

Helpful Background for Biblical Scholarship

Apocrypha: The literal translation is “secret” or “hidden”. As such, the apocrypha are sacred books of the Jewish people not included in the Hebrew Bible. These writings are valuable in connecting the Old and New Testaments. The Catholic Church views certain apocrypha, such as the First and Second Book of Maccabees as part of canon. The apocrypha also include a number of books, such as the Book of Jubilees, not afforded scriptural status by the Catholic Church. Included in the apocrypha are: The First Book of Esdras, containing an account of Josiah’s religious reforms and the subsequent history down to the destruction of the Temple 588 B.C.; The Second Book of Esdras, containing seven visions or revelations made to Ezra, grieving over the afflictions of his people and perplexed at the triumph of gentile sinners, this book has a tone of deep melancholy; The Book of Tobit; and The Book of Judith, describing a most likely fictional romantic event in Jewish history where the Assyrian general Holofernes is murdered by Judith, a rich and beautiful widow of Betulia.

Most important of the apocrypha identified by the Roman Catholic Church as part of canon are The First Book of the Maccabees from the Jewish history in the 2nd century B.C. which details the narrative of the Maccabean movement from the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes (175) to the death of Simon (135). The persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes and the national rising led by the aged priest Mattathias, the heroic war of independence under the lead of Judas the Maccabee, the recovery of religious freedom and political independence under Jonathan (160-143) and Simon (143-135) mark the chief divisions of the stirring period that the book chronicles. The Second Book of the Maccabees deals with the history of the Jews during fifteen years(175-160)examining part of the period described in the First Book. The Second Book is generally seen as inferior to The First Book both in simplicity and accuracy. The Second Book does affirm the doctrine of the resurrection.

Aramaic is a Semitic language, part of the Semitic sub-family of the Afro-Asiatic language family. This sub-family includes the Canaanite languages, to which modern Hebrew belongs. Though spoken and written use of Aramaic as a first language is at present only found in isolated communities, the language does have a rich 3,000-year history. In ancient times, Aramaic was the language of administering empires and the language of divine worship. Large sections of the Biblical books of Daniel and Ezra were originally written in Aramaic. It is also the main language of the Talmud, the authoritative record of rabbinic discussions concerning Jewish law, ethics, customs, legends, stories. The Talmud is the fundamental source for rabbinic legislation and case law. Aramaic is also believed to be one of the languages spoken by Jesus.

Mosaic Law: The law of Moses as handed down in the Ten Commandments, e.g., the Eighth Commandment of the Mosaic Law is: "Thou Shalt Not Steal" Exodus 20:15

New Testament: can be traced to the 4th century CE when Christians canonized a "New Testament" consisting of texts written between 60 CE and about 150 CE. The New Testament can be divided into the “Gospels” of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – with Matthew, Mark and Luke being considered the “Synoptics” due to the closeness of the material in these three Gospels; the “Acts” of the Apostles, which deals with church history; the letters and epistles of Paul; letters of Peter, John and Jude; the Revelation to John; and, the Psalms and Proverbs. Though precise details are unavailable in most cases, the dates and usually anonymous authors of the various sections do differ.

There is good evidence that the Gospels date from the period following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, probably 70-100 CE. The Gospels were written by anonymous authors and not based on direct contact with the particular Apostle; the Gospels were derived from information available in oral tradition. The 'Synoptic Puzzle' in biblical scholarship is concerned with determining the chronological order in which the Gospels were written. The earliest parts of the New Testament to be written are the Epistles and Letters of Paul.

The Pentateuch, is closely related to the Torah. In certain usage, the terms are the same with Pentateuch translating from the Greek as 'implementation of the five books'. The five books involved are the first five chapters of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. While Torah strictly refers to the first five chapters of the Tanakh, the Torah sometimes is used in a more general sense to include both of Judaism's written and oral law, covering the entire spectrum of authoritative Jewish religious teachings throughout history, including the elements such as the Mishnah, the Talmud and the Midrash.

Pseudepigrapha: Refers to certain non-canonical writings supposedly by biblical characters, and also refers to ancient Jewish literature outside the canon and the apocrypha. Though the writings are supposed to be the work of ancient patriarchs and prophets, present opinion holds these are mostly productions from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 200.

These writings have at times been popular with some branches of Christianity. Unfortunately, there is no accepted fixed limit to the number of writings that are called pseudepigrapha. What one group regards as canon another may call pseudepigrapha. Some of the writings originated in Palestine and were written in Hebrew or Aramaic; others originated in North Africa and were written in Coptic Greek and Ethiopic. These include legends about biblical characters, hymns, psalms (Songs of Solomon), and apocalypses. Writings relating to Enoch, Moses (The Book of the Jubilees), and Isaiah are prominent.

Septuagint ("LXX") is the name given by biblical scholars to the Koine Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh/Old Testament). Translated some time between the 3rd to 1st century BCE, the Septuagint translation includes additional books and chapters of the Hebrew text, including the books of the Maccabees and the Book of Esther. These additional books were composed in Greek with small portions in Aramaic and were authored by the translator. Many Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible predate the Septuagint while others such as the famous Onkelos translation are dated to 1st century. The Septuagint is derived from Latin *septuaginta*, meaning seventy. For this reason, the abbreviation LXX is sometimes used to identify the text. This name originates from a legend about seventy-two Jewish scholars directed by the Greek King of Egypt, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, to translate the Torah for inclusion in the Library of Alexandria, circa the 3rd century BCE. A later version of this legend states that, although the translators were kept in separate chambers, all produced identical versions of the text in seventy-two days.

Tanakh (also Tanach) is an acronym used to identify the Hebrew Bible, based on the initial Hebrew letters of each of the text's three parts: Torah meaning one or all of "The Law" also called the "The five" meaning "The five books of Moses", Torah is also referred to as the "Pentateuch" meaning "Prophets"; and, Ketuvim meaning "Writings" or "Hagiographa". The Tanakh is also called Mikra

or **Miqra**.

Yahweh: An older variant of “Jehovah”, the mostly commonly used name for God appearing in the Bible. Other variants include “Jahveh” (an ancient Hebrew noun), “Jabe” (Samaritan), and “Yahwah” (a modern alternative spelling). An approximate translation from the Hebrew is “He who is”. After the destruction of the Temple, pronunciation of God’s name was restricted to priests of the temple and then only spoken in a low voice.

Yeshua is often recognized as the original Aramaic proper name for Jesus of Nazareth, now estimated to have lived from about 6 BCE to 27 CE. There is debate over whether ‘Yeshua’ was the name Mary and Joseph gave to Jesus at birth. Jesus is a mis-transliteration of the Greek mis-transliteration, *Yeysu*. In Hebrew *Yeshua* means “salvation,” and, as a concatenated form of *Yehoshua*, the “lord who is salvation.” The name Jesus has no intrinsic meaning in English.

Important People

The Apostle Paul or Paul of Tarsus, or, as originally called, Saul of Tarsus was one of the early leaders of the Christian Church. He is considered to be a saint by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, among others. Saul is also known as Paul, Paulus, and Saint Paul the Apostle, (AD 3 – 67). Paul was central to the early development and spread of Christianity, particularly westward from Judea. Paul is described in the New Testament as a Hellenized Jew and Roman citizen from Tarsus (in present-day Turkey). Through the Epistles to Gentile Christian communities, Paul attempted to show that the God of Abraham is for all people rather than for Jews only. Akenson (2000) is an essential source on ‘Saint Saul’. Paul was not one of the twelve Apostles of the Gospels and only entered the Christian movement after the crucifixion of Jesus. After joining the Christian movement, he did come in contact with key leaders including some of the original Apostles.

The Twelve Apostles: common knowledge (Mark 3:13-19) has twelve apostles but closer inspections reveals some qualifications. Of the “Gospels”, the first four chapters of the New Testament – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – only Matthew and John are attributed to an original apostle. Luke was a companion of Paul and Mark was a follower of Peter. The Letters and Epistles of the New Testament are connected to Paul, or Saul, who is not one of the twelve apostles, though Paul claimed he was made an apostle by the resurrected Jesus. The Catholic Church also recognizes Epistles of Peter. Originally Simon or Simon Peter, the apostle Jesus referred to as Peter became the leading figures in the Christian movement after the death of Jesus. Other apostles include Peter’s brother Andrew who, together with Simon Peter, were the first apostles chosen by Jesus. Another seven apostles named by Jesus in the Bible are Philip, Bartholomew, James (the less), James (the Great), Thomas, Simon the Canaanite and Judas Iscariot. After Judas betrayed Jesus, he was replaced by Matthias. The identify of the twelfth apostle is something of a mystery. Judas, son of James, or Thaddaeus are possibilities.

The Maccabees were Jewish rebels who fought against the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Hellenistic Seleucid dynasty who attempted to Hellenize the Jewish people. The Maccabees founded the Hasmonean royal dynasty and established Jewish independence in the Land of Israel for about

one hundred years, from 165 BCE to 63 BCE. The Maccabean revolt started in 167 BCE when the Jewish priest, Mattathias, started a revolt against the Seleucid overlords of Judea by refusing to worship the Greek gods. Mattahias and his five sons fled to the wilderness and Mattathias' died about one year later. His son, Judas Maccabaeus, led an army of Jewish dissidents to victory over the Seleucids. After the victory, Judas Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem in triumph and religiously cleansed the Temple, reestablishing traditional Jewish worship there. Every year Jews celebrate Hanukkah in commemoration of Judas Maccabeus' victory over the Seleucids.

Pharisees (from the Hebrew "to separate") were a Jewish school of thought (movement) that flourished during the Second Temple Era (536 BCE–70 CE). After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Pharisaic sect was re-established as Rabbinic Judaism — which eventually produced traditional Judaism, the basis for most contemporary forms of Judaism. The Pharisees were an anti-Hellenic movement that formed in the time of the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes (175–163 BCE).

The movement is first mentioned by the Jewish-Roman historian Josephus, in a description of the four "schools of thought" into which the Jews were divided in the 1st century CE. The other schools were the Essenes, revolutionaries, and the Sadducees. The Essenes were apolitical; the revolutionaries, such as the Sicarii and the Zealots, emerged specifically to resist the Roman Empire. Other movements also emerged at this time, such as the Christians in Judea and the Therapeuta in Egypt. The Sadducees and Pharisees originated earlier, as political factions in the Hellenistic Hasmonean period of the Second Temple era. At no time did any of these schools of thought constitute a majority; as most Jews were non-sectarian. For most of their history, Pharisees defined themselves in opposition to the Sadducees. Conflicts between the Sadducees and the Pharisees took place in the context of much broader conflicts among Jews in the Second Temple era that followed the Babylonian captivity of Judah. In general, the Sadducees were conservative, aristocratic monarchists and the Pharisees were eclectic, populist, and relatively democratic.

The Pharisees are important in the development of Christianity. While the Sadducees believed that people have total free will and the Essenes believed in predestination, the Pharisees believed that while there is free will, God also has foreknowledge of human destiny. According to Josephus, Pharisees were further distinguished from the Sadducees in that Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead.

Dates and Places

CE stands for "Common Era" or "Christian Era" or "Christ's Era" A new acronym that is getting increased usage and may eventually replace **AD** the abbreviation for "*Anno Domini*" in Latin or "the year of the Lord" in English. Both refer to the approximate birth year of Jesus Christ. CE and AD are interchangeable.

BCE stands for "Before the common era." and may replace BC, "Before Christ." BC and BCE are interchangeable. Most theologians and religious historians believe that the approximate birth date of Jesus was in the Fall, sometime between 7 and 4 BCE, although there are estimates as late as 4 CE and as early as the second century BCE.

Temples. Important dates in the time line of ancient Judaism continuing to the time of Jesus Christ and after are marked by the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Temple worship is a defining feature of the various Judaic religions in the period up to the destruction of the Second Temple. Key events in the Jewish calendar such as Hanukah and Passover revolve around temple activities. Three temples are involved, though the time line for the last two temples, which stood between 515 BCE and 70 CE, is referred to as the **Second Temple** period. The original temple, or **First Temple**, which Solomon erected to the Lord about 966 B.C. was destroyed by Nabuchodonozor in 586 B.C. After the return from captivity Zorobabel raised the temple from its ruins (537 B.C.), but in much more modest conditions. Around 19 B.C., King Herod destroyed the Temple of Zorobabel to replace it by another which would equal, if not surpass in splendor, that of Solomon. This temple was destroyed by the Romans circa 70 CE, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, ending the Great Jewish Revolt that began in 66 CE.

Nag Hammadi a small town in the middle of Egypt, about 80 kilometres north-west of Luxor where, in December 1945, thirteen leather-bound papyrus codices buried in a sealed jar were found by local peasants. The writings in these codices comprised 52 mostly Gnostic tracts, often referred to as the Gnostic gospels, the most famous of these works being the Gospel of Thomas. The find was likely a library hidden by monks from the nearby monastery of St Pachomius during a period when the possession of banned writings, denounced as heresy, was made an offence. The codices were written in Coptic, probably from Greek translations. The Nag Hammadi codices contain the only complete copy of most Gnostic gospels.

Qumram is the location of the site near the northwest corner of the Dead Sea in modern Israel where the bulk of the so-called "Dead Sea Scrolls" were discovered in 1946. The "Qumram Community" that created the scrolls is generally thought to be a group of Jewish Essenes which flourished in the area around Qumram between the 300 BCE and 100 CE.

Internet and other Sources

www.newadvent.org This site connects to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* which is an essential source.

www.pseudepigrapha.com This site has links to primary texts.

<http://en.wikipedia.org> On biblical scholarship, another essential source.

<http://www.professorpage.info/christianity.htm> Terrific overview of the basics.