

INTRODUCTION
to the
INTERTESTAMENTAL
PERIOD

Raymond F. Surburg



Publishing House
St. Louis

Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri

Copyright © 1975 Concordia Publishing House

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Surburg, Raymond F 1909-

Introduction to the intertestamental period.

Includes bibliographies.

1. Judaism—History —Post-exilic period, 586 B. C. -210 A. D.
2. Bible. O. T. Apocrypha—Introductions.
3. Apocryphal books (Old Testament) —Introductions.

I. Title.

BM176.S94 296'.09'014 75-1115

ISBN 0-7586-1852-2

To
MY WIFE, LILLIAN
*For all that this book owes to her
and for all that
I owe besides*

Contents

PART ONE

The Historical Background

- I. Introduction
- II. The Jews Under Persian Rule
- III. The Jews and Alexander the Great
- IV. The Ptolemies and the Jews
- V. The Jews Under the Seleucids
- VI. The Jews Under the Maccabees
- VII. The Jews Under the Hasmoneans
- VIII. The Jews Under the Romans (63 B. C.–A. D. 135)

PART TWO

The Religious Background

- IX. The Religious Sects of Judaism
- X. Theological Teachings of the Intertestamental Period

PART THREE

Jewish Literature of the Intertestamental Period

- XI. The Translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek
- XII. The Literature from the Dead Sea Caves
- XIII. The Apocrypha
- XIV. The Individual Books of the Apocrypha
- XV. Introduction to the Pseudepigraphical Literature
- XVI. The Individual Pseudepigrapha
- XVII. Philo and His Writings
- XVIII. Josephus and His Writings
- Notes
- Selected Bibliography

PART ONE

The Historical Background

Introduction

When readers of the Bible turn its pages from Chapter 4 of Malachi to Chapter 1 of the Gospel According to St. Matthew, they pass not only from the Old to the New Testament, a fact of which they are well aware, but they also pass over a number of centuries, a truth to which most readers give little thought. Between Malachi and the appearance of John the Baptist there is an interlude of about four centuries. Certain scholars in the past have characterized these centuries as the “silent centuries,” and have relegated them to oblivion, not considering them of much significance for Jewish history or for an understanding of the history and theology of the New Testament.

In a larger sense than is often realized, these centuries are the key for the understanding and adequate comprehension of the life and literature of the New Testament. While the setting for both the Old and New Testaments is the Mediterranean world, yet the intellectual, social, and religious backgrounds of both testaments is different. The fact is that the atmosphere in which the New Testament is written is in large part the product of the period between the testaments, and no amount of study of the Old Testament can solely explain it. On the other hand, no survey of the life of the Roman era is able to give the Biblical reader explanations of many New Testament phrases and ideas.

During the intertestamental period important developments took place: great dynastic changes occurred; the face of Europe was changed two or three times; the geography of European and Asiatic countries was greatly altered; and new civilizations appeared.

The political and religious history of the intertestamental period is one with which the serious Bible student ought to be acquainted. The literature of this period is no less noteworthy. The Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek intertestamental writings of this period represent what Eissfeldt has called “die Wirkungsgeschichte des Alten Testaments,” the story of the influence of the Old Testament in the history of the world and of the Christian church.

The history of the interim between the testaments is invaluable for understanding the New Testament. It bridges the gap between the political and social conditions at the time of Malachi and the world that confronts the reader of the gospels. In many respects institutions found in the last books of the Old Testament are not continued in the New Testament. During the intervening centuries world control has passed from the Persians to the Romans; the West is now in control instead of the East. The whole face of Jewish society has changed by New Testament times. The student of the New Testament finds that new facts and situations challenge him; a score of questions suggest themselves to him. Studying the developments of the intertestamental period will enable him to understand many of the changes that have occurred.

In the days of Malachi the population was scanty; the cities were heaps of rubbish; the land everywhere bore the marks of long desolation; the poverty of the many was aggravated by the rapacity of the few. In early New Testament days Palestine appears as one of the most densely populated parts of the Roman Empire. Its cities are crowded; its terraced hills are cultivated to the last inch. The merchants of Palestine share in and largely control the trade of the Mediterranean world.

Greek is universally used throughout the Roman Empire as the language of the New Testament. Aramaic replaces Hebrew as a spoken language, although the discoveries of Qumran negate the conception that after the return Hebrew became a totally dead language. At the end of the Old Testament period Aramaic had become the lingua franca of the Persian Empire; this helps to explain the origin of the practice of using a methurgeman (interpreter) in the synagog services. At first the Aramaic paraphrases for both the Law and the Prophets were given orally, but eventually in the post-Christian centuries they were written down and known as Targums, of which there were a number. From where did the Greek language come? Why did the Jews in the Dispersion not read their Scriptures in Hebrew instead of in Greek, in a translation known as the Septuagint, written in a language that has been identified with the language of the Koine Greek of the Egyptian papyri? The answer is to be found in the years between the last books of the Old Testament and the coming of John the Baptist in the New.

A characteristic of Judaism of the New Testament is the passionate devotion of Israel to one God and the avoidance of all polytheism and idolatry. There are also the beliefs in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body that receive emphasis in the New Testament. These eschatological views are delineated with greater clarity in the first century after Christ than in the last century of the Old Testament.

On the pages of the Gospels we meet the Sanhedrin, read of the traditions of the elders, and are confronted with the activities of the scribes. The Gospel writers report that on numerous occasions Jesus resorted to the synagog, not for sacrifices but to read the Law and for religious discourse and prayer. When Jesus graced this earth with His presence, Palestine was divided into three parts: Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. Whence did this division of Biblical geography arise? The answers to all these questions are found in a study of the geography, history, and religious development of the Jews and the peoples with whom they came into contact during the time between the Testaments.

Sources covering the intertestamental period are the writings of the Egyptian historian Manetho, the geographer Strabo, the histories of Polybius, the writings of Flavius Josephus and Philo, the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings, the Zadokite documents from Damascus, and the manuscripts from the Dead Sea caves.

The purpose of this volume is to treat briefly the Jewish literature which originated in Palestine and in the Dispersion, concentrating especially on the Septuagint, the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, the writings of the Qumran Sectaries, and the writings of Josephus and Philo.

A portrayal of the historical development of the Near Eastern world from the time of the Babylonian captivity till the end of the religious development of the Jews as experienced by them in Egypt, Palestine, and the Jewish Dispersion, should help in a better understanding of the Septuagint, the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, the noncanonical literature of Qumran, and the writings of Philo and Josephus.