

Have you ever turned the page from the last words of Malachi to the first utterances of Matthew? Go ahead. Turn that one page. What do you see? Exactly. Nothing.

Was the world silent between Malachi and Matthew? Indeed it was not. But just how much time had passed between the two Testaments? What happened in the eastern Mediterranean world during that time? Did anything happen at all? Could ideas, beliefs and practices significantly change between the Testaments?

Consider the following: Would we feel historically, ideologically and politically disoriented if our knowledge of Western history stopped in the year 1492, skipped five hundred years, and then resumed again in the year 1992? Such a thought is absurd. No one could have a complete understanding of the modern world that we live in by skipping such a vast stretch of time which has seen enormous changes in so many aspects of life.

Yet, that is exactly what happens when we turn from the last page of Malachi to the first page of Matthew. Some five hundred years span the distance between these two Biblical writers, but we seem not to worry that the political, religious and ideological worlds that these two writers came from were in many ways radically different from each other. Indeed, when we comprehend the flux of change in the eastern Mediterranean world over the course of five hundred years, our understanding of the New Testament will be enlarged as wide as the chasm that now marks the apparent emptiness between the Testaments.

Unfortunately, we cannot explore here every relevant detail that may enhance our understanding of the New Testament world. Rather, we will focus on some of the key features of change between the Testaments and talk briefly of how knowledge of these changes can enhance our understanding of the New Testament world. Some attention will be given to emerging Jewish groups in the post-exilic world, to ideological changes born in those years, as well as to some of the literature produced between the Testaments. We will also look at the chronological flow of history between the post-exilic times to the New Testament world. With this latter approach we seek to look at the world of the New Testament not from hundreds of years after the fact, but hundreds of years *before* it emerged. Similarly, with regard to the New Testament itself, it is much more realistic to start many hundreds of years before its composition and look ahead to it through the natural flow of chronology instead of looking over our backs from our own day through successive layers of interpretation which change the color of the original composition.

### **Jews Return from Exile**

As we know the Jews were led into Babylonian captivity by Nebuchadnezzar around 587 BC. Decades later when the Persians conquered Babylon, Cyrus decreed that the Jerusalem temple should be rebuilt (ca. 539 BC). Some Jews did return to the homeland of Judea, but most stayed in the prosperous circumstances of Mesopotamian cities, such as Babylon. Perhaps those that returned from Babylon to Jerusalem were the more religiously zealous, but within a short time spiritual leaders such as Nehemiah and Ezra the Scribe had need to call the Jerusalemite Jews to repentance for they had forsaken the covenants of the Lord. Later still, Malachi called the priestly class to repentance for focusing more on the rituals of the temple cult than on practicing principles of mercy and justice.

### **The Rise of Canon Consciousness**

Ezra's method of calling the Jews to repentance (by means of an appeal to authoritative writings) is representative of one of the key ways that the ideological landscape of Israel changed from Old Testament times to New Testament times. As the years progressed after the Babylonian exile the

Jews gained greater “canon consciousness.” What do we mean by this phrase? Well, let us discuss for a moment what the Bible is.

The word “Bible” comes from the Greek *ta biblia*, which simply means “the books.” The Old Testament is just that, a collection of 39 individual books composed by various authors for varied purposes across many different locales and time periods. The individual books that now comprise our present day Old Testament were not originally composed with the purpose of being included in the Old Testament; the Old Testament did not exist, as we know it, when the individual books were being created. Rather, it was later groups of Israelites who recognized the significance of these various writings. They sought to preserve them by copying them, memorizing and reciting them and teaching them in the synagogues.

It was also of great importance to the preservation process of these religious writings that various groups of Israelites established criteria by which writings could be judged to be of spiritual worth and thus included in the body of literature that was to be normative of both religious practice and belief.

As a side note, we should mention that not all groups of Israelites agreed upon which books should be included in the authoritative canon. In fact, some of the works that now constitute the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha emerged in this canonization process. They reflect the cultural and religious battles taking place between various groups of Jews as they sought to develop a normative canon for belief and practice, which sometimes required exploration of their own beliefs and religious systems. Indeed, when we understand the world in which the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were produced and the purposes for such literature we begin to have a deeper understanding of Jews during the Intertestamental time period rather than fearing this so-called “mysterious” literature or misusing this literature as “evidence” for Mormonism. ((The only true and real “evidence” of our faith is that of the Spirit.))

The canonization process likely began for some Old Testament books before the Babylonian captivity (587 BC), but the process was heightened during and after the captivity for two reasons. First, there was the rise of the scribal class. They spent their lives collecting religious writings, establishing criteria for literature to be included in the canon and disseminating the doctrines of the normative texts that were allowed into the canon. Ezra was fully part of this scribal class. Indeed, his knowledge of sacred writings helped to put wayward post-exilic Jerusalem Jews back on track. Second, the Babylonian captivity had been so devastating for the Jewish people that they spent many hundreds of years afterwards doing all in their power to avoid a repeated catastrophe. Many Jews believed that this required closer attention to the laws and rituals of Judaism. But to know these things meant that a common body of sacred writings must be gathered and then shared with all.

It was these processes that brought about over the course of several hundred years a uniform and normative canon of authoritative writings for the Jews. As the scribal class disseminated the teachings found in these writings, the Jews in general became more conscious of a “Biblical Canon”—their set of authoritative writings that defined the boundaries of their belief and practice. Many came to believe that if they adhered to these authoritative writings they would avoid the disastrous circumstances of exile, foreign invasion and the wrath of an offended God, though Greek and later Roman dominance challenged these fundamental assumptions.

Thus, the *final* version ((Perhaps it is technically incorrect to say that there is a “final version” of the Bible. Every new translation of the Bible is essentially a “new version” that reflects the attitudes, values, and ideals of the time period in which it was translated. This is an inescapable fact. For example, the King James Version (KJV) is reflective of 17th century English culture. How? This is most strongly reflected in the language and grammar employed in the translation itself, though this

is somewhat of circular reasoning for what other options did the translators have than to render the original Hebrew and Greek texts into the common tongue of their place and time? But that is exactly the point. Every time we translate the Bible we cannot help but place our own fingerprints upon the work. That does not necessarily mean that we have smudged the Bible or corrupted it; we should have no fear of translating and transmitting the Bible so that it continues to inform our spiritual lives today. In most cases today, new translations depend upon the most ancient and authentic sources (usually Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic) and not the translations of our own times. In other words, if I was attempting to translate the Bible into Spanish I would not use the English KJV to do so. Such an approach would preserve the “fingerprints” of the King James translators into the Spanish version as well as adding the new “fingerprints” of Spanish culture and values embedded in the language of the translation. Rather it would be best to go back to the original languages of Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic and make a fresh translation from those documents into Spanish. That way the intervening “fingerprints” of the KJV translators are not preserved and transmitted. This is not to slight the KJV translators. What we are simply attempting to do is to get back to the most original and authentic versions of the Biblical text; each translation and each transmission takes us one step further from the original and pure source.) of the Bible was a product of later Jews (and in some instances Christians), often hundreds of years after the Biblical times in which the writings were composed or to which they referred. It is also helpful to note that just as our present day Book of Mormon was never a complete set of authoritative writings for the people who produced it, so too the Bible was not available, as we know it today, for those who produced the individual works that comprise this collection of “books.” ((Book of Mormon references to writings by Zenos and Zenock suggests that the “canon” of Old Testament writings was not yet set when Lehi and his family left Jerusalem in 600 BC.))

As later generations of Jews in the Intertestamental period were raised to be aware of an authoritative canon of Jewish religious writings, their world view was very much shaped by the doctrines, beliefs and expectations they found in the Old Testament. Indeed, the writers from the Jewish sect called Christianity were well versed in the Old Testament canon. They often and freely quoted or referred to it as they composed their Gospels and Epistles to show how the mission of Christ was a fulfillment of words of prophets written, collected and preserved over the course of many centuries.

### **Alexander the Great & Hellenism**

Now that we have discussed one example of how Jewish world views changed from within let us return to the history of the eastern Mediterranean and discuss a few ways that outside influences changed the Jewish world. We begin by returning to 530 BC.

After toppling the mighty Babylonians, the Persian Empire persisted for nearly two hundred years, ever seeking to increase its domain and influence. But over time it became a large, inefficient and proud nation, believing that it was invulnerable to decay or collapse. However, an otherwise insignificant young man from an obscure nation soon radically changed the course of the world forever—this was Alexander the Great.

Born to King Philip of Macedon and tutored by the great Aristotle himself, Alexander was laden with ideas of the promise and glory of Greek culture. He envisioned himself enacting the great exploits of the Greek warriors who fought in the Trojan War, memorialized by the ancient writings of Homer, copies of which Alexander carefully stored under his pillow wherever he went. Alexander also dreamed of bringing the world together in a powerful unity of Greek culture.

At the youthful age of twenty (c. 332 BC), Alexander - brilliant, daring, heedless - amassed an army of Greeks to do battle with an old giant, otherwise known as the Persian Empire. In comparison to

the Persians, the Greeks were as small and as insignificant in its time as Andorra is to the United States today. The Persians looked upon this call to arms as a joke. Yet within the course of a mere ten years the entire world from Greece to India, Afghanistan to Egypt was ruled and influenced by Greeks. Soon the Greek language was imported to each of these areas and with it the best of Greek learning, including philosophy, astronomy, music, math, medicine and literature. Greek religion – complete with the myths, rituals and beliefs that accrued in Greek society over hundreds of years – now replaced or blended with the national and local gods throughout the new empire. People everywhere began to adopt Greek language, thought and way of life. The adoption and adaptation of Greek culture is called Hellenization (*Hellene*=Greek).

### **Centuries of Power Struggles in Palestine**

Not all humans readily and entirely adopt such enormous changes to their lives. Thus in the age of Hellenism (c. 3<sup>rd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC), many sought to retain the beliefs and practices of their own culture in response against that which was offered by the Greeks. One group in particular that sought to maintain its own ethnic and religious identity was the Jews, even though their communities were scattered across the vast domains under Greek control. The Old Testament canonization process greatly aided in this endeavor, much as the canonical Book of Mormon has helped to establish for Mormons across the world a common religious culture.

But the Jewish efforts met with difficulties. Some Jews discovered the political and financial advantages of adopting Greek customs while other Jews reasoned that much of the Greek culture would have a benign influence upon their own Jewish beliefs and culture, not entirely unlike the challenge believers of today have as they seek to balance their religious life with ubiquitous popular culture. But such mixing was the ground for controversy and strife, for there were Jews who felt that the barbaric influences of Greek expansion and culture compromised the purity of Jewish life and doctrine, much like some non-American nations view the negative influence that American Hollywood has had upon their own societies. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha preserves some of these religious and cultural controversies of the Intertestamental time period as well as the creative expressions of Greek cultured Jews exploring their religious heritage with the intellectual tools of Greek invention. ((Many Jews at this time were deeply influence by the intellectual and literary achievements produced by the Greeks. The Egyptian city of Alexandria (which was home to the one of the greatest universities and libraries of the ancient world) became one of the main centers for Jews to explore how Greek approaches to Biblical literature, ideas and motifs could enhance their understanding of their own Jewish religious and cultural identity. For example, there lived in Alexandria at the time of Christ a learned Jew, named Philo, who was much enamored with the philosophical doctrines of the Greek philosopher Plato. In Philo's own writings he essentially rewrote much of the Bible from a Platonic perspective. Years later, prominent early Christians adopted and preserved the writings and ideas of Philo, which influenced the ways in which they interpreted the scriptures for many centuries. In fact, some of those interpretations still exercise authoritative status today. Other Jews tried to write historical expositions of the Jewish people following the literary examples of Greek historian Herodotus. Other Jews followed the literary models of theatrical literature (such as the plays of Athenian Aristophanes) and sought to recast famous Biblical stories in this new genre, perhaps somewhat akin to what we find today with *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. These writings, which comprise portions of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, were not meant to replace the authority of the Bible but rather offer exciting new vistas on an old, yet vibrant faith. What is exciting about these writings is what they tell us about the way Jews between the Testaments understood, interpreted and lived the Bible. Just as *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* is not an authoritative interpretation of the Biblical story of Joseph, but rather an expression of how people in our day understand and interpret that story, so too much of the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic literature of Intertestamental time

expresses how Jews understood and interpreted their own scripture. We are free to borrow these latter Jewish interpretations or we can return to the original Biblical texts and find interpretations and meanings that may be more relevant to our circumstances of today.)

Another reason that conflict arose among the Jews of the ancient Middle East had to do with the political climate imposed upon them in the wake of Alexander's triumphs. Alexander died at a young and untimely age. He was but thirty years old with the world and her vast treasures at his fingertips when a horrible flu laid him low in the dust to greet death (c. 323 BC). Alexander's mightiest generals then fought prolonged wars with each other, following the desires of self-interest, to secure their own divided portions of the conquered lands. The state of affairs in Palestine were influenced for more than a century as two of Alexander's generals (Ptolemy and Seleucus) and their descendants warred over this small piece of real estate.

One way that this Greek conflict over Palestine affected the Jewish inhabitants is that those Jews who wanted to rise to power and prominence simply had to exercise some wisdom in choosing political sides to support this ongoing tug-of-war. But such choosing often involved a compromise of Jewish culture and religion to the dismay of those who remained faithful. In fact, some of the Jewish leadership readily adopted Greek customs and ways of life in order to win favor with the Greek rulers.

It is ironic to note, in this regard, that the Jewish position of High Priest, the central feature of Jewish spiritual and religious autonomy during the Greek (and later Roman) occupation of Palestine and the epitome of Jewish religious solidarity against the influence of Greek culture, often became a main proponent in introducing Greek culture into Palestine. How did this happen? Often it was Jews from the religio-political camp of the Sadducees (a priestly aristocracy) which vied for the position of High Priest. Aspiring Jews would pay large sums of money to one Greek political leader or another (Ptolemaic or Seleucid based on which side appeared to be the most powerful at the time) for the position of High Priest. The Greek political leader would guarantee the security of that individual in the position of High Priest so long as the High Priest was loyal to that particular Greek leader and supported his plan to create a unified culture (i.e. Greek lifestyle) across the kingdom. With such priestcraft going on over the course of many decades it is no wonder that Jesus so sternly rebuked such treachery.

### **Maccabean Revolt & Jewish Independence**

Throughout the long-lasting political and military conflict between the Seleucids and Ptolemies, Jews found themselves once again as conquered and subjugated people. Though many longingly hoped for the day when independence and Davidic kingship would be restored to them, they learned to live out their lives under less promising political circumstances as long as they were granted the freedom to live according to their ancient beliefs and practices. In most cases the Greek (and later Roman) leaders recognized the political expediency of granting such religious freedom to the various groups within their empire. What the leaders simply desired was stability, which came through the loyalty (and taxes) of those living within the boundaries of the empire.

Around 175 BC a Seleucid king, Antiochus the IV, came to power and asserted dominion over Palestine. To secure his newly gained political position he attempted to impose Hellenic culture upon all of his people. This was not entirely novel for a Greek ruler except in what Antiochus IV demanded. After erecting an altar to Zeus Olympus in the sacred precinct of the Jerusalem temple, he commanded the Jews to sacrifice pigs. ((Some Biblical scholars and interpreters see this pagan altar in the temple as the "Abomination of Desolations" referred to in the Book of Daniel.)) A Jewish priestly family known as the Maccabees, from a small town not far from present day Tel-Aviv, mustered enough influence to stand against the mighty Seleucid army. Within the space of several

years (c. 165 BC), this family, along with their armies and allies (including a nominal friendship with Rome that will play into the picture momentarily), won Jewish independence, a freedom that the Jews had not known since the Babylonian exile nearly four hundred years before. With this new found political freedom the Maccabees and their descendants inaugurated one hundred years of Jewish (mis)rule. ((Some of the Maccabean rulers took upon themselves not only kingship but also appropriated the powers of priesthood, often by paying large sums of money.))

### **The Many Faces of Judaism**

Not all of the Jews were entirely pleased with the Maccabean religio-political experiment. So during this time various Jewish factions (Sadducee , Pharisee & Essene) arose which persisted into New Testament times. Biblical scholar John Bright concisely describes each faction and succinctly explains the circumstances in which they emerged:

With the Maccabean struggle [of 165 BC against the Greeks] serving as a catalyst, Judaism in the second century began to crystallize and to assume the form that it would have in New Testament times... There were, of course, the Sadducees. These drew their strength from the priestly aristocracy and the secular nobility associated with them—the very class that in Seleucid days [prior to 165 BC] had been more than a little tainted with Hellenism. In a certain sense they could claim to be conservatives, for they accorded authority only to the Torah, ((The Torah is the 5 books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).)) and granted none to the body of oral law developed by the scribes. They also rejected such novel notions as belief in resurrection, rewards and punishments after death, demonology and angelology, and apocalyptic speculations generally. It is probable that their foremost concern was that the Temple cult should be prosecuted and the law, especially its ritual and sacrificial features, carried out under the supervision of the constituted priesthood. Whatever they may have thought God’s ultimate purpose for Israel to be , their aim in the present was to see to it that this *status quo* was maintained. Being practical men of the world, they were willing to go to considerable lengths of compromise in order to do it, readily cooperating with the secular rulers, whether worldly-minded [Maccabean] priest-kings (who were of their stripe) or Roman procurators, and fearing above all things any disturbance that might upset the balance—which is why they found Jesus dangerous. For them, in effect, the future of Judaism was to continue as a hierocratic ((“Hiero” is Greek for “sacred” and often refers to a temple.)) cult community under the Pentateuchal law. ((The Pentateuch is a Greek term referring to the 5 books of Moses (Penta = 5).))

Opposite these were, most notably, the Pharisees. These continued the tradition of the Hasidim of Maccabean days, that group whose zeal for the law had allowed no compromise with Hellenism. Though by no means militant nationalists, the Hasidim were driven by the Seleucid persecutions to join in the struggle for religious liberty; but when this was won, and the struggle became one for political independence as well, they tended to lose interest. The Pharisees, who emerged as a party in the course of the second century, were, like the Hasidim, punctilious in their observance of the law. Their relations with the worldly [Maccabean] kings, of whose policies they could scarcely approve, were for the most part strained. Neither an aristocratic nor a priestly clique, their moral earnestness won them widespread respect among the people. Indeed, they became the true spiritual leaders of Judaism and set its tone. Though religiously more strict than the Sadducees, they were in another sense less conservative. They not only accepted other parts of Scripture as authoritative alongside the Torah, they also regarded the oral law developed to interpret the written as fully obligatory. It was

through them that this oral law was handed down and expanded, till finally codified in the Mishnah (ca. AD 200), then in the completed Talmud. The Pharisees quite readily accepted the resurrection. . . They believed that Judaism's future was to be the holy people of God through keeping the law, written and oral, to the minutest detail; Jews could then await the fulfillment of the promises, which would come in God's own time. Though they... [disliked] Roman rule, the Pharisees [avoided]. . . revolutionary activity. . .

There were, of course, those who felt that the future of Judaism lay along the lines of aggressive nationalism. Men of this opinion had been the backbone of the Maccabean revolt, and the ones who had carried it beyond a mere struggle for religious freedom and turned it into a full-scale war for national independence. The establishment and aggrandizement of the [Maccabean] state under [Jewish priest-king] John Hyrcanus and his successors doubtless satisfied their ambitions and caused militant nationalism for the moment to subside. But the coming of the Roman occupation [c. 70 BC when the Romans replaced the Greeks, as well as the Jews in Palestine, as rulers of the eastern Mediterranean] which was a galling and humiliating thing to Jewish patriots, fanned the sparks once more to a flame. In New Testament times there had emerged a party of Zealots, fanatically brave and reckless men who were ready to strike for independence against whatever odds, trusting that God would come to their aid. Men such as these precipitated the [Jewish] revolts of A .D . 66 - 70 and 132 -135, which brought the Jewish commonwealth to an end. In their attitude toward the law, Zealots probably differed little from the Pharisees; but they were unwilling to see the future of their nation as one merely of law-keeping—and waiting.

Finally, there were sectarian groups such as the Essenes, who lived in ... [expectation of the conquering Messiah]. The sect of Qumran, from which have come the Dead Sea scrolls, was almost certainly Essene. . . . Like the Pharisees, the Essenes presumably continued the Hasidic tradition. Their opposition to the [Maccabean ] priest-kings was, however, irreconcilable. They. . . regarded the [Maccabean] priesthood as illegitimate and apostate. At some time, probably in the last third of the second century, they withdrew in the face of opposition from Jerusalem and from participation in the Temple cult, and took refuge in the wilderness of Judea, where they pursued a quasi-monastic existence in preparation for the impending end. It was, apparently, among the Essenes that the Jewish apocalyptic tradition was carried forth, and much of its literature produced. They regarded themselves as the people of the New Covenant; they had their own peculiar interpretation of the law, their peculiar religious calendar, and they were pledged to a strict discipline with was rigorously enforced. They awaited the imminent end of history's drama, the outbreak of the final struggle between light and darkness, God and evil—which would also involve a holy war on earth in which they expected to participate. Convinced that all prophecy was being fulfilled in their day, they commented upon various Biblical books to show that this was so. The importance of Essene belief for understanding the background of New Testament thought is a subject to itself. ((John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1 9 8 1 ) , pp. 460-463.))

## Jewish Sects and the New Testament

We are greeted with two of the above mentioned groups (Sadducees and Pharisees) throughout the pages of the New Testament. They are constantly at odds with Jesus who continually points out their failings for true righteousness. Both of these groups believed in their own innate righteousness, the Sadducees because they were the line of priests and held the privilege of officiating in the temple,

and the Pharisees because of their zealous observance of Jewish practice found both in the written and oral law. Nothing could be more grating to an individual that believes in their own goodness and righteousness than to be called to repentance, by a carpenter no less! (What insignificant Galilean town was he from again?). The Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament, but are of interest to us because of their connection with the Dead Sea Scrolls and the way that those scrolls inform our understanding of Judaism and Christianity at the time of Christ.

### **Loss of Jewish Independence—Roman Domination**

Some of the later Maccabean rulers were excessive in their pride and wickedness, even going so far as to subjugate other peoples and forcibly convert them to Judaism. One such subjugated group was the Idumeans, the people of Herod the Great. Around 70 BC two Jewish brothers (Hyrcanus II & Aristobolus II), heirs and descendants of the Maccabean priest-kings, quarreled for power. One appealed to Rome for intervention, but the end result was Roman general Pompey occupying Jerusalem and annexing the region of Palestine as the Roman province of Judah. Thus, Jewish political independence was again forfeited to foreign (read Gentile) rulers. The more pious of the Jews who felt that an adoption of Greek culture or Roman administrative structure was a transgression against canonized Biblical norms longed for the revolutionary days of the Maccabees when the faithful stood united against “gentile” incursions. These tendencies and desires remained tacitly in the Jewish psyche for hundreds of years afterwards. ((Consider that there was an open Jewish revolt against Rome in 66 AD which resulted in the destruction of the Temple. Then in 132 AD the Jews again revolted against Rome for which they were dispersed from the province of Judah by imperial edict.)) These events are one of the reasons why some of the Jews were looking for a political Messiah when Jesus came upon the scene 100 years after Pompey brought Roman rule to Palestine. It was Roman administrative rule and the Greek culture (which had conquered the conquering Romans), which provided the backdrop for the world of the New Testament, a world that had once been dominated by independent Israelites and then later by Babylonian and Persian authority.

### **A Summary**

We have raced through nearly five hundred years of history at a speed that would even make Einstein rethink the laws of relativity. The purpose of this article, however, was not to be exhaustive in breadth, for that would indeed be exhausting, but to offer a sense for the turbulent world of change. Sometimes we view the ancient past with an idyllic lens through which life seems serene (though without modern amenities), timeless and changeless. What we discover, however is that culture was vibrant, religion was compelling, and politics were divisive just as they are in our own day. The only difference was in the expression of these different facets of life.

When we look upon the ancient past with the knowledge that it was populated by humans who lived, loved, learned and desired we see similar patterns, yet expressed in unique colors and hues. When we look upon these ancient expressions in their original colors and hues without imposing our own predetermined, preconceived colors and hues upon them, the barriers for understanding them are broken down and suddenly their life struggles and triumphs become relevant and useful for our own day. In other words, if we truly hope to understand the people of the ancient past that produced the literature that we call scripture we must follow the common wisdom of “stepping into their shoes.” We must temporarily let go of our own world view and perspectives and replace it with theirs if we ever hope to truly understand them.

### **An Invitation for the Onward Journey**

One of the best ways to understand the world view of another is by reading what they have written.



Though this article is just but a brief survey of a few ways that the world had changed between the Testaments, it is sufficient foundation to understand some of the cultural and religious institutions, political conflicts and moral needs that shaped the New Testament world. But more importantly this historical survey also provides a backdrop for more fully exploring the many literary resources produced by the Jews during the Intertestamental time period which preserve the beliefs and practices of the various Judaisms ((I consciously use the term “Judaisms” to highlight the reality that there was not one single, normative version of Judaism. For example we have Pharisaic Judaism, Hasidic Judaism, Essenic Judaism, Sadducean Judaism and many others. In fact, it was the very situation of various expressions of Judaism over many centuries that provided fertile ground for the Jewish sectarian movement now known as Christianity.)) alive at that time, which can greatly aid us in “stepping into their shoes.” During the Intertestamental period most of the 15 Apocryphal writings ((The 15 books of apocryphal writings are currently found in Catholic versions of the Bible as well in an excellent scholarly translation of the Bible known as the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) . The 15 Apocryphal books of the Old Testament are:

1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Song of the Three, Susanna, Daniel, Bel and the Dragon, Wisdom of Ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) , Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees.) and many of the 90 Old Testament Pseudepigraphic writings ((An excellent collection of the Old Testament Pseudepigraphic writings, complete with scholarly introductions and translations can be found in James H. Charlesworth’s 2 volume set of *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*.) were composed in various locales where Jews resided (i.e. Palestine, Egypt, Babylon). These writings often reflect the cultural environment of Hellenization, the ongoing political conflicts of various regions, or the exercise and exploration of Jewish belief and practice. It will be left for another article or for anyone desiring to pursue the bibliography below to delve into the fascinating world of ideas preserved in these voluminous writings.

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