territorial Israel. The result of that cooperation was the Bible much as we know it: the Pentateuch was completed in exile and the prophetic words compiled with the Pentateuch into a canon. Israel had been lost on the ground, but it had been rediscovered in writing, understood as the word of Yahweh himself.

The Pentateuch or Torah was compiled by editing the sources known as the Yahwist from the Davidic court and the Elohist from the prophetic movement in the north. Both of these provide stories of the patriarchs and the exodus, but they locate the traditions in different places, according to their geographical bias. The mountain of the revelation of the Torah, for example, is the southern Sinai for "J" and the northern Horeb for "E." It should be stressed that there is no was of assigning a book (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy) to one source. Each source is distributed through the books (albeit unevenly). In addition to "J" and "E," the Pentateuch includes the great prophetic work called the Deuteronomist ("D") and a source of the Priesthood ("P"). This complex work, together with the emerging Prophetic canon, gave landless Israel a charter for its existence that survived the exile in Babylon.

701 BCE

539 BCE

2 Kings 16, 18:1-23, 21:1-23:37; 24-25, Isaiah 6-8, 36-39; Jeremiah 4, 7, 17-20, 29-31; Isaiah 40, 42-45, 47; Ezekiel 1, 4-5, 34-37, 40; Leviticus 17-19, Haggai, Zechariah 3-5

John Bright, *A History of Israel*, chapters 8 & 9

2 Kings 18-19

(A) In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, went on an expedition against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. Hezekiah, king of Judah, sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong. Leave me, and I will pay whatever tribute you impose on me." The king of Assyria exacted three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold from Hezekiah, king of Judah. Hezekiah paid him all the funds there were in the temple of the Lord and in the palace treasuries....(B) So the Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he had heard that he had departed from Lachish....(C) That night the angel of the Lord went forth and struck down 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp. Early the next morning, there they were, all the corpses of the dead. So Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, broke camp and went back home to Nineveh. When he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adram-melech and Sharezer slew him with the sword and fled into the land of Ararat.

2 Kings 22:14-17

Hilkiah the priest and Ahikam and Achor and Shaphan and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum (the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the robe). She dwelt in Jerusalem in the second quarter; they spoke with her. And she said to them, “This is what says Yahweh, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man that sent you to me, This is what Yahweh says, Look, I am bringing evil upon this place, and upon its inhabitants -- all the words of the scroll that the king read. For they have forsaken me and have burned incense to other gods, to provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands and my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and it shall not be quenched.

Jeremiah 29:4-7

This is what Yahweh of armies, the God of Israel, says to the exile that he exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon, Build house and settle; plant gardens and eat their yield; take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands so they have sons and daughters. Become great there, and do not diminish. Seek the peace of the city where I exiled you. Pray to Yahweh for it. For your peace shall be in its peace.

Ezekiel 44:1-3

He brought me by way of the outer gate of the Sanctuary that turns east, and it was shut. And Yahweh said to me, This gate will be shut and shall not be opened. No one will enter by it, because Yahweh, the God of Israel has entered by it, and it is shut. The prince will sit in it as a prince to eat bread before Yahweh. He shall come in by way of porch of the gate and go out by that way.

Phase Five: Radical Pluralism

Even with a written Bible, it seems unlikely Israel could have lasted more than a generation or two in exile. Had the Assyrian/Babylonian policy been taken to its usual end, the most we would have known of the Torah and the Prophets would have been a few papyrus fragments from scrolls. And Jerusalem's name and buildings would have been buried under those who came to inhabit the rubble the Babylonians had left behind. But Babylon itself did not last, and Cyrus the Persian developed a radical new policy: toleration. He permitted his subject peoples to return to their own lands and worship their own gods.

When some Israelites did return to Jerusalem in 539 BCE, many covenanted themselves to the prophetic promise and eventually set about rebuilding the Temple (from 520 BCE). But others were quite happy to accept the customs and in some cases the women of the foreigners the Babylonians had settled there. The result was deep conflict between like scribes like Ezra and large numbers of assimilationists. Those who opposed the radical Yahwists especially relied on traditions that made a goddess named Chochma: Wisdom, the consort of Yahweh. She represented all that was best in the prophetic tradition, and could be seen in the patterns of nature and in the best of all human cultures. Yet another group anticipated a final apocalypse, when God himself would bring sense to Israel and all the nations in a final judgment that would include them all. The resettlement of the land, in other words, brought no respite from internal conflict, and the lure of assimilation only grew after Alexander the Great claim territorial Israel in 332 BCE.

The radical Yahwists resisted assimilation, above all in the form of intermarriage, and developed a strict understanding of the purity that was to maintain Israel's integrity in the face of the nations (or Gentiles). They built upon the work of the prophets, but were masters of the written form, and prided themselves on their mastery of Israel's literature. These scribes became all the more important, as the monarchy inevitably wanted in significance. Full power (above all, in foreign affairs) had never been accorded to the house of David by the Persians, and the successors of Alexander had no positive interest in it whatever.

But scribes were also represented in the Diaspora, where the movement for assimilation prospered, as well as within territorial Israel. For this reason, part of our story is the Greek literature that was not included in the canon in Hebrew. The two types of scribes fought over the hearts of the minds of the priests. The side they tilted towards often had as much to do with their judgment of the advantage to be gained by the political regime of the moment as their conviction that one side or another was correct.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Israelite history during this period is the absence of prophecy. Neither the assimilationists nor the Yahwists claimed to speak directly in the name of the God of Israel. A principal reason for that was that the power of the scribes on both sides of the argument had fixed the prophetic voice in writing. Further guidance for Israel was to come from interpretation, rather than from direct inspiration. But that apparent dominance of the scribal mode cannot completely conceal what is evident in the writings which record the folk movements of Israel (such as the Apocrypha and the scrolls from Qumran): the prophetic voice continued, but in a different key. Instead of using the language of direct inspiration, vision became the principal guide into the divine world. A growing dedication to the guidance of seers was about to reshape the theological terrain of Israel.

Proverbs 4-10, Ecclesiastes 3-4, Job 19, 41-42; Psalms 29, 93, 74, 47; Song of Songs 3-4, Jonah 4; Ruth 3; Esther 7; Habakkuk 2; Joel 2; Obadiah 1; Isaiah 56; Zechariah 14; Ezra-Nehemiah 8

539 BCE

167 BCE

John Bright, *A History of Israel*, chapters 10 & 11

Proverbs 8:22-36

**Yahweh made me, the beginning of his way,
 Before his primordial acts;
From eternity I was established,
 From the beginning, the primordial earth.
When there was no deep I was birthed,
 When there were no fountains spurting water.
Before the mountains were mired,
 Before the hills I was birthed.
He still had not made earth and fields,
 Or source of the world's dirt.
When he conceived heavens, there I was:
 When he carved a circle on the face of the deep.
When he firmed clouds above,
 When he empowered the fountains of the deep,
When he gave to the sea its boundary (and waters did not cross it),
 When he carved foundations of the earth,
I was at his side, Amon!
 I was his delight day by day,
 Rejoicing with him in every time.
Rejoicing in the world of earth,
 And my delights: the sons of men.
And now my sons, hear me:
 Happy are those who will keep my ways.
Hear teaching and be wise,
 And do not neglect.
Happy the man who hears me,
 Attending my gates daily,
 To keep to the threshold of my doors.
Because whoever finds me finds life,
 And gets pleasure from Yahweh.
But whoever misses me does himself violence,
 And all who hate me love death.**

Ezra 10:1-5

While Ezra prayed and owned up, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very big congregation gathered from Israel: men, women, and children, because the people wept with great weeping. Shekhaniah son of Jechiel, of the sons of Elam, answered and said, We have betrayed our God and lived with foreign women from the peoples of the land. But now there is hope for Israel over this. Now we shall make a covenant with our God and send out all the women and their young according to the Lord's counsel and those who tremble at the commandment of our God and according to the Torah it shall be done. Arise, because the word is for you and we are with you: be strong and act. So Ezra arose and made the princes of the priests swear and the Levites and all Israel to act according to this word, and they swore.

Psalms 98

Tune

**Sing Yahweh a new song, because he did wonders;
his right hand has made salvation for him, his arm his holiness.
Yahweh made his salvation known
in the eyes of the Gentiles he uncovered his justice.
His compassion and integrity he remembered for the house of Israel.**

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
Shout for Yahweh, all the earth:
Break out and cry and play!
Play for Yahweh with lyre and sound of melody!
With clarions and sound of shofar, shout before the king, Yahweh.
The sea and its fullness shall thunder,
The world and those that dwell there.
Rivers shall clap hands, the mountains shall cry together,
Before Yahweh because he arrives to judge the earth.
He shall judge with world with justice and peoples with equity.

Zechariah 14:1-4, 9, 16, 20-21

Look, a day comes for Yahweh, and your spoil will be divided in your midst, and I will gather all the Gentiles to Jerusalem for battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women ravished and half the city shall go into exile and the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Yahweh will go out and battle with those Gentiles as on a day of battle, in day of war. His feet shall stand on that day upon the Mount of Olives that is opposite Jerusalem on the east and the Mount of Olives will split in half from east and west by a very big valley, and half the Mount will go north and half south.... And Yahweh will be king over all the earth on that day; Yahweh will be one and his name one.... Then all that remain from all the Gentiles shall come to Jerusalem and go up year by year to worship the king, Yahweh of armies, and to feast the feast of booths.... And on that day there will be on the bells of the horse, Holy to Yahweh, and pots in Yahweh's house will be vessels before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and in Judea will be holy to Yahweh of armies, and all who sacrifice shall come and take them and cook in them and there shall not a trader in the house of Yahweh of armies in that day.

Esther 7

The king and Haman went to feast with Esther the Queen. And the king said to Esther -- on the second day of the wine feast -- what is your request, Esther the Queen? It shall be given to you. What is your petition? Up till half the kingdom, it shall be done! Esther the Queen answered and said, If I have found favor in your eyes, King, and if it is good to the king, my life shall be given me as my request, and my people as my petition! Because we are sold, I and my people, for destruction and for slaughter and for annihilation. If we had been sold for male and female slaves, I would have kept silence, since there would be no comparing that suffering and the loss to the king. King Ahasuerus said to Esther the Queen, Who is he and where he whose heart is filled to do this? And Esther said, An enemy and adversary! Haman -- this wicked man. Then he quaked before the king and the queen. The king arose in wrath from the wine feast to the palace garden and Haman stayed to request Esther the Queen regarding his life, because he saw that evil was concluded against him from the king. And the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the wine feast and Haman had fallen on the couch that Esther was on. And the king said, Is he even going to lie with the queen with me here, in my own house? The word went out from the king's mouth and covered Haman's face. Harbona, one of the eunuchs before the king also said, Look, the tree that Haman made for Mordecai, whose word was good for the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high. The king said, Hang him on it. They hung Haman on the tree he prepared for Mordecai and the king's anger slept.

Phase Six: Final Israels

The last act of biblical formation occurred in an environment of persecution and resistance. One of Alexander's successors, Antiochus Epiphanes, claimed the Temple for Hellenism in 167 BCE by offering swine (a delicacy as far as Zeus was concerned) on the altar. The response was the Maccabean revolt, the most militarily successful movement in the history of Israel. But the Maccabean dynasty proved no less arrogant than their Davidic predecessors did. They attempted to arrogate the powers of kingship and priesthood to themselves, and earned the contempt of many apocalyptists, priests, scribes, and Wisdom teachers. So the victory that might have brought unity in fact resulted in further factionalism. The Essenes of Qumran combined the interests of priests and apocalyptists, while other apocalyptic movements were more purely literary. The Pharisees maintained a loyalty to the Mosaic traditions of Yahweh, but in an oral form (to steer clear of the control of scribes). Meanwhile, die-hard zealots yearned for the days of the Maccabees, and the Wisdom thrived in the Greek speaking Diaspora. In the midst of such conflict, it was easy for the Romans to assert its control of Jerusalem and the entire kingdom of the Maccabees, handing it over to Herod the Great and his family.

After periodic revolts, the national war against Rome was too much for the patience of the Empire, and Titus burned Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE. In a single act, he destroyed the power-base of the priests, just as he exterminated the Essenes. Jews in the Diaspora continued to cherish Wisdom, but increasingly they found their loyalties divided between the traditionalism of the Pharisees and the apocalyptic fervor of groups such as the sect called the Christians. Jesus' followers developed – like the Pharisees, their principal competitors in the Diaspora as well as in Israel -- their own oral traditions to meet the crisis of the Temple's destruction with the promise of a messiah who would at long last bring the final Israel to earth.

Just as the Pentateuch can only be appreciated by means of a familiarity with its sources, so the different cycles of tradition within the Gospels need to be recognized. They were developed by the most important teachers within earliest Christianity: Peter, James (Jesus' brother), the select group of twelve apostles, and Barnabas (a Levite from Cyprus and Paul's sometime companion). Paul's relation to that considerable establishment of power is also important to assess. Yet all the while those developments are unfolding (until their climax in the Revelation of John), all these Christian teachers were shadow-boxing with their Pharisaic contemporaries, who were shaping Rabbinic Judaism during just the period when the New Testament took shape.

164 BCE

100 CE

Daniel, Malachi, Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon, 1 Maccabees, Mark, John, Acts, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Romans, Hebrews, Revelation

Beginning New Testament Study

Wisdom of Solomon 2:13-3:4

“He claims to have the knowledge of God, and calls himself the Lord’s child. He is painful for us to regard, because his life is not like other people’s, his ways are of a different order. By him we are considered frauds; he abstains from our ways as from impurity; he announces the end of the just is blessed, and boasts that God is his father. Let’s see if his words are true, and let’s see what shall happen at his end. For if the righteous man is God’s son, he will help him, and deliver him from the hand of his enemies. Let us examine him with spite and torture, that we test his meekness, and prove his patience. Let us condemn him with a shameful death; for by his own statement he will be measured.” Such things did they imagine, and were deceived: their own wickedness blinded them. They did not know the mysteries of God; they did not hope for the wages of righteousness, nor perceive the reward of innocent souls. For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity. Nonetheless through the devil’s envy death came into the world; and those who hold his side find it. But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure is taken for misery, and their going out from us as utter destruction; but they

are in peace. For though they are punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

But we do not want you ignorant, brothers, concerning those who sleep, so you do not grieve as the rest, who have no hope. Because if we believe that Jesus died and arose, so God also will through Jesus lead those who have slept with him. This we say to you by the Lord's word, that we who are alive, left for the Lord's arrival, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. Because the Lord himself with a command, an archangel's shout and God's trumpet, shall descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ shall arise first, then we who are alive, who are left together with them shall be snatched up in clouds for meeting the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. So comfort one another with these words.

Mark 9:1-13

And he was saying to them that: Amen I say to you that there are some here of those standing, such as will never taste death until they see the kingdom of God having come in power. And after six days Yeshua takes Rock and Jacob and Jochanan aside and brings them up to a high mountain privately: alone. And he was transmuted before them and his clothing became gleaming, very white, as a washer on the earth is not able to whiten. And there appeared to them Elijah with Mosses, and they were speaking together with Iesu. Rock responded and says to Yeshua, Rabbi, it is fine for us to be here, and we shall build three lodges: one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah. For he did not know how he should respond, because they were terrified. And there came a cloud overshadowing them, and there came a voice from the cloud, This is my son, the beloved: hear him. Suddenly looking around they no longer saw anyone with themselves but Yeshua, alone. They descended from the mountain, and he ordered them strictly so that they would narrate to no one what they had seen, except when the one like the person had arisen from the dead. And they retained the word, arguing among themselves what to arise from the dead meant. And they interrogated him, saying, that: The letterers say that Elijah must first come. But he told them, Indeed, Elijah coming first restores all things, and how is it written about the one like the person, that he should suffer a lot and be despised? But I say to you that even Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they wanted to, just as was written about him.

John 1:14-18

And the word became flesh and dwelled among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only one with a father, full of grace and truth. John witnessed concerning him and cried, saying, This is he of whom I spoke, the one coming after me is before me, because he was prior to me. Because from his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace. Because the law was given through Moses; grace and truth happened through Christ Jesus. No one has ever seen God: an only one, God on the breast of the father, that one has interpreted him.

Revelation 21:22-27

And there was no temple in her, for the Lord God, Creator of all, is her temple, and the lamb. And the city does not have need of sun nor moon to shine in her, because the glory of God illumines her, and her light is the lamb. And the Gentiles shall walk through her light, and the kings of the earth will carry their glory to her, and her gates shall not be closed by day, and there will not be night there. And they will carry glory and the honor of the Gentiles to her. And there shall not enter her anything profane, nor what does abomination or falsehood: only those written in the lamb's book of life.