Scripture in Jesus’ Judaism and in the Early Church included more documents than those found in the Protestant canon. Some of these works, called “Apocrypha” by Protestants and “Deuteron-canonical Works” by Roman Catholics are expertly and attractively collected in *The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes*. In these writings you will find a deep expression of the need for God’s forgiveness (the Prayer of Manasseh) and a vision of the future with the coming of the Messiah (*2 Esdras* or *Ezra Apocalypse* = *4 Ezra*). The introductions are superbly well written and engaging. One can see how the Apocrypha . . . bridges the “Old” Testament with the “New” Testament. Highly recommended, as Athanasius said in 367 “for instruction in the word of godliness.”

—James H. Charlesworth, PhD
Director and Editor, Princeton Dead Sea Scrolls Project
George L. Collord Professor of New Testament Language and Literature
Princeton Theological Seminary

This book provides a well-balanced blend of sound scholarship and religious beliefs on the Apocrypha, especially those of Luther and the Lutherans. The reader will find all the necessary background information on the Apocrypha in an attractive presentation, as well as religious guidance for instruction and preaching. A wealth of introductory essays and appendices make this a very useful compendium.

—Prof. Emanuel Tov, PhD
J. L. Magnes Professor of Bible
Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Concordia Publishing House, General editor Edward Engelbrecht, and the several contributing editors have placed Bible scholars and students in their debt by bringing out a new and updated version of *The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes*. The introduction includes explanation of what the books of the Apocrypha are, what their value is, and a concise overview of history from Persian rule to Roman rule. Next come judicious commentaries on the several books of the Apocrypha, followed by ten appendices that provide readers with additional related information concerning such things as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the writings of Josephus, rabbincic literature, and New Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. What a treasure trove! This marvelous commentary belongs in the study of every student and scholar of the Bible.

—Rev. Craig A. Evans, PhD
Payzant Distinguished Professor of New Testament
Acadia Divinity College, Nova Scotia, Canada
Luther recommended the Apocrypha as books that are not regarded as equal to the Holy Scripture, and yet are profitable and good to read. Lutheran piety up to now seems to have remembered just the first part of this statement and did not very often exercise itself in the profitable reading. This present edition gives us occasion to get a fresh approach to books like Wisdom of Solomon, Maccabees, and others. Accompanied with quotations mainly from Luther and John Gerhard, and useful explanations, the reader may gain a deeply spiritual approach to the Apocrypha and explore anew these treasures of the Lutheran faith!

—Prof. Dr. Volker Leppin
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, Germany

I recommend this edition of the Apocrypha as a timely and useful addition to The Lutheran Study Bible. The Apocrypha have been considered as a part of the biblical canon for most of the church’s history, and while the Reformers may have had good reasons for thinking differently, they still had a high regard for them. This edition enables both scholars and lay readers to understand why.

—Knut Alfsvåg, ThD
Professor of Systematic Theology
School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway

The books of the Apocrypha are absolutely essential for understanding the Jewish context of early Christianity. The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes is an outstanding work of scholarship that provides a welcome service to Lutherans and, indeed, to Christians of other traditions interested in reading and studying these fascinating and often entertaining writings, which the great Luther himself deemed “useful and good to read.” A thoughtfully edited and attractively produced volume, it includes many unique features and has the fullest annotations of any comparable study edition. In all, this is a monumental achievement and valuable resource for scholars, students, and lay people alike.

—Daniel C. Harlow, PhD
Professor of Religion, Calvin College
Editor, The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism

One of the great rewards of biblical study is an increased awareness of the historical and cultural setting in which the Scriptures were written. In The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes, Editor Engelbrecht and his team of contributors has provided an attractive and accessible overview of one of the most interesting periods in the Bible’s history, namely, the Intertestamental or Second Temple Period. It was during this time that the Old Testament was completed and the New Testament was on the threshold of emerging. Succinct introductions with helpful maps and diagrams enrich the presentation. A distinctive strength is the churchly and confessional assessment from a Lutheran perspective that provides a framework for the historical material—a significant contribution that lifts the reader beyond the merely academic.

—Rev. Dean O. Wenthe, PhD
General Editor, Concordia Commentary
Professor and President Emeritus,
Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana
Martin Luther commented that the Apocrypha “were not equal to scripture, yet useful and good to read.” This volume helpfully guides the reader in exploring how and why this is so. Useful historical explanations, wisely chosen excerpts from the prefaces of the apocryphal books by Luther and Gerhard, helpful textual explanations and charts, and wise advice on the challenges and blessings for readers make this edition of the Apocrypha shine. This is a delightful study resource and devotional guide to complement one’s reading of Scripture.

—Rev. Gordon A. Jensen, PhD
William Hordern Professor of Theology
Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, Canada

Love stories. War stories. Sage wisdom and end time visions. The Apocrypha is chock-full of indispensable historical, theological, and practical information for gaining a rich understanding of the New Testament world. This excellent study edition will make reading the Apocrypha enjoyable, whether in college and seminary classrooms, church groups, or individual studies. Each book is accompanied by maps, well-placed illustrations, beneficial charts, and informative study notes; the edition even begins with overviews of history and theology. Ostensibly for Lutherans, this edition will benefit anyone who wants to learn how Israel formed Judaism and how Judaism gave birth to Christianity.

—John R. (Jack) Levison, PhD
Professor of New Testament
Seattle Pacific University
Author of Filled with the Spirit (Eerdmans, 2009)

Martin Luther declared the books of the Old Testament Apocrypha to be “useful and good to read.” At about the same time, the Lutheran Confessions twice engage texts from the Apocrypha, and they do so with a theological seriousness befitting its status. For today’s student of the Bible, the books of the Apocrypha also provide indispensable background for a historically and theologically informed reading of God’s New Testament revelation, centering in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This fine new Concordia edition, with its thorough introductory materials and notes, is one important means to that sanctified end.

—David A. Lumpp, PhD
Professor of Theology
Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota

All Lutheran students of the Bible and the Early Church should welcome this useful study tool. The Apocrypha have too long been “hidden” from view to modern Lutherans. Like other non-canonical works from the early centuries, they still enlighten us on the religious, social, and political world into which the Savior was born and which was the seedbed for the Church’s early growth. The introductory essays, charts, and wealth of background material make this a one-stop resource for these oft-ignored early writings.

—Glen L. Thompson, PhD
Professor of New Testament and Historical Theology
Asia Lutheran Seminary (Hong Kong)

The publication of a Lutheran edition of the Apocrypha is a milestone in ecumenical biblical scholarship. The historical and philological scholarship is of a high standard. The attention paid to this material in an explicitly Protestant publication project shows that old Catholic-Protestant disputes about the canon have lost their relevance in the twenty-first century. As Luther himself said of the Apocrypha, this book is good to read.

—John J. Collins, PhD
Holmes Professor of Old Testament
Yale Divinity School

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Edward A. Engelbrecht, General Editor

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*Ezekiel 1–20*, Horace D. Hummel
*Ezekiel 21–48*, Horace D. Hummel
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*Jonah*, R. Reed Lessing
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*Matthew 11:2–20:34*, Jeffrey A. Gibbs
*Romans 1–8*, Michael Middendorf (forthcoming May 2013)
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Bengt Hägglund

I know that the church retains this book [of the Apocrypha] as I just said, but the church is not able to grant more authority or strength to a book than the book has on its own.

— Martin Luther
Dispute with John Eck, 1519
(WA 59:529)
Contents

FRONT MATTER
Contributors .............................................. xi
Acknowledgements ................................. xiii
Foreword ................................................ xv
The Engravings ........................................... xix
Editor’s Preface .......................................... xxii
Preface to the *ESV Apocrypha* .................... xxv
Features of *The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition*  with Notes ............................................ xxxvi
Reading Guide ........................................... xxviii

An Introduction to the Apocrypha and the Time Between the Testaments
Getting Started ........................................... xxxiii
The Holy Scripture
and Other Ancient Writings ....................... xxxv
The Apocrypha in Modern Bible Publications ...... xxxix
The Historical Setting of the Apocrypha ............ xliii
The Judeans under Persian Rule
(538–330 BC) ............................................ xlvii
The Judeans and Alexander the Great
(334–323 BC) ............................................. lv
Divided Rule: The Judeans under the
Ptolemies (323–181 BC) ............................... lxii
Divided Rule: The Judeans under the
Seleucids (311–164 BC) ............................... lxv
The Judeans under the Maccabees
(164–134 BC) ............................................ lxxi
The Judeans under the Hasmoneans
(134–63 BC) ............................................ lxxii
The Judeans under the Romans
(63 BC–AD 135) ........................................... lxxxii
Theological Teachings of the Time between
the Testaments .......................................... xcii

THE APOCRYPHA
The Arrangement of Books ......................... 2
Title Variations for Apocryphal Books .......... 3

The Compositions
Judith .......................................................... 5
The Wisdom of Solomon ............................. 27
Tobit .......................................................... 57
Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach) .... 73
Baruch ....................................................... 142
The Letter of Jeremiah ................................. 151

The Histories
1 Maccabees ............................................. 156
2 Maccabees ............................................. 197

The Additions
Old Greek Esther ........................................ 227
Susanna ...................................................... 241
Bel and the Dragon .................................... 246

The Prayers and Songs
The Prayer of Azariah ................................. 250
The Song of the Three Holy Children .......... 250
The Prayer of Manasseh .............................. 256

The Apocryphal Books in Other Christian Traditions
Other Books of the Apocrypha ...................... 261
Canonicy and Use of the Apocrypha ............ 262
The Apocrypha and the Old Testament
Scriptures ................................................. 265
The Apocrypha and the New Testament ....... 267
1 Esdras ................................................... 269
2 Esdras ................................................... 282
3 Maccabees (Ptolemaika) ......................... 308
4 Maccabees ............................................. 318
Psalm 151 ................................................... 331

APPENDICES
Appendix 1: The Elephantine Papyri ............... 334
Appendix 2: The Cairo Genizah Documents ........ 335
Appendix 3: The Dead Sea Scrolls ................. 336
Appendix 4: Discoveries of Other Early Jewish
   Manuscripts ........................................ 338
Appendix 5: Philo and His Writings ............... 340
Appendix 6: Josephus and His Writings .......... 346
Appendix 7: The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha ... 352
Appendix 8: Rabbinic Literature .................. 354
Appendix 9: New Testament Apocrypha or
   Pseudepigrapha .................................... 356
Appendix 10: The Nag Hammadi Codices .......... 357

REFERENCE GUIDE
Abbreviations ....................................... 360
Transliteration Guidelines ......................... 363
Articles and Charts List ............................ 364
Weights and Measures ............................... 365
Persons and Groups
   in the Apocrypha and Early Judaism ............ 366
Key Terms and Phrases in the Apocrypha ........ 370
The Offerings ....................................... 381
Old Testament and Jewish Feasts ................. 383
Names for God in the Apocrypha ................. 384
The Apocrypha in Lutheran Worship ............. 387
Assumed Settings for Apocryphal Books .......... 389
Map List ............................................. 390
Place-Names of the Apocrypha
   and Ancient Empires ............................. 391
Apocrypha Chronology and World History ....... 394
Apocrypha Topics ................................... 406
Contributors

Portions of this book are drawn from the histories published by Raymond F. Surburg (1909–2001) and an article by Edwin Cone Bissell (1832–94). Their work was edited or updated to serve current readers. Lutheran writers of notes and articles include the following:

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Rev. Dr. Jason R. Soenksen
Rev. Dr. Robert A. Sorensen
Rev. Dr. Andrew E. Steinmann
Rev. Dr. Karl A. Weber
Rev. William C. Weedon

We are also grateful to include “The Apocrypha and the Old Testament Scriptures” as well as “The Apocrypha and the New Testament,” prepared by a member of the ESV Translation Committee of the Apocryphal Books: Dr. David A. deSilva, Trustees’ Distinguished Professor of New Testament and Greek at Ashland Theological Seminary.
I give thanks to God for the many colleagues who supported or contributed to this work. First, God has blessed us with steadfast and daring leadership in Dr. Bruce Kintz, Jonathan Schulz, and Rev. Paul McCain, who are described among us as “the cord of three strands” (cf Ec 4:12). They fully supported this effort to restore a useful portion of the Luther Bible tradition for English readers. Our production editor, Laura L. Lane, and project coordinator, Pam Burgdorf, collaborated wonderfully to keep our work moving forward on pace. Charles P. Schaum worked on our maps, resulting in a most thorough edition. Music editor Peter Reske developed the chart on use of the Apocrypha in Lutheran worship materials. Editorial assistant Amanda Lansche and production editor Sarah Steiner guided the assignments out of and into the publishing house, a complex and essential responsibility. Sarah also developed the prayer chart (p xcvii) and comparison chart between Josephus and the books of Maccabees (p 159).

Let your conversation be with men of understanding, and let all your discussion be about the law of the Most High.

—Ecclesiasticus 9:15
The term *apocrypha* and its adjectival form *apocryphal* are likely the most flexible, yet misunderstood, words in the English language. In the public mind, they often connote fictional tales, petty lies, and made-up stories, or writings that have something to do with the Bible. Even when the latter is the proper and original definition, people wonder if New Testament apocryphal works such as the Gnostic Gospels are intended, or perhaps the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha? Or, again, does “The Apocrypha” refer to those intertestamental books that were included in most Christian Bibles for centuries? This last option, in fact, is the theme of this remarkable volume and the original, primary definition of the term *apocrypha*.

The word *apocrypha* comes from a Greek term that means things “hidden.” The word was first used for writings deemed too sacred and significant for general knowledge, but later, quite oppositely, it referred to biblical books that some thought too questionable, derivative, or even heretical for public consumption. However, few in church history regarded the Apocrypha as heretical; in fact, many have indeed regarded the Apocrypha as canonical Scripture. Most Protestants, though, conclude that these “outside books” (as they were called) serve as good, edifying reading, but are not up to any scriptural level. Some fifteen ancient documents—the number varies—comprise the Apocrypha. Most of them were written in Greek during the intertestamental period, and together they are about 80 percent the size of the New Testament.

The Apocrypha have had a mixed reception across the centuries because of differing answers to one, fundamental question: are these writings part of the Bible or not? Are they sacred, inspired Scripture like the Old and New Testament and therefore to be numbered among the books of the canon or not? The Apocrypha were included in the Septuagint, the very first translation of the Hebrew Bible into another language, Greek. Yet they were not included in the final canon of the Hebrew Bible, which was debated by rabbis at Jamnia (near Jerusalem) in AD 93. Thus they were also not included among the very 39 books that comprise the Old Testament in Christian Bibles today.

The books of the Apocrypha, however, were widely used by the early Christians, and for good reason: their Scripture was primarily the Greek Septuagint with the Apocrypha included. Many of the Early Church Fathers quote from the Septuagint in a manner exactly parallel to their citations from canonical Scripture. For example, Clement of Alexandria, Polycarp, Tertullian,
Hippolytus, Cyprian, and Augustine were among those who did so, and the earliest listing of New Testament books—the Muratorian Canon (c. AD 200)—lists the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon as one of the New Testament books! Several early synods in the West even declared the Apocrypha canonical. Churches within the Eastern Orthodox Communion have also done so in recent centuries.

Early on, however, other churchmen such as Origen of Alexandria noted a difference between the Apocrypha and the Hebrew Scriptures. Cyril of Jerusalem and Jerome also drew a line of separation between the two, using the term *Apocrypha* for the first time in reference to these writings. To be sure, Jerome included them in his Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, but advised that the Apocrypha should be read for edification, not for supporting church dogma.

Clearly, then, the Early Church was of two minds on this issue: *inclusionary*—as witnessed in the fact that the Apocrypha were included in Codex Sinaiticus, one of the earliest and most authoritative Scriptures in book form—yet *exclusionary* as well. In the Medieval Church and beyond, however, the inclusionaries won the day. The Council of Trent, Roman Catholicism’s answer to the Reformation, actually anathematized those who did not credit the books of the Apocrypha as canonical. As this decision was confirmed by the Vatican Council of 1870, the Apocrypha remain canonical Scripture in Catholicism to the present day (never mind that the very man who gave the Roman Catholic church its official Latin Bible in the Vulgate, Jerome, did not regard the Apocrypha as canonical!).

As in so many other areas, Martin Luther did something dramatic regarding the Apocrypha, and it was a solution that masterfully resolved much of the issue: he incorporated these writings in his celebrated German Bible, published in 1534, but prized them apart from their scattered placements in the Old Testament, and moved them as a group into a separate location between the Testaments.

Emulating Luther, Myles Coverdale’s first authorized English translation of the Bible in 1535 separated the Apocrypha in a similar manner, as did the King James Version in 1611, the format that would command the future. If Protestant Bibles today include the Apocrypha, these writings usually appear as a group between the Testaments.

Christendom, then, as in the Early Church, continues to have two minds regarding the Apocrypha: (1) these writings are regularly read and used in public worship as actual Scripture in great segments of Christendom, or (2) they are all but ignored by most Protestants today. But if that is the case,
why should the latter read these “outside books”? Or take them seriously as “next to sacred Scripture” in terms of authority? Or even devote a volume like this to their translation, interpretation, and study?

For many reasons, the Apocrypha remain very important to the Church, as these pages will show. Because these writings originated in a period between the Testaments in which the historical evidence is otherwise quite sparse, they help fill a significant gap in our knowledge of the past. But they also provide seminal concepts regarding the historical (even theological) future, as reflected in the teachings of such New Testament personalities as Paul, the apostles, and Jesus Himself. And because the Apocrypha interact with scriptural material throughout, they serve as a vital context for understanding not only the biblical world of their day but also that of the Early Church. Since many Church Fathers assumed that the Apocrypha had canonical authority, their contributions to the theology of Christendom can better be understood from reading the Apocrypha.

Along with the larger issues surrounding the Apocrypha and their reception by Jews and Christians are more focused issues of scholarly concern such as chronology and interpretation of historical events such as the rabbinic decisions at Jamnia. The present volume raises or alludes to these issues and at times notes different scholarly opinions. No doubt these matters will continue to be discussed and investigated with the goal of resolving them in the clearest way. The current volume provides readers with an opportunity to learn about the issues and to join the discussion.

Like the Bible itself, books of the Apocrypha offer a fascinating spectrum of different literary forms. Some books are solid history, such as First Maccabees, which tells the heroic story of the Jewish revolt against oppressive Syrian Seleucid tyranny. Ancient history would be impoverished without this information. Other books offer didactic material, wisdom literature, addenda to Old Testament accounts, songs, prayers, and apocalyptic writings, just as do the Scriptures. When read, this literature seems so similar to that found in the Bible in both themes and narrative style that it can easily be confused with Holy Writ itself. The apocryphal psalms read almost exactly like their biblical counterparts. The account of valiant Judith preaching truth to Uzziah’s power and then saving her city from the Assyrians by decapitating Holofernes seems cut out of the same cloth as the biblical account of Jael and Sisera. Judas Maccabeus’s victories over the Syrians easily matches David’s triumphs over the Philistines.

Quite likely, The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes is the product of one of the most ambitious projects dealing with the Apocrypha
ever undertaken. Not only does it offer an unfailingly accurate translation of the various texts involved, via the English Standard Version, but it is also replete with scholarly notes and commentary to assist the reader—lay or professional—in every way possible. The general historical setting for the books of the Apocrypha is especially well presented, as are the introductions to its various writings. What other works on the Apocrypha have included (besides the usual text and commentary) timelines, maps, illustrations, historical engravings, tables, charts, and glossaries, as well as a string of appendices so valuable that they might well have been included in the main text itself? Small wonder, then, that advance readers, including world-class scholars of different religious persuasions, are voicing praise for *The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes*. Concordia Publishing House and all the scholars, editors, and illustrators who contributed to this project are to be congratulated for providing the church such a valuable resource, overdue as it is.

Simply put, this book belongs in every serious library, be that collection Evangelical, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Jewish. Why? No reply could be better than the introduction to the Apocrypha in the German Luther Bible: “Apocrypha, that is, books which are not held equal to the sacred Scriptures, and nevertheless are useful and good to read.”

These pages will make the reading even better and more useful.

—Paul L. Maier, PhD
The Russell H. Seibert Professor of Ancient History
Western Michigan University

In 1860, artist Julius Schnorr von Carlsfeld (1794–1872) published a monumental collection of 240 biblical illustrations for an edition of Luther’s translation of the Bible, including the Apocrypha. Schnorr was a member of the artistic Guild, or Brotherhood, of St. Luke (tradition held that St. Luke was a painter; the brotherhood was also called the Nazarene Movement). These artists focused on religious subjects, admired medieval and Renaissance art, and inspired the Pre-Raphaelite Movement in England.

As an expression of their Christian faith, the Brotherhood of St. Luke set a goal of fully illustrating the Bible. Several members started on the project but never produced many illustrations. Schnorr, as a Lutheran artist inspired by the graphic illustrations of Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbein the Younger, dedicated himself fully to the Bible illustration project, which he completed. Schnorr’s style is realist with a Romantic touch. His cross-hatching is influenced by Dürer, but the illustrations have Holbein’s quality of draftsmanship.

Portions of Schnorr’s etchings in this edition of the Apocrypha are drawn from Die Bibel in Bildern (Leipzig: Georg Wigand, [1860]).
Editor’s Preface

Luther’s views on the Apocrypha were formative not only for the Lutheran tradition but also for Protestants generally. Roman Catholic scholars likewise interacted with the views of other Lutheran theologians, such as Martin Chemnitz and Johann Gerhard. One of the first questions that arose during development of The Lutheran Study Bible was whether we should include the Apocrypha, since the traditional Luther Bible included the Apocrypha during its first four hundred years of publication. Early Lutheran editions of the Vulgate likewise included books of the Apocrypha. We were also receiving regular customer inquiries about the Apocrypha and how Lutherans viewed these books. We decided against including the Apocrypha in TLSB for the following reasons:

- *The Lutheran Study Bible* was already a massive undertaking. Including the Apocrypha would further complicate and delay the project.
- Our churches had not fully embraced an English Bible with Apocrypha. The transition of immigrant congregations from their native language to English had left the Apocrypha behind. People would need to be reintroduced to the books and their use in the Lutheran tradition.
- Since our lay people were not familiar with the Apocrypha, suddenly including them would likely cause confusion and perhaps even offense.

For all these reasons, we delayed work on the Apocrypha while planning to make it the next significant Bible project for our team. The current book is a result of those plans first considered in 2003. Development of the *The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes* began in 2009. As the general editor for *The Lutheran Study Bible*, I am pleased to see completed this broad effort that involved so many contributors, and I trust that it will serve the churches for years to come. In fact, after receiving so many kind endorsements from scholars of the Apocrypha, it appears that our efforts may please readers beyond the Lutheran tradition. May God grant it.

**What’s “Lutheran” about This Edition of the Apocrypha?**

The Lutheran Church, from its beginning, used the Apocrypha as many earlier Christians had before. In the following comments, I will list not only unique features of the Lutheran understanding of the Apocrypha but also how our approach derives from the long tradition of biblical studies in western Christendom.
1. Lutherans regarded the Apocrypha as a continuation of the piety and teaching of God’s old covenant people, Israel. Just as the Old Testament saints such as Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, writers of the Apocrypha also looked forward to His appearing. As a result, writers of the Apocrypha share the bond of messianic faith with God’s people of each generation. See p xcix.

2. Lutherans looked upon the writers of the Apocrypha as fellow believers who struggle to follow the Lord’s ways (see Melanchthon’s reading of Tobit in Ap V:156–59) while facing persecution (see the illustrations of Susanna in Luther’s Small Catechism). They become examples to us of imperfect saints longing for the kingdom of God.

3. Lutherans recognized that features of the New Testament interacted with the setting or content of the Apocrypha, making these books of special interest to Christians who would correctly interpret the Scriptures in their broader context. (See chart, p 267–68.) The Apocrypha are invaluable for understanding the transition from the old covenant to the new (cf how Luther grouped the Apocrypha at the end of the Old Testament based on literary history).

4. Lutherans chose for their editions of the Bible books of the Apocrypha that were in common use during the ancient and medieval eras. (See pp 2, 263–64.) Lutherans did not regard the Apocrypha as wholly reliable in their history and doctrine. Luther largely agreed with the views of Jerome and other Church Fathers who valued the Apocrypha as good to read. This edition reflects these long-held Christian views embraced by the Reformation.

5. Although the Lutheran Church has never formally adopted a canonical list of biblical books, the Luther Bible tradition established the boundary of what books Lutherans would typically use. Luther’s introductions to biblical books describe the Apocrypha as non-canonical, which is how we have treated them in our introductions and notes. (See also Melanchthon’s description of 2Macc in Ap XXI:8–9.) In a separate section, we have included books of the Apocrypha commonly used in other Christian traditions and provided brief introductions to them with the perspective of the Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard. Study of the Apocrypha demonstrates how Lutheran ideas of canon and inspiration play themselves out. Reading the Apocrypha provides an important contrast between the strengths and truthfulness of the canonical books, which distinguish them as genuinely Holy Scripture, and the many other works of ancient literature that faithful Christians have used or avoided. Such understanding is especially impor-
tant in view of the many recent manuscript discoveries and odd claims that Christians suppressed or lost books of the Bible. (See p 333.)

6. The article/chart on p 387 provides examples of how the poetry and prayers of the Apocrypha have contributed to the Lutheran tradition of prayer and song, which illustrates their vitality in the lives of Lutheran Christians of previous generations. It likewise sets an example for us today.

Readers of This Book

We envisioned adult users for this book, especially those who are familiar with the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments. The introductions and study notes are patterned after the material we wrote for *The Lutheran Study Bible*. We expect that our book will be used in churches, universities, and seminaries for introduction to the Apocrypha and as a general reference work for historical, biblical, and theological studies.

In *TLSB*, I described “Reading the entire Holy Bible and the Apocrypha” (p 1426) as a life goal for every mature Christian. To facilitate that goal, please go to p xxviii, which provides a reading guide for the Apocrypha and some thoughts on reading the Apocrypha for devotional purposes in conjunction with Holy Scripture. May the Lord bless your study and prayers.

Rev. Edward A. Engelbrecht, STM
Concordia Publishing House
Senior Editor for Bible Resources
General Editor for *The Lutheran Study Bible* and
*The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes*
Features of *The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes*

**Apocrypha Book Heading.** Appears at the top outer margin above the ESV translation.

**ESV Apocrypha Translation.** Always presented in two columns divided by a hairline. For a description of the translation, see p xxv.

**Chapter Reference Numbers.** Standard in Bibles; first appeared in thirteenth-century Latin Bibles.

**Verse Reference Numbers.** Standard in Bibles; introduced by Robert Estienne in 1551.

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**Duties toward Poor and Oppressed**

1. My son, deprive not the poor of his living, and do not keep needy eyes waiting.
2. Do not grieve the one who is hungry or anger a man in distress.
3. Do not add to the troubles of an angry heart or delay your gift to a beggar.
4. Do not reject an afflicted supplicant or turn your face away from a poor person.
5. Do not arrest your eye from someone who begs or give him occasion to curse you.
6. For if in bitterness of soul he calls down a curse upon you, his Maker will hear his prayer and make you ashamed in the congregation.

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Actual Size

Cross-References. The notes include standard cross references to other apocryphal books and canonical books of Scripture.

Running Chronology. Dates for a book of the Apocrypha or for events within a book. For a full chronology of intertestamental history, see pp 394–403.

ESV Subheading. Summarizes larger passages for the reader.

Cross-Reference to an Article. The study notes will often refer to introductions, articles, charts, and maps. See also the Reference Guide, pp 406–17.

ESV Translation Notes. Further clarification of original wording or other matters.

- Do not delay to turn to the Lord

The Historical Setting of the Apocrypha

by Raymond F. Surburg

Revised by Edward A. Engelbrecht in view of recent scholarship
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 from the Old to the New Testament, a fact of which they are well aware. However, 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 the history of God’s people or for an understanding of the history and theology of the New Testament.

Why Study the Apocrypha?

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. Although the setting for both the Old and New Testaments is the Mediterranean world, the intellectual, social, and religious backgrounds of both testaments are 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. No amount of study of the Old Testament can solely explain the New. 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. Knowledge of the Apocrypha becomes essential.

During the intertestamental period important developments took place: great dynastic changes occurred; the face of Europe was changed two or three times; the borders of European and Asiatic countries were 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 the story of the influence of the Old Testament in the history of the world and of the Christian Church (die Wirkungsgeschichte des Alten Testaments).

Contrasting Eras

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 Judean 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; and the poverty of the many was aggravated by the rapacity of the few. In early New Testament days, Judea 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 the eastern Mediterranean 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, though the discoveries of Qumran negate the conception that after the return from the Babylonian exile 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 synagogue services. At first, the Aramaic translators gave oral paraphrases for both the Law and the Prophets, but eventually in the post-Christian centuries
scribes wrote the translations down (Targums).¹ From where did the Greek language come? Why did the Jews in the Dispersion not read their Scriptures in Greek instead of Hebrew, in a translation known as the Septuagint, written in a language that scholars have 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 synagogue, not for sacrifices but to read the Law and for religious discourse and prayer. When Jesus graced this earth with His presence, the land of Israel 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.

The Literature

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, the manuscripts from the Dead Sea caves, and a variety of other resources from ancient archives, chronicles, and inscriptions.

The purpose of this survey is to treat briefly the Jewish literature that originated in Judea 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, Israel, and the Jewish Dispersion, should provide better understanding.

¹ E.g., Targum Onqelos, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Targum Neofiti 1, and others.
The Judeans under Persian Rule
(538–330 BC)

Ancient sources related to the period: Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther; Daniel; Haggai; Zechariah; Herodotus, The History; Fragments of Ctesias; Thucydides; Xenophon, Anabasis; Josephus, Jewish Antiquities Book II; Elaphantine Papyri

The period from 596 BC to AD 70 was a decisive one for the children of Israel. It was during this time that “Judaism” came into existence, though scholars differ on how and specifically when “Judaism” emerged. It is noteworthy that in the Apocrypha “Israel” remained the favorite designation for the land.

Beginning with the deportations in 605 BC and 596 BC, the people concentrated in Judea for centuries now became a religious community that eventually scattered throughout the Near East, Middle East, Asia Minor, and Europe. The historical works that shed light on this period of history are the following: the Books of Nehemiah, Ezra, Esther; the Books of the Maccabees, and the Jewish Antiquities and Jewish War of Josephus. Additional data is also found in Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, together with the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Judaism began to develop in the years between 605 BC, the date of the first Babylonian deportation by Nebuchadnezzar, and 538 BC, when Cyrus issued the decree of liberation. Not all Judeans were deported by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC, 597 BC, and 587 BC, but those who were taken by Babylon represented the flower of the social and religious people of Judah (2Ki 24:14–16; 25:11–12). The deportees grew to enjoy living in their new Babylonian homes and were successful in their agricultural and commercial endeavors.

In contrast to their brethren of the Northern Kingdom, most Judeans did not intermarry in exile but preserved their identity by existing as separated communities in a heathen environment. In Babylonia, the Judeans maintained themselves as a religious community probably under the direction of elders (Ne 8:1; 13:1). Under the leadership of the prophet Ezekiel and other religious leaders, the Judeans were strengthened in their national unity by spiritual instruction from their leaders. ²

During the exile it became apparent that the Judeans could exist as a religious community without a king and the services of the temple. Fidelity to the Law by the High Priest Haggai and the prophet Zechariah from Jerusalem was a sign of their commitment to God. This faithfulness is also evidenced in the Book of Esther, where Mordecai and Esther, through a series of trials and triumphs, provide a model for the faith of the exiled Judeans. Their story is a testament to the resilience and spiritual strength of the Judeans, who, despite the challenges of living in Babylon, remained true to their faith and identity as a people of God.

of Yahweh became the force that solidified the people and helped them remain a religious unity. During the Babylonian exile, scribes skilled in the Law explained the meaning of the sacred writings to gatherings of the Judeans and thus anticipated the synagogue, which played such a vital role in the subsequent history of Judaism. The scribes emphasized personal prayer, the observance of the Sabbath, and the practice of justice in brotherly relationships.

As a result of this religious activity, a small nucleus of Judeans formed who were determined to guard the deposit of God’s revelation. Babylonia, therefore, became an important center for the maintenance and promulgation of what would become Judaism.⁴

The Return from Exile

In 538 BC, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah (626–587 BC), Cyrus gave the Judeans permission to return to their native land, and in accord with his policy of toleration, he granted religious liberty to all peoples heretofore made vassals by the Babylonians. When these expatriates of Babylonia returned to Judea, they endeavored to reform the lax morality that the people who had remained in Judea adopted.

Ezra and Nehemiah record three returns to Israel by Judeans from exile countries. The first return took place under Cyrus in 538 BC (Ezr 1:5); Ezra led the second in 457 BC (Ezr 7), and Nehemiah led the third in 445 BC (Ne 2). The various groups that eventually returned to Judea from Babylonia numbered over 50,000 people, among whom were 4,289 priests (Ezr 2:36–39). Most of these exiles settled near Jerusalem, where together with those who had remained, they constituted a separate district, a nation of Judeans: the Yehudim (Hbr). The lot of the repatriated Judeans was difficult one: wrecked houses had to be laboriously rebuilt or bought from their owners, and fields ruined by the ravages of war had to be recultivated. The territory assigned to the returned Judeans was very small, Keilah, Beth-zur, and Tekoa to the south.

In the seventh month after their return, the Judeans began rebuilding the temple that had been completely destroyed in 587 BC. Their determination, however, to preserve the purity of their race and religion created difficulties for them with their neighbors, the Samaritans, Arabians, Ammonites, and others. This resulted in opposition to the building of the temple, which the Persian king halted by official decree, and thus the building of the temple ceased in 537 BC. The Judeans spent the next 15 years in agricultural efforts and in the rebuilding of their homes. The great religious enthusiasm that the repatriates had upon their first return to Judea began to wane. In 520 BC, God caused two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, called “the prophets of the temple,” to prophesy and galvanize the people into action, arousing them from their sinful lethargy and indifference. In 515 BC, the temple was completed under the stimulation furnished by Haggai and Zechariah. The Persian emperor Cambyses II came to the throne after his father, Cyrus I, fell in battle east of the Caspian Sea. Cambyses succeeded in conquering Egypt in 525 BC, though the Egyptians would continuously trouble the empire with revolts.⁵ The next great emperor, Darius I, was a brilliant administrator. The empire reached its greatest extent under his reign. He led ambitious building projects, improved and added roads, and established an effective postal system.

Under Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, the temple was restored. The Book of Ezra, which has furnished us with most of the historical material thus far, omits a period of over 57 years that followed the completion of the temple. In 458 BC, Ezra, a man of priestly lineage and a scribe of the Law, sought permission from the Persian emperor Artaxerxes to lead another group to Judea to investigate the religious conditions there. The Persian emperor allowed Ezra to requ-

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⁴ Early Judaism was never a fully uniform set of doctrines or practices. In fact, some scholars speak of Judaisms to emphasize the differences between various groups. For example, Jacob Neusner writes that, prior to 1950, scholars agreed that there was only one essential form of Judaism until archaeological discoveries emphasized the existence of different groups. Jacob Neusner, Studying Classical Judaism: A Primer (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 27, 30. See also Gabriele Boccaccini, Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 13–14; J. Andrew Overman and William Scott Green, “Judaism” in Anchor Bible Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:1037. However, Josephus emphasized the popularity of the teachings of the Pharisees (Ant 13:288; 18:12–15). Most scholars of Judaism have maintained that the views of the Pharisees were dominant and continued to be taught in later rabbinic Judaism (e.g., the Mishnah). See Herbert Danby, The Mishnah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), xv; Shaye J. D. Cohen, From the Maccabees to the Mishnah (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1987), 154; Lawrence H. Schiffman, From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism (Hoboken: KTAV, 1991), 177; and James C. VanderKam, An Introduction to Early Judaism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 189.

In 458 BC, Ezra returned with 1,700 men and the temple vessels that had not been brought back from Babylonia. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, Ezra was shocked to find that the Judeans had violated the Law of Moses through intermarriage with foreign and Canaanite women. He gave himself to prayer and confession of the sins of the people. Ezra succeeded in persuading the priests to put away their heathen wives, but later Nehemiah had to address the same issue.

The efforts of Ezra were especially concerned with instructing the Judeans in the Law of God as it was revealed in the Books of Moses. This resulted in a strict observance of the Sabbath, the conducting of the liturgy as prescribed, the suppression of mixed marriages, and the dismissal of foreign wives.

Nehemiah was a layman who played a prominent role in the fifth century BC in Judea. He occupied an important position at the court of Artaxerxes I at Susa (Shushan). When Nehemiah was apprised of the plight of the Judeans, he prevailed on the Persian king for a leave of absence so that he might help his countrymen.

Artaxerxes appointed Nehemiah governor of Judea, gave him letters of recommendation to the provincial governors en route, and provided for a military escort from Susa to Jerusalem.

In 445 BC, Nehemiah went to Jerusalem and immediately upon arrival made a night tour of inspection of Jerusalem, after which he called the people together and urged them to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Within less than two months this was accomplished despite the opposition of Sanballat (a representative official of Artaxerxes, Ne 2:10; 4:1–2), the Samaritans, and other hostile neighbors.

Ezra and Nehemiah cooperated to improve the religious and social conditions of the people. In this effort the prophet Malachi assisted them. Chapter 8 of Nehemiah records how the Law was read to the people as they were assembled at the Feast of Tabernacles:

And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. . . . And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord. . . . They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. (Ne 8:4–6, 8)

The people promised that they would keep the covenant with God and that they would maintain separation from their heathen neighbors. Nehemiah instituted drastic marriage reforms (13:25) and preached against Sabbath desecration (13:21). Some years later Nehemiah obtained another leave of absence from Artaxerxes and returned to Jerusalem. He enforced strict observance of the Sabbath and removed from the court of the temple the chamber that Tobias, the Ammonite, had been permitted to erect through the indifference of the high priest Eliashib, who had married a daughter of Sanballat. Tobias fled to his father-in-law in Samaria. At this time these outcasts made the oldest transcription of part of the Hebrew Bible, and it became known as the Samaritan Pentateuch. These exiles also built a temple on Mount Gerizim.

At the close of the Old Testament period (c 400 BC), Judea had been a province of Persia for 138 years, and Judeans were scattered throughout the 128 provinces of the Persian Empire. Persia had been a world power for over 140 years. The Persian kings of the fifth century before Christ, under whose sovereignty the Judeans had enjoyed for the most part a mild and enjoyable rule, were Artaxerxes I (464–424 BC), during whose reign the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt; Xerxes II, who ruled only a year; and Darius II (Nothius) 423–405 BC.

Peaceful Persian Rule

Not much is known of what happened in Judea between 432 BC and 411 BC. During the next decade, Bagoas was the governor of Judea. Johanan, the high priest, grandson of Eliashib, was an important political leader at this time. He murdered his own brother in the temple in 408 BC, and thereby fell into disfavor with Bagoas, who shortly replaced Johanan with his son Jedaiah.

The Elephantine Papyri, discovered in 1903 on the Island of Elephantine at the First Cataract of the Nile River in Egypt, opposite Syene, presents students of the Old Testament with an interesting glimpse of one of the outlying regions of the Persian Empire during the fifth century. They also inform us about the closing years of the Old Testament period. The Aramaic papyri from Syene have shed light on a Judean military colony that had settled in Upper Egypt and received lands for themselves and their descendants. They engaged in business
or pursued a profession, spoke and wrote Aramaic, kept their own customs, and enjoyed self-government. During the reign of Darius II, Jedonia, the son of Gemariah, ruled with the elders over the military colony. Contrary to the Law, this Judean colony built a temple of its own to YHWH (Yahweh).

In 419 BC, a certain high official named Hananiah wrote to Elephante and cited the text of an edict of Darius II, fixing the details of the Passover. We also learn from the Elephante Papyri that Egyptians had just sacked the Judeans’ temple in an anti-Judean pogrom around 411 BC, instigated by priests serving the ram-headed Khnum (Chumis). The Judeans wrote to Jerusalem asking permission to rebuild their temple. After receiving no reply from Jerusalem, they wrote a second letter in 408 BC, but at the same time forwarded a request to the Samaritans, petitioning them for permission to rebuild their destroyed temple. This time the Jerusalem authorities responded quickly in the affirmative. How long the colony lasted is not known; the last dated document from the area comes from 400 BC.

In addition to worshiping YHWH, the Judeans at Elephante honored other divinities that they probably had brought along from Canaan, e.g., Anathbethel, Ashim-bethel, and Cherem (or Charam). However, Yahweh remained their primary deity.

The Touna-el-Gebel letters indicate the existence of other Judean colonies in Upper Egypt during the fifth century BC. It seems that the Judeans of these colonies maintained contact with their Coreligionists in Jerusalem. According to E. J. Bickerman, a unique polarity marked the postbiblical period of Jewish history. Jerusalem reemerged as the most important religious and cultural center of Judaism, but other centers in the Diaspora grew strong and finally prevented the destruction of Judaism when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

Decline of the Persian Empire

The first signs of the decline of Persian power came in the reign of Artaxerxes II (404–358/59 BC), when revolts in different parts of the empire threatened to terminate the rule of the Persians. Already in the reign of his predecessor, Darius II, who was dominated by his wife Parysatis, a considerable number of revolts had occurred. The Libyan pharaoh Amyrtaus expelled the Persian garrisons from Egypt and proclaimed himself king.

In 401 BC, Artaxerxes had to abandon the campaign against Egypt when his brother, Cyrus the younger, challenged his right to the crown. Cyrus fell at Cunaxa, north of Babylon, but his Greek mercenaries, “the ten thousand,” whose famous march has been described by Xenophon in Anabasis, were able to reach the Black Sea, showing that the might of the Persian Empire was weak. For nearly 60 years (until 343 BC) Egypt enjoyed freedom from the control of Persia. They allied with the Cypriots to fight against the Persians and took control of Tyre and Sidon, though they were driven out by 380 BC. The Egyptians were instrumental in yet another revolt in c 360 BC.

Artaxerxes III Ochus (358–338 BC) was forced to suppress this uprising in the western parts of the empire. In 350, he tried to reconquer Egypt but failed. Then Syria under the leadership of Sidon revolted. In 338, Artaxerxes III was poisoned by his general, Bagoas. Darius III, the last of the Persian kings, strengthened his hold over the Greek cities and reconquered Egypt in 334. It appeared as if Darius had restored the stability of the Achaemenian rule, but it was not for long, for in the same year Alexander the Great set out to liberate the Greek cities of Asia Minor from Persian domination. Alexander also put down a Samaritan revolt in 332 BC.

Already during the Babylonian period the Judeans had adopted what Semitic scholars call Imperial Aramaic (Reichsaramaesch) in place of the old classical Hebrew language. Aramaic was a Semitic and Syriac dialect spoken in the Babylonian Valley and was closely related to Hebrew. However, the difference between Hebrew and Aramaic was sufficiently great to necessitate the paraphrasing of the Hebrew synagogue pericopal selections (from the Torah and the Prophets) in the Aramaic read by an interpreter or methurgeman. The Hebrew of certain books of the Old Testament showed Aramaic influence insofar as the figures of speech came from the Babylonian and Persian environments. A noticeable difference can be seen in the style of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Esther, and Malachi, all products of the postexilic period. In these books it is noted that the Judeans reckoned time according to the kings of Persia. (Cf Zec 1:1; Ezr 1:1; Ne 2:1; Hg 1:1.)

Some scholars contend that they can trace a number of important influences in Judaism and its literature to the Persian period and to the contacts the Judeans

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7 Stern, Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 2:358.
8 Stern, Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 2:360.
had with non-Judeans in Elam and Persia. They claim that the Judeans in Persia obtained from Zoroastrianism their monotheistic concept of God. The facts as revealed in the Old Testament are not in agreement with this view. It shows that the Judeans were essentially monotheistic throughout their entire history. (This does not militate against the fact that the Judeans on numerous occasions were guilty of idolatry.)

Also, some scholars alleged that the two eschatological doctrines of immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body were acquired by the Judeans as a result of their contacts with Zoroastrianism. However, long before the Babylonian captivity, the Judeans expressed their hope in an afterlife and their belief in the resurrection of the body. Passages in Job and Isaiah clearly set forth these doctrines (Jb 19:25–27; Is 25:6–8).

Another doctrine supposedly acquired during the stay of the Judeans in Babylonia and Persia is the belief in angels. However, the historic episodes of the patriarchs give sufficient evidence of their belief in angels, so that the doctrine of Old Testament angelology does not have its origin in the postexilic period.
ZERUBBABEL'S TEMPLE
516–20 BC

Shown here is a much more modest reconstruction of Solomon's magnificent temple, destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC. It is assumed that this “second temple” followed the original floor plan, but funds were limited, craftsmanship was compromised, and its glory was in a spiritual sense only (Hg 1:6–7). Reconstructed cherubim here guard the ark as before, along with barrier tapestry (curtain or veil), lampstands, tables, and portico pillars. But the walls are plain, with no hint of lavish artistry or gold.

On the ark of the covenant, cf Ex 25.

Construction of the second temple was started in 536 BC on the Solomonic foundations leveled a half-century earlier by the Babylonians. People who remembered the earlier temple wept at the comparison (Ezr 3:12). Not until 516 BC, the sixth year of the Persian emperor Darius I (522–486 BC), was the temple finally completed at the urging of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezr 6:13–15).

Archaeological evidence confirms that the Persian period in Judea was a comparatively impoverished one in terms of material culture. Later Aramaic documents from Elephantine in Upper Egypt illustrate the official process of gaining permission to construct a Judean place of worship and the opposition engendered by the presence of various foes during this period.

Of the temple and its construction, little is known. Among the few contemporary buildings, the Persian palace at Lachish and the Tobiad monument at Iraq el-Amir may be compared in terms of technique. Unlike the more famous structures razed in 587 BC and AD 70, the temple begun by Zerubbabel suffered no major hostile destruction, but was gradually repaired and reconstructed over a long period. Eventually, it was replaced entirely by Herod’s magnificent edifice.
THE PERSIAN EMPIRE. The empire founded by Cyrus II “the Great” is called the Achaemenid Persian Empire to distinguish it from the later Parthians and Sasanids, also based in Persia. This was one of the largest empires of the ancient world, exceeding both the Roman Empire and the empire of Alexander. Persia had been subject to Media. Cyrus defeated Media, Lydia, and Babylon, casting himself as the savior of conquered nations and allowing religious tolerance. Cyrus also allowed exiles from Judah to return to their homeland.

The early period of the Persian Empire (559–485 BC) consisted of expansion under Cyrus II, Cambyses II, and Darius I “the Great,” including the annexation of Egypt. The middle period (485–358 BC) saw culture flourish under Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, Darius II, and Artaxerxes II. During this time, the Persians fought the Greeks in the Greco-Persian Wars and then alternately supported feuding Greek city-states in the Peloponnesian War. The decline of the Persian Empire (338–320 BC) came under Artaxerxes III and Darius III.
The Apocrypha

Thus there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them. . . . The Jews and their priests were pleased that Simon would be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise.

—1Macc 9:27; 14:41

When I went East and came to the place where these things were preached and done, I learned accurately the books of the Old Testament, and send them to you as written below. [He excludes the Apocrypha.]

—Melito, Letter to Onesimus

For greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books [the Apocrypha] besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness.

—Athanasius, Festal Easter Letter (AD 367)

As, then the Church reads Judith, Tobit, and the books of Maccabees, but does not admit them among the canonical Scriptures, so let it read these two volumes [Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus] for the edification of the people, [but] not to give authority to doctrines of the Church.

—Jerome, Prefaces

Books [of the Apocrypha are] not held equal to the Scriptures but are useful and good to read.

—Martin Luther, Prefaces to the Apocrypha
The Arrangement of Books

One should note that across the centuries the order of the books varies from tradition to tradition, and likewise varies in early manuscripts as described on pp 262–64. Our edition follows the order in the German Luther Bible. Some scholars express frustration in trying to understanding the order of the apocryphal books Luther used. The table of contents for the 1534 Luther Bible lists them in seven unnumbered entries as follows: Judith, the Book of Wisdom, Tobit, Jesus Sirach [Ecclesiasticus], Baruch, Maccabees, and Additions in Esther and Daniel. The title page for the Apocrypha follows the same order, though distinguishing the Additions in Esther and Daniel for a total of eight numbered entries. In his prefaces to the books of the Apocrypha, Luther gave some indication of the categories he assumed as he worked. These categories help us understand Luther's order.

**Compositions.** Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit, and Ecclesiasticus are placed together as compositions that teach the faith. For example, Luther called Judith “a beautiful religious fiction” (AE 35:338; “ein geistlich schön Geticht” in WA DB 12:5). Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah are prophetic letters of warning against idolatry, which Luther also regarded as non-historical compositions and treated as one book (see p 151).

**Histories.** 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees are works of history (German *Geschichte*).

**Additions.** Luther regarded the additions (German *Stücke*) to Esther and Daniel as “cornflowers” (AE 35:353; “Kornblumen” in WA DB 12:493). These are compositions that grew up in the middle of existing works, though the Luther Bible does refer to Susanna as a *Historia* according to ancient custom.

**Prayers/Songs.** Luther grouped together the additions that were prayers or songs, rather than stories, and placed them at the end of the collection.

After the Prayer of Manasseh, one finds “End of the Books of the Old Testament.” This shows that the editors of the 1534 Luther Bible included and described the books of the Apocrypha as a part of the Old Testament collection. In other words, they were compositions from the time of the old covenant that were “useful and good to read” (see p 1), though not canonical.
Title Variations for Apocryphal Books

A confusing aspect of studying the Apocrypha can be the various titles for the books, especially when those titles differ in major versions such as the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and works derived from them. One also finds that modern scholars have at times introduced new titles to distinguish a book from others that share a similar name or title elements. The following chart provides a sampling of additional titles encountered in introductions, commentaries, and versions of the Apocrypha. In some cases specific versions or Fathers are noted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Bible Title</th>
<th>Ancient, Patristic, and Modern Titling</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>Scroll of Judith (Hbr)</td>
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<td>Wisdom of Solomon</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
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<td>Book of Jesus Sirach (Luther)</td>
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<td>Baruch the Prophet</td>
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<td>Book of the House of the Hasmonaeans (Eusebius)</td>
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<td>Epitome [of Jason Cyrene]</td>
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<td>Esther (LXX)</td>
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<td>Additions to Esther (labeled A through F by modern scholars)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Greek Esther (modern)</td>
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<td>Susanna</td>
<td>Daniel (LXX)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>History of Susan (Syriac)</td>
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<td>History of Susanna and Daniel (Luther)</td>
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<td>Daniel (LXX)</td>
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<td>Part of the Prophecy of Habakkuk (LXX mss)</td>
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<td>Daniel (LXX)</td>
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<td>2 Ezra (Isidore of Seville)</td>
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<td>Ptolemaika</td>
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Reading Judith

“See how she remembers him,” the women whispered to one another as the young widow passed through the market. They can see glimpses of sackcloth peeking out from her sleeves and her neckline. The days of mourning had passed, but she continued in the piety of one newly bereaved.

An older woman, herself a widow, reached out and gripped the young widow by the arm. “God has more for you, daughter. Your loss is great, but He has a calling for you.”

The Book of Judith describes a beautiful young widow whom God suddenly calls to greatness. Although mournfully severed from her dear husband, God raises her up as a deliverer such as the Old Testament heroines of Deborah, Jael, and Esther.

Luther on Judith

If one could prove from established and reliable histories that the events in Judith really happened, it would be a noble and fine book, and should properly be in the Bible. Yet it hardly squares with the historical accounts of the Holy Scriptures, especially Jeremiah and Ezra. . . . Thus as to both time and name, error and doubt are still present, so that I cannot reconcile [the accounts] at all. Some people think this is not an account of historical events [Geschichte] but rather a beautiful religious fiction [Gedicht] by a holy and ingenious man who wanted to sketch and depict therein the fortunes of the whole Jewish people and the victory God always miraculously granted them over all their enemies. . . . Such an interpretation strikes my fancy, and I think that the poet deliberately and painstakingly inserted the errors of time and name in order to remind the reader that the book should be taken and understood as that kind of a sacred, religious, composition. Now the names fit into this sort of an interpretation extraordinarily well. [E.g.,] Judith means Judea, (that
is) the Jewish people. . . . It may even be that in those days they dramatized literature like this, just as among us the Passion and other sacred stories are performed. . . . Therefore this is a fine, good, holy, useful book, well worth reading by us Christians. For the words spoken by the persons in it should be understood as though they were uttered in the Holy Spirit by a spiritual, holy poet or prophet who, in presenting such persons in his play, preaches to us through them. (AE 35:337–39)

**Gerhard on Judith**

We demonstrate that the Book of Judith is outside the canon with the following arguments. [I] It is not found in the Hebrew sources. . . . [II] It does not agree with historical truth. . . . [III] The Book of Judith by no means agrees with the analogy of faith. In Judith 9:2 approval is given to the deed of Simeon and Levi, who killed the Shechemites with the sword, contrary to the treaty and promise they had made. . . . [IV] The Israelite church and the early Christian church exclude the Book of Judith from the canon. Josephus does not even touch on the entire history of Judith in his commentaries De antiquitate. In his preface to Judith, Jerome explicitly excludes it from the canon. (ThC E1 § 191–92, 194–95)

**Challenges for Readers**

**Setting.** Judith is supposed to describe the Babylonians’ early sixth century advance into Judea. However, as Luther and Gerhard indicated, the story is likely fictional. The notes provide details about obvious historical inaccuracies in the book that may have been intentional. For example, Nebuchadnezzar was a Babylonian king, not an Assyrian king reigning from Nineveh (1:1). The distance covered by Holofernes’s troops from Nineveh to Cilicia is over 300 miles (2:21), a feat that is humanly impossible to accomplish in three days (see note, 2:28). Such depictions may be provided for literary effect to characterize the invincible aura of Judah’s enemies, whom God will overthrow by the hand of one woman.

**Authorship.** Details such as reconsecration of the temple (4:3), the high priest as a military commander (4:6), and a “senate” in Jerusalem (4:8) point to a second century BC composition rather than the seventh century setting with which the author introduced the book. Other composition features, such as the generic name Judith that means “Judean woman,” point to an inspirational story that seeks to embody the bravery and devotion of Judeans in an era of persecution. As a consequence, scholars conclude that the author was a Judean writing in the second century BC.

**Right and Wrong.** Judith celebrated the dishonesty and treachery of her forefather, Simeon, in dealing with foreigners who threatened the identity and future of Israel (9:2–4). She engaged in seduction and deception to fulfill her plans. The story promotes a morality that is not in keeping with biblical teaching about God’s Law. It teaches trust in God while also suggesting that one may seek success by every means.

**Blessings for Readers**

The Book of Judith is a well composed story, though the author does not introduce his heroine until nearly halfway through the story. As you read, watch for the storyteller’s use of irony and contrast, which enriches the plot.

The book raises important questions about morality and goodness when faced with difficulty or even annihilation. For these reasons it makes compelling reading for God’s people, who may also benefit from the expressions of prayer, faith, and worship that characterize the work.
I. Introduction to Assyrian Conquests (ch 1)
   A. Nebuchadnezzar’s War with the Medes (1:1–6)
   B. Nebuchadnezzar’s Request for Allies (1:7–12)
   C. Nebuchadnezzar Defeats the Medes (1:13–16)
II. Holofernes’s Campaign of Revenge (chs 2–7)
   A. Holofernes Appointed to Punish the Western Nations (2:1–3:8)
      1. Nebuchadnezzar’s plan of revenge (2:1–3)
      2. Nebuchadnezzar’s orders for Holofernes (2:4–13)
      3. Holofernes prepares for the campaign (2:14–20)
      4. Holofernes’s campaign from Nineveh to Damascus (2:21–27)
      5. Holofernes accepts the surrender of coastal cities (2:28–3:8)
   B. Holofernes Resisted by Israel (3:9–4:15)
      1. Holofernes encamps near Dothan (3:9–10)
      2. Israelites fortify the hilltops and villages (4:1–5)
   C. Holofernes Learns about Israel and Their God (chs 5–6)
      1. Holofernes consults local leaders (5:1–4)
      2. Achior describes Israel and their God (5:5–21)
      3. Achior’s description rejected (5:22–24)
      4. Holofernes describes Nebuchadnezzar as God (6:1–4)
      5. Holofernes turns Achior over to the Israelites (6:5–13)
      6. Israel learns of the Assyrians’ arrogance (6:14–21)
   D. Holofernes Besieges Bethulia (ch 7)
      1. Holofernes advances to Bethulia (7:1–5)
      2. Holofernes’s allies and commanders counsel for siege (7:6–18)
      3. Bethulia’s suffering during the siege (7:19–28)
      4. Uzziah contemplates surrender (7:29–32)
III. The Lord Delivers Israel through Judith (8:1–15:7)
   A. Judith’s Counsel (ch 8)
      1. Judith introduced (8:1–8)
      2. Judith argues that the Lord will deliver Israel (8:9–31)
      3. Judith plans to visit the enemy (8:32–36)
   B. Judith’s Prayers (ch 9)
   C. Judith Visits the Enemy (ch 10)
   D. The Lord’s Will and Nebuchadnezzar’s Will Contrasted (ch 11)
   E. Judith Conquers Holofernes (12:1–13:11)
      1. Holofernes’s banquet (12:1–20)
      2. Judith beheads Holofernes (13:1–10a)
      1. Judith encourages the people of Bethulia (13:12–14:5)
      2. Achior believes in the Lord (14:6–10)
      3. Israel drives the Assyrians away (14:11–15:7)
IV. Celebration of Victory (15:8–16:25)
   A. Israel Celebrates (15:8–13)
   B. Judith Offers Thanksgiving (16:1–20)
   C. Judith’s Renown (16:21–25)
Arphaxad Fortifies Ecbatana

In the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh, in the days of Arphaxad, who ruled over the Medes in Ecbatana—the king who built walls about Ecbatana; he is the king who is the builder of the city and temple with hewn stones three cubits thick and six cubits long; he made the walls seventy cubits high and fifty cubits wide; at the gates he built towers a hundred cubits high and sixty cubits wide at the foundations; and he made its gates, which were seventy cubits high and forty cubits wide, so that his armies could march out in force and his infantry form their ranks. It was in those days that King Nebuchadnezzar made war against King Arphaxad in the great plain that is on the borders of Ragae. He was joined by all the people of the hill country and all those who lived along the Euphrates and the Tigris and the Hydaspes and in the plain of King Arioch of the Elymans. Many nations joined the forces of the Chaldeans.

Nebuchadnezzar Issues an Ultimatum

Then King Nebuchadnezzar of the Assyrians sent to all who lived in Persia and to all who lived in the west, those who lived in Cilicia and Damascus and Lebanon and Antilebanon and all who lived along the seacoast of Esdraelon and those among the nations of Carmel and Gilead and the great Plain of Esdraelon and the nations of Carmel and Gilead and the great Plain of Esdraelon and the nations of Carmel and Gilead and the great Plain of Esdraelon and the nations of Carmel and Gilead and the great Plain of Esdraelon and the nations of Carmel and Gilead and the great Plain of Esdraelon and the nations of Carmel and Gilead and the great Plain of Esdraelon and the nations of Carmel and Gilead and the great Plain of Esdraelon and the nations of Carmel and Gilead and the great Plain of Esdraelon and the nations of Carmel and Gilead and the great Plain of Esdraelon and the nations of Carmel and Gilead and the great Plain of Esdraelon.

1:1 twelfth year. The story is set in 593 BC. Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar II ruled Babylonia from 605 to 562 BC. He conquered Judah and captured Jerusalem, destroying the city and the temple in 587 BC. Assyrians. Named for their first capital, Assur; lived in the upper Tigris region of Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). The Assyrians defeated the northern ten tribes (sometimes called “Ephraim” or “Israel” in the Bible) and destroyed their capital, Samaria, by 722 BC. Nineveh. See map, p 404. Located in northwestern Iraq, this capital city of the last Assyrian empire fell to a coalition of forces led by Nebuchadnezzar’s father, Nabopolassar, in 612 BC. Arphaxad. No historical record exists of anybody by this name during the time of the Assyrians or Babylonians. The name appears to be drawn from the table of nations in Gn 10:22, 24. Medes in Ecbatana. See map, p 404. Located in modern western Iran, Ecbatana served as the capital city of the Median Empire. The author of Judith draws from a number of different time periods to create a composite arch-villain of the story, Holofemes. The author seems to signal to the readers that the characters in the book are fictional, while the story embodies the great themes of trust in God and obedience to His Word. Another name for the Babylonians. By mixing kings, empires, cities, and lands together, the writer creates an idealized antagonist against the perfect protagonist, Judith, who acts to save her people. 1:7 Persia. See map, p lxxi. Cilicia. A region on the southern coast of Asia Minor. Damascus. See map, p 404. Antilebanon. Mountains running northeast from Mount Hermon. 1:8 Carmel. Mount Carmel. Gilead. See map, p lxxx. Upper Galilee. See map, p lxxx. great Plain of Esdraelon. The plain southeast of Mount Carmel. 1:9 Samaria. See map, p lxxx. Bethany and Chelous. Towns near Jerusalem. Kadesh. City along the Orantes River. river of Egypt. Streamed that formed a border between Egypt and Canaan. Tahtpanhes. . . . Raamses. . . . Goshen. In the eastern Nile delta. 1:10 Tanis. See map, p 405. Memphis. See map, p 405. borders of Ethiopia. See map, p lxxi. 1:11 only one man. The people of Judah and surrounding regions underestimated the threat, much as the enemies of Alexander the Great or Napoleon might have done. 1:12 swore. Angry at those who refused to ally themselves with him in his campaign against Arphaxad, Nebuchadnezzar vowed his willingness to risk everything in pursuit of revenge. Cilicia . . . Egypt. Cv v 7–10. The nations and city-states that occupy the land from the southeast tip of Turkey down to Egypt. two seas. Likely the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. 1:13 seventeenth year. Reference to the seventeenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. Based on V 1, the setting is five years after the start of his
Arphaxad and defeated him in battle and overthrew the whole army of Arphaxad and all his cavalry and all his chariots. 6Thus he took possession of his cities and came to Ecbatana, captured its towers, plundered its markets, and turned its beauty into shame. 7He captured Arphaxad in the mountains of Ragae and struck him down with his spears; and he utterly destroyed him, to this day. 8Then he returned with them to Nineveh, he and all his combined forces, a vast body of troops; and there he and his forces rested and feasted for 120 days.

Expedition against the West

2In the eighteenth year, on the twenty-second day of the first month, there was talk in the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar of the Assyrians about carrying out his revenge on the whole region, just as he had said. 2He called together all his officers and all his nobles and set forth to them his secret plan and recounted fully, with his own lips, all the wickedness of the region; 3and it was decided that everyone who had not obeyed his command should be destroyed. 4When he had finished setting forth his plan, King Nebuchadnezzar of the Assyrians called Holofernes, the chief general of his army, second only to himself, and said to him:

"Thus says the great king, the lord of the whole earth: When you leave my presence, take with you men confident in their strength, to the number of 120,000 foot soldiers and 12,000 cavalry. 6Go and attack the whole west country, because they disobeyed my orders. 7Tell them to prepare earth and water, for I am coming against them in my anger and will cover the whole face of the earth with the feet of my army and will hand them over to be plundered by my troops, 8till their wounded shall fill their valleys, and every brook and river shall be filled with their dead and overflow; 9and I will lead them away captive to the ends of the whole earth. 10You shall go and seize all their territory for me in advance. They will yield themselves to you, and you shall hold them for me till the day of their punishment. 11But if they refuse, your eye shall not spare, and you shall hand them over to slaughter and plunder throughout your whole region. 12For as I live and by the power of my kingdom, what I have spoken my hand will execute. 13And you—take care not to transgress any of your sovereign’s commands, but be sure to carry them out just as I have ordered you; and do not delay about it.”

Campaign of Holofernes

4So Holofernes left the presence of his master and called together all the commanders, generals, and officers of the Assyrian army 5and mustered the picked troops by divisions as his lord had ordered him to do, 120,000 of them, together with 12,000 archers on horseback, 6and he organized them as a great army is marshaled for a campaign. 7He collected a vast number of camels and donkeys and mules for transport and innumerable sheep and oxen and goats for provision; 8also plenty of food for every man and a huge amount of gold and silver from the royal palace. 9So he set out with his whole army, to go ahead of King Nebuchadnezzar and campaign against Arphaxad. However, in history Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in the eighteenth year of his reign (Jer 32:1).

1:14 towers. Towers were often built into the defensive wall surrounding a city to provide a platform for lookouts, guard gates, stronger walls, and weapon platforms.
1:15 mountains of Ragae. See note, v 5, destroyed him, to this day. An expression meaning complete, utter destruction. Nebuchadnezzar’s victory over Arphaxad, graphically portrayed in this verse, meant that he could turn his attention to the nations and city-states that refused to ally with him.

2:1 eighteenth year. 587 BC, the year Nebuchadnezzar historically conquered Jerusalem and razed the temple. King Nebuchadnezzar. See note, 1:1, just as he had said. Cf 1:12.
2:2 wickedness of the region. Wicked only from Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective. They had refused to send troops to aid him in his conquest of Arphaxad.
2:4 Holofernes. This character may be drawn from the historical figure of a Persian general who served the Persian king Artaxerxes III in the mid-fourth century BC during a war against Judah and Egypt. chief general. Holofernes was the top commander of the forces arrayed against God’s people. He is the arch-villain of the story.

2:5 lord of the whole earth. An exaggeration that emphasizes Nebuchadnezzar’s power and might. How could Judah stand against such a great force? confident. Experienced soldiers. By implication they trusted in their own strength in contrast to the people of God who trusted in the Lord.
2:6 west country. From the perspective of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia (modern Iraq and Iran), Israel lay to the west.
2:7 prepare earth and water. Persians regarded the offer of earth and water as a sign of submission (surrendering one’s possessions) and a request for a peace treaty.
2:10 the day of their punishment. Nebuchadnezzar held a grudge against the lands mentioned in 1:7–10. Their destruction seemed just and right to him because they did not do what he told them.
2:14–20 An innumerable multitude of well-armed, experienced, and organized enemies turned their hostile attention to the west. The author of Judith wants readers to understand that God’s people have no hope against such a huge, well-oiled killing machine. Only the Lord can save His people.
2:14 commanders, generals, and officers. Not so much military ranks as terms for powerful leaders. With enemies as strong as these, who could save Judah?
2:15 picked troops. Soldiers chosen for their ability and experience. Holofernes led an army of battle-hardened veterans, experts in the art of war.
to cover the whole face of the earth to the west with their chariots and horsemen and picked troops of infantry. 20 Along with them went a mixed crowd like a swarm of locusts, like the dust of the earth—a multitude that could not be counted. 21 They marched for three days from Nineveh to the plain of Bectileth and camped opposite Bectilettry, cavalry, and chariots and went up into the hill country 22 and ravaged Put and Lud and plundered all the people of Rassis and the Ishmaelites who lived along the desert, south of the country of the Chelleans. 23 Then he followed 24 the Euphrates and passed through Mesopotamia and destroyed all the hilltop cities along the brook Abron, as far as the sea. 25 He also seized the territory of Cilicia and killed everyone who resisted him and came to the southern borders of Japheth, fronting toward Arabia. 26 He surrounded all the Midianites and burned their tents and plundered their sheepfolds. 27 Then he went down into the plain of Damascus during the wheat harvest and burned all their fields and destroyed their flocks and herds and sacked their cities and ravaged their lands and put to death all their young men with the edge of the sword. 28 So fear and terror of him fell upon all the people who lived along the seacoast, at Sidon and Tyre, and those who lived in Sur and Ocina and all who lived in Jamnia. Those who lived in Azotus and Ascalon feared him exceedingly.

Entreaties for Peace

3 So they sent messengers to sue for peace and said, 2 “Behold, we the servants of Nebuchadnezzar, the great king, lie prostrate before you. Do with us whatever you will. 3 Behold, our buildings and all our land and all our wheat fields and our flocks and herds and all our sheepfolds with their tents lie before you; do with them whatever you please. 4 “Our cities also and their inhabitants are your slaves; come and deal with them in any way that seems good to you.” 5 The men came to Holofernes and told him all this. 6 Then he went down to the seacoast with his army and stationed garrisons in the hilltop cities and took picked men from them as his allies. 7 And these people and all in the country round about welcomed him with garlands and dances and tambourines. 8 And he demolished all their shrines and cut down their sacred groves; for it had been given to him to destroy all the gods of the land, so that all nations should worship only Nebuchadnezzar, and all their tongues and tribes should call upon him as god.

Greek: 1 Greek he * Or crossed 2 Greek borders
occupied the temple area. Areas and utensils had to be ritually purified after non-Jewish people were consecrated after their profanation.

Judea on Alert

By this time the people of Israel living in Judea heard of everything that Holofernes, the general of King Nebuchadnezzar of the Assyrians, had done to the nations and how he had plundered and destroyed all their temples; they were therefore very greatly terrified at his approach and were alarmed both for Jerusalem and for the temple of the Lord their God. They had only recently returned from the captivity, and all the people of Judea were newly gathered together, and the sacred vessels and the altar and the temple had been consecrated after their profanation. So they sent to every district of Samaria and to Kona and Beth-horon and Belmain and Jericho and to Choba and Aesora and the valley of Salem and immediately seized all the high hilltops and fortified the villages on them and stored up food in preparation for war—since their fields had recently been harvested. And Joakim, the high priest, who was in Jerusalem at that time, wrote to the people of Bethulia and Betomesthaim, worship of the king. His treatment of the captured peoples was relatively mild by pagan standards but would be the ultimate sin for the people of God (Ex 20:3; Dt 6:13–15). The author of Judith may well have drawn from the incidents in Dn 3 and 6 for this scene of the drama.


4:3 recently returned from the captivity. See “captivity,” p 371. In the real history of the Jewish people, exiles returned from Babylon by the end of the sixth century BC and rebuilt and rededicated the temple shortly thereafter. The author may have more recent events in mind, since the temple had been cleansed and rededicated by Judas Maccabeus in 164 BC. The story of Judith is only loosely based on history, allowing the author to draw from a number of events and situations to make his point about faith in God and obedience to the Law of Moses. consecrated after their profanation. Worship areas and utensils had to be ritually purified after non-Jewish people occupied the temple area.


4:5 recently been harvested. See note, 2:27.

4:6 Joakim. A high priest by that name lived in the fifth century BC (Ne 12:26), but no high priest had power to command armies until the mid-second century BC (the Maccabean period). Like the other people in Judith, Joakim is a fictional character drawn from other people in history. Bethulia. An unknown village, probably invented by the author for this story. Betomesthaim. Location uncertain. Esdraelon. The plain southeast of Mount Carmel. Dothan. North of the city of Samaria.

4:7 seize the passes. These mountain passes offered the only route to Jerusalem. wide enough for only two men. A relatively small number of soldiers could stop an entire army in a narrow pass as the Greek king Leonidas and the 300 Spartans stopped the Persian army at Thermopylae in 480 BC.

4:8 senate. The ruling body of Jerusalem, likely the Sanhedrin, which suggests the author was writing in the second century BC.

4:9 humbled themselves with much fasting. Fasting and wearing sackcloth (v 10) were signs of repentance, sorrow for sin, submission to God, and hope for divine intervention in times of crisis.

4:10 resident alien. A citizen of another country that lived and worked in Jerusalem for an extended period of time. hired laborer. A person employed by someone else regardless of national origin. slave. A person who had been sold into service to another.

4:11 prostrated themselves. Lying face down before the temple reflected submission to God’s will. ashes on their heads and spread out their sackcloth. Signs of humility often accompanied the confession of sin and request for God’s help (cf Est 4:1–3).

4:12 surrounded the altar with sackcloth. An extreme measure signifying the depth of their humility and the earnestness of their appeal to God. The Ninevites had similarly draped sackcloth on their cattle as a sign of their repentance (Jnh 3:8), unison. They all cried out to God together—no one held back. malicious joy. Mixed with hatred and insult, much like the joy Jesus’ enemies took when He hung on the cross (Mt 27:32–44).

4:13 God responded to the prayer of His people and determined to save them. Only the method of rescue remains to be revealed.
Jerusalem before the sanctuary of the Lord Almighty. 7 And Joakim the high priest and all the priests who stood before the Lord and ministered to the Lord, with their loins girded with sackcloth, offered the continual whole burnt offering and the vows and voluntary gifts of the people. 8 With ashes upon their turbans, they cried out to the Lord with all their might to look with favor upon the whole house of Israel.

Council against the Israelites

It was reported to Holofernes, the general of the Assyrian army, that the people of Israel had prepared for war and had closed the passes in the hills and had fortified all the high hilltops and set up barricades in the plains. 2 He was very angry, so he called together all the princes of Moab and the commanders of Ammon and all the governors of the coastland 3 and said to them, “Tell me, you Canaanites, what people is this that lives in the hill country? What cities do they inhabit? How large is their army, and in what does their power or strength consist? Who rules over them as king, leading their army? 4 And why have they alone, of all who live in the west, refused to come out and meet me?”

Achior’s Report

Then Achior, the leader of all the Ammonites, said to him, “Let my lord now hear a word from the mouth of your servant, and I will tell you the truth about this people that dwells in the nearby mountain district. No falsehood shall come from your servant’s mouth. 2 This people is descended from the Chaldeans. 3 At one time they lived in Mesopotamia, because they would not follow the gods of their fathers who were in Chaldea. 4 For they had left the ways of their ancestors, and they worshiped the God of heaven, the God they had come to know; hence they drove them out from the presence of their gods; and they fled to Mesopotamia and lived there for a long time. 5 Then their God commanded them to leave the place where they were living and go to the land of Canaan. There they settled and prospered, with much gold and silver and very many cattle. 6 When a famine spread over Canaan they went down to Egypt and lived there as long as they had food; and there they became a great multitude—so great that they could not be counted. 7 So the king of Egypt became hostile to them; he took advantage of them and set them to making bricks and humbled them and made slaves of them. 8 Then they cried out to their God, and he afflicted the whole land of Egypt with incurable plagues; and so the Egyptians drove them out of their sight. 9 Then God dried up the Red Sea before them, 10 and he led them by the way of Sinai and Kadesh-barnea and drove out all the people of the wilderness. 11 So they lived in the land of the Amorites and by their might destroyed all the inhabitants of Heshbon; and crossing over the Jordan they took possession of all the hill country. 12 And they drove out before them the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Jebusites and the Shechemites and all the Gergesites and lived there a long time. 13 As long as they did not sin against their God...
they prospered, for the God who hates iniquity is with them. 8But when they departed from the way that he had appointed for them, they were utterly defeated in very many battles and were led away captive to a foreign country; the temple of their God was razed to the ground, and their cities were captured by their enemies. 9But now they have returned to their God and have come back from the places to which they were scattered and have occupied Jerusalem, where their sanctuary is, and have settled in the hill country, because it was uninhabited. 20Now therefore, my master and lord, if there is any unwitting error in this people and they sin against their God and we find out their offense, then we will go up and defeat them. 21But if there is no transgression in their nation, then let my lord pass them by; for their Lord will defend them, and their God will protect them, and we shall be put to shame before all the earth.”

22When Achior had finished saying this, all the men standing around the tent began to complain; Holofernes’ officers and all the men from the seacoast and from Moab insisted that he must be put to death. 23“For,” they said, “we will not be afraid of the Israelites; they are a people with no strength or power for making war. 24Therefore let us go up, Lord Holofernes, and they will be devoured by your vast army.”

Achior Handed over to the Israelites

When the disturbance made by the men outside the council died down, Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, said to Achior and all the Moabites in the presence of all the foreign contingents:

5:17–18 An epitome of the book’s teaching. Only by trusting God and obeying His Law will His people survive and conquer. The destruction of the temple described here actually occurred in history when the Babylonians, commanded by the real Nebuchadnezzar, took the city in 587 BC.

5:19 they have returned to their God. See “turn,” p 379. uninhabited. Rural areas depopulated by the Babylonian captivity were repopulated only after the captivity ended and exiles returned at the end of the sixth century BC.

5:20 unwitting error. Refers to a sin committed in ignorance (cf Heb 9:7). Such a sin would make the Israelites vulnerable to the enemy because, as Achior pointed out in his speech, God would withdraw His protection from them.

5:22 he must be put to death. Achior’s good advice sounded like treason, and the penalty for that was death. Jeremiah faced a similar problem in his ministry prior to the fall of Jerusalem (Jer 26:11).

6:1 commander. See note, 2:4.

6:2 hirelings of Ephraim. Achior was the leader of the Ammonite contingent of Holofernes’s forces. By calling him and his soldiers “hirelings of Ephraim,” Holofernes implied Achior was really on the side of the Judeans (“Ephraim” was another name for “Israel” in the divided kingdom). prophesy. Speaking on behalf of God, often predicting the future. Who is God except Nebuchadnezzar? This is the central question of the entire Book of Judith. The question and its answer strongly resemble a similar challenge to God and His people in Dn 3:13–18.

6:3 as one man. In unison, a coordinated military assault. might of our cavalry. Horse-mounted soldiers often complemented the infantry in a way similar to modern armored vehicles. However, cavalry would not be as effective in the Judean hills, which restricted mobility. See note, 4:7.

6:4 footprints . . . perish. Holofernes predicted such complete victory over the Judeans that every trace of their existence would be destroyed.

6:5 Ammonite hireling. Achior and his men came from Ammon, a country on the eastern border of Israel, and served as mercenaries in Holofernes’s army. race that came out of Egypt. A reference to the exodus when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and eventually placed them in Canaan, the Promised Land (Gn 15; Ex 12).

6:7–9 Holofernes sentenced Achior to be delivered to the Israelites as punishment for his “treason.” In short, Holofernes forced Achior to bet his life on the advice he had given to the general earlier. At issue, of course, is whether the God of Israel is stronger than the god of Holofernes (and all other gods).

came to the springs below Bethulia. When the men of the city saw them on the top of the hill, they caught up their weapons and ran out of the city to the top of the hill, and all the slingers kept them from coming up by casting stones at them. However, they got under the shelter of the hill, and they bound Achior and left him thrown at the foot of the hill and returned to their master.

Then the Israelites came down from their city and found him; and they untied him and brought him into Bethulia and placed him before the magistrates of their city, who in those days were Uzziah son of Micah, of the tribe of Simeon, and Chabris son of Gothoniel and Charmis son of Melchiel. They called together all the elders of the city, and all their young men and their women ran to the assembly; and they set Achior in the midst of all their people, and Uzziah asked him what had happened. He answered and told them what had taken place at the council of Holofernes and all that he had said in the presence of the Assyrian leaders and all that Holofernes had said so boastfully against the house of Israel. Then the people fell down and worshiped God and cried out to him and said:

"O Lord God of heaven, note their arrogance and have pity on the humiliation of our people and look this day upon the faces of those who are consecrated to you."

Then they consoled Achior and praised him greatly. And Uzziah took him from the assembly to his own house and gave a banquet for the elders; and all that night they called on the God of Israel for help.

Campaign against Bethulia

The next day Holofernes ordered his whole army and all the allies who had joined him to break camp and move against Bethulia and to seize the passes up into the hill country and make war on the Israelites. So all their warriors moved their camp that day; their force of men of war was 170,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry, together with the baggage and the foot soldiers handling it, a very great multitude. They encamped in the valley near Bethulia, beside the spring, and they spread out in breadth over Dothan as far as Balbaim and in length from Bethulia to Cymon, which faces Esdraelon.

When the Israelites saw their vast numbers they were greatly terrified, and everyone said to his neighbor, “These men will now lick up the face of the whole land; neither the high mountains nor the valleys nor the hills will bear their weight.” Then each man took up his weapons, and when they had kindled fires on their towers they remained on guard all that night.

On the second day Holofernes led out all his cavalry in full view of the Israelites in Bethulia and examined the approaches to their city and visited the springs that supplied their water and seized them and set guards of soldiers over them and then returned to his army.

Then all the chieftains of the people of Esau and all the leaders of the Moabites and the commanders of the coast-God who had created the world and rules it. Meaning “set apart, devoted.” God’s people are holy, set apart from the rest of the world, and separated from the masses by His covenant with them (cf Dt 28:9; Is 62:12).

6:12–21 consoled . . . praised . . . took him. Their treatment of Achior contrasted sharply with the treatment he received from Holofernes, just as their humility stood as the polar opposite to the enemy’s arrogance. called on the God of Israel. See “call,” p 371.

7:1 next day. This verse—as well as vv 6, 20, and 30—include time references. They add up to over a month of siege.

7:3 Dothan as far as Balbaim. Location and identity of these villages are unknown, from Bethulia to Cymon. Unknown locations. The author may well have created these towns with historical villages in mind, but we do not have any way to identify them.

7:4 lick up. A vivid way of describing the devastation left behind when such a large army passed. Cf Nu 22:4.

7:5 kindled fires on their towers. Signal fires indicated to people that an enemy was approaching. Such beacon fires were commonly used in the ancient world to communicate quickly across large distances.

7:6 second day. See note, v 1.

7:8 people of Esau. Esau was the older brother of Jacob. As Esau was ancestor to the Edomites, traditional enemies of Judah, so Jacob was ancestor to the Israelites. Moabites. Moab was the son and grandson of Abraham’s nephew, Lot, by Lot’s daughter (Gn 19:36–37).
land came to him and said, “Let our lord hear a word, lest his army be defeated. For these people, the Israelites, do not rely on their spears but on the height of the mountains where they live, for it is not easy to reach the tops of their mountains. Therefore, my lord, do not fight against them in battle array, and not a man of your army will fall. Remain in your camp and keep all the men in your forces with you; only, let your servants take possession of the spring of water that flows from the foot of the mountain— for this is where all the people of Bethulia get their water. So thirst will destroy them, and they will give up their city. We and our people will go up to the tops of the nearby mountains and camp there to keep watch that not a man gets out of the city. They and their wives and children will waste away with famine, and before the sword reaches them they will be strewed about in the streets where they live. So you will pay them back with evil, because they rebelled and did not receive you peaceably.”

These words pleased Holofernes and all his servants, and he gave orders to do as they had said. So the army of the Ammonites moved forward, together with 5,000 Assyrians, and they encamped in the valley and seized the water supply and the springs of the Israelites. And the sons of Esau and the sons of Ammon went up and encamped in the hill country opposite Dothan; and they sent some of their men toward the south and the east, toward Acraba, which is near Chusi beside the brook Mochmur. The rest of the Assyrian army encamped in the plain and covered the whole face of the land, and their tents and supply trains spread out in great number, and they formed a vast multitude.

Distress of the Israelites

The people of Israel cried out to the Lord their God, for their courage failed, because all their enemies had surrounded them and there was no way of escape from them. The whole Assyrian army, their infantry, chariots, and cavalry, surrounded them for thirty-four days, until all the vessels of water belonging to every inhabitant of Bethulia were empty; their cisterns were going dry, and they did not have enough water to drink their fill for a single day, because it was measured out to them to drink. Their children lost heart, and the women and young men fainted from thirst and fell down in the streets of the city and in the passages through the gates; there was no strength left in them any longer.

Then all the people, the young men, the women, and the children, gathered about Uzziah and the rulers of the city and cried out with a loud voice and said before all the elders, “God be judge between you and us! For you have done us a great injury in not making peace with the Assyrians. For now we have no one to help us; God has sold us into their hands, to stew us on the ground before them with thirst and utter destruction. Now call them in and surrender the whole city to the army of Holofernes and to all his forces, to be plundered. For it would be better for us to be captured by them; for we will be slaves, but our lives will be spared, and we shall not witness the death of our infants before our eyes or see our wives and children draw their last breath. We call to witness against you heaven and earth and our God, the Lord of our fathers, who punishes us according to our sins and the sins of our fathers. Let him not do this day the things that we have described!”

Then great and general lamentation arose throughout the assembly, and they cried out to the Lord God with a loud voice. And Uzziah said to them, “Have courage, my brothers! Let us hold out for five more
Prayers for Those Killed in Battle

38 Then Judas assembled his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the seventh day was coming on, they purified themselves according to the custom, and they kept the Sabbath there.

39 On the next day, as by that time it had become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kinsmen in the sepulchers of their fathers. 40 Then under the tunic of every one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was why these men had fallen. 41 So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous Judge, who reveals the things that are hidden; 42 and they turned to prayer, imploring that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out. And the noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. 43 He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of 2,000 drachmas of silver and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. 44 For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. 45 But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.

Menelaus Put to Death

13 In the 149th year\(^1\) word came to Judas and his men that Antiochus Eupator was coming with a great army against Judea \(^2\) and with him Lysias, his guardian, who had charge of the government. Each of them had a Greek force of 110,000 infantry, 5,300 cavalry, 22 elephants, and 300 chariots armed with scythes.

\(^{2}\) Menelaus also joined them and with utter hypocrisy urged Antiochus on, not for the sake of his country's welfare, but because he thought that he would be estab-
lished in office. 4But the King of kings aroused the anger of Antiochus against the scoundrel; and when Lysias informed him that this man was to blame for all the trouble, he ordered them to take him to Beroea and to put him to death by the method that is custom in that place. 5For there is a tower in that place, fifty cubits high, full of ashes, and it has a rim running around it that on all sides inclines precipitously into the ashes. 6There they all push to destruction any man guilty of sacrilege or notorious for other crimes. 7By such a fate it came about that Menelaus the lawbreaker died, without even burial in the earth. 8And this was eminently just; because he had committed many sins against the altar whose fire and ashes were holy, he met his death in ashes.

Battle Near the City of Modein

13:4 King of kings. Name for God from apocalyptic tradition. Similar name also found at Dt 10:17; Ps 136:3. Cf Dw 2:37 for the first application to the true God (cf 3Macc 5:35; Enoch 9:4); cf “Prince of princes,” Dt 8:23. NT usage: 1Tm 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16. Beroea. A small town between Hierapolis and Antioch known for punishing criminals by suffocation in an ash pit. This practice was imported from Persia.


13:10 call upon the Lord. The Jews were urged to request divine protection against the enormous army threatening certain extinction. deprived of the law: God’s revelation, the Torah, with rules, regulations, and divine promises would be eradicated if Lysias’s forces succeeded. The Jewish heritage at stake was the Torah, the temple, the city, and their land (cf v 14).

13:13 elders. Civil government council recognized as having wisdom, expertise, and experience.

13:14 Creator of the world. Cf 1:24; 7:23. All-powerful God created the world out of nothing; He is capable of providing victory to faith-filled followers. Modein. See map, p lxxx. An observation post in Judean hill country and Maccabean hometown. It would be ideal for surveying armies traveling along the sea coast.

13:15 watchword. Similar to Nicanor’s battle cry (8:23), Judas signaled the nighttime attack with the shout of “God is victory!” (Literal translation; the Gk word for God comes first in the statement; giving it emphasis.) pavilion. Private quarters for Lysias and his family. 13:24 163 BC. 163 BC.

Antiochus Makes a Treaty with the Jews

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Ptolemais to Gerar, and went to Ptolemais. The people of Ptolemais were indignant over the treaty; in fact they were so angry that they wanted to annul its terms. Lysias took the public platform, made the best possible defense, convinced them, appeased them, gained their good will, and set out for Antioch. This is how the king’s attack and withdrawal turned out.

**Alcimus Speaks against Judas**

Three years later, word came to Judas and his men that Demetrius son of Seleucus had sailed into the harbor of Tripolis with a strong army and a fleet and had taken possession of the country, having made away with Antiochus and his guardian Lysias.

Now a certain Alcimus, who had formerly been high priest but had willfully defiled himself in the times of separation, realized that there was no way for him to be safe or to have access again to the holy altar and went to King Demetrius in about the 151st year, presenting to him a crown of gold and a palm and besides these some of the customary olive branches from the temple. During that day he kept quiet. But he found an opportunity that furthered his mad purpose when he was invited by Demetrius to a meeting of the council and was asked about the disposition and intentions of the Jews. He answered:

> “Those of the Jews who are called Hasideans, whose leader is Judas Maccabeus, are keeping up war and stirring up sedition and will not let the kingdom attain tranquility. Therefore I have laid aside my ancestral glory—I mean the high priesthood—and have now come here, first because I am genuinely concerned for the interests of the king, and second because I have re-

**Nicanor Makes Friends with Judas**

When the Jews heard of Nicanor’s coming and the gathering of the Gentiles, they sprinkled dust upon their heads and prayed to him who established his own people forever and always upholds his own heritage by manifesting himself. At the command of the leader, they set out from there immediately and engaged them in battle at a village called Dessau. Simon the brother of Judas had encountered Nicanor, but had been temporarily checked because of the sudden consternation created by the enemy.

1. The meaning of the Greek is uncertain. Some manuscripts mingle “161 BC” with “161 BC.” The meaning of the Greek is uncertain. Greek When they Greek pe. Greek name is uncertain. Some manuscripts slowy.
Nevertheless Nicanor, hearing of the valor of Judas and his men and their courage in battle for their country, shrank from deciding the issue by bloodshed. Therefore he sent Posidonius and Theodotus and Mattathias to give and receive pledges of friendship. When the terms had been fully considered and the leader had informed the people, and it appeared that they were of one mind, they agreed to the covenant. And the leaders set a day on which to meet by themselves. A chariot came forward from each army; seats of honor were set in place; Judas posted armed men in readiness at key places to prevent sudden treachery on the part of the enemy; they held the proper conference.

Nicanor stayed on in Jerusalem and did nothing out of the way, but dismissed the flocks of people that had gathered. And he kept Judas always in his presence; he was warmly attached to the man. And he urged him to marry and have children; so he married, settled down, and shared the common life.

Nicanor Turns against Judas

But when Alcimus noticed their good will for one another, he took the covenant that had been made and went to Demetrius. He told him that Nicanor was disloyal to the government, for he had appointed that conspirator against the kingdom, Judas, to be his successor. The king became excited and, provoked by the false accusations of that depraved man, wrote to Nicanor, stating that he was displeased with the covenant and commanding him to send Maccabeus to Antioch as a prisoner without delay.

When this message came to Nicanor, he was troubled and grieved that he had to annul their agreement when the man had done no wrong. Since it was not possible to oppose the king, he watched for an opportunity to accomplish this by a stratagem. But Maccabeus, noticing that Nicanor was more austere in his dealings with him and was meeting him more rudely than had been his custom, concluded that this austerity did not spring from the best motives. So he gathered not a few of his men and went into hiding from Nicanor.

When the latter became aware that he had been cleverly outwitted by the man, he went to the great and holy temple while the priests were offering the customary sacrifices and commanded them to hand the man over. And when they declared on oath that they did not know where the man was whom he sought, he stretched out his right hand toward the sanctuary and swore this oath: “If you do not hand Judas over to me as a prisoner, I will level this precinct of God to the ground and tear down the altar, and I will build here a splendid temple to Dionysus.”

Having said this, he went away. Then the priests stretched forth their hands toward heaven and called upon the constant Defender of our nation, in these words: “O Lord of all, who has need of nothing, you were pleased that there be a temple for your habitation among us; so now, O Holy One, Lord of all holiness, keep undefiled forever this house that has been so recently purified.”

14:20 covenant. See p 372. Treaty between equals. Although the covenant could be broken by either party, it established mutual respect for peace.
14:23–25 Nicanor accepted a peaceful coexistence and sent those gathered around Judas home, which shows a relationship of adoration and respect (contrary to 1Macc 7:30). Judas, following Nicanor’s advice, became a productive citizen.
14:27 Antioch. See note, 11:36.
14:31 great and holy temple. Second temple in Jerusalem, built by Zerubbabel (Ezr 6). This temple was not grand like Solomon’s (1Ki 8), yet it was great because God promised His presence.
14:34 stretched forth their hands. The priests extended their arms in petitioning prayer to invoke God’s help against Nicanor’s blasphemous oath. Defender. God shields against would be destroyers (Ps 7:10) as promised (Is 51:22–23).
14:37–46 Until the Zealots, a Jewish party at Jesus’ time, suicide was rare and condemned in Judaism. Samson’s death (Jgs 16:23–31) was an act of divine judgment as a soldier against the Philistines. Saul’s death (1Sm 31:4, 2Sm 1:6–10) was not heroic like his sons. Ahithophel was sinful in guiding Absalom’s rebellion and in killing himself (2Sm 17:23). Judas was a sinful suicide (Mt 27:5). Although contrary to Scripture, suicide as “noble political option” was common and accepted in the Greco-Roman world. This illustrates the pagan culture of death as opposed to the God of the living (Mt 22:31–32). Those who embrace killing others or self invite judgment of God (cf Ps 52:5; 2Tm 4:1; Heb 4:12; 10:31). The thought of suffering for one’s faith is certainly intimidating. Yet the Lord promises to help His people in the midst of temptation (1Co 10:13; cf the example of Stephen in Ac 7:54–60). See Luther’s comments, pp 156, 197–98.
Razis Dies for His Country

3A certain Razis, one of the elders of Jerusalem, was denounced to Nicanor as a man who loved his fellow citizens and was very well thought of and for his good will was called father of the Jews. 4For in former times, when there was no mingling with the Gentiles, he had been accused of Judaism, and for Judaism he had with all zeal risked body and life. 5Nicaric, wishing to exhibit the enmity that he had for the Jews, sent more than 500 soldiers to arrest him; 6for he thought that by arresting him he would do them an injury. 7When the troops were about to capture the tower and were forcing the door of the courtyard, they ordered that fire be brought and the doors burned. Being surrounded, Razis fell upon his own sword, preferring to die nobly rather than to fall into the hands of sinners and suffer outrages unworthy of his noble birth. 8But in the heat of the struggle he did not hit exactly, and the crowd was now rushing in through the doors. He bravely ran up on the wall and manfully threw himself down into the crowd. 9But as they quickly drew back, a space opened, and he fell in the middle of the empty space. 10Still alive and aflame with anger, he rose, and though his blood gushed forth and his wounds were severe he ran through the crowd; and standing upon a steep rock, with his bow now completely drained from him, he tore out his entrails, took them with both hands and hurled them at the crowd, calling upon the Lord of life and spirit to give them back to him again. This was the manner of his death.

Nicanor’s Arrogance

15 When Nicanor heard that Judas and his men were in the region of Samaria, he made plans to attack them with complete safety on the day of rest. 2And when the Jews who were compelled to follow him said, “Do not destroy so savagely and barbarously, but show respect for the day that he who sees all things has honored and hallowed above other days,” 3the thrice-accursed wretch asked if there were a sovereign in heaven who had commanded the keeping of the Sabbath day. 4And when they declared, “It is the living Lord himself, the Sovereign in heaven, who ordered us to observe the seventh day,” 5he replied, “And I am a sovereign also, on earth, and I command you to take up arms and finish the king’s business.” Nevertheless, he did not succeed in carrying out his abominable design.

Judas Prepares the Jews for Battle

6This Nicanor in his utter boastfulness and arrogance had determined to erect a public monument of victory over Judas and his men. 7But Maccabaeus did not cease to trust with all confidence that he would get help from the Lord. 8And he exhorted his men not to fear the attack of the Gentiles, but to keep in mind the former times when help had come to them from heaven and now to look for the victory that the Almighty would give them. 9Encouraging them from the Law and the Prophets and reminding them also of the struggles they had won, he made them the more eager. 10And when he had aroused their courage, he gave his orders, at the same time pointing out the perfidy of the Gentiles and their violation of oaths. 11He armed each of them not so much with confidence in shields and spears as with the inspiration of brave words, and he cheeks them all by relating a dream, a sort of vision, 12that was worthy of belief.


14:38 accused of Judaism. Being Jewish was crime under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (6:6).

14:42 die nobly. Razis chose suicide based on a false idea of dignity. He could not endure mistreatment from the Gentiles. In contrast, he could have died nobly like the martyrs in ch 7.

14:43–46 Razis failed in his attempts at suicide by falling on his sword and leaping from the wall. He finally resorted to self-evisceration. 2Macc uses the same praise for Razis as for the martyrs in ch 7, which indicates the human, not divine, origin of this book.

14:46 give them back. Razis’s final prayer for the resurrection of his body asks God to restore both his bowels and the breath of life. Cf 14:46 – 15:11 with the inspiration of brave words. Not military skills or abilities, but God’s promises of support. True bravery comes from trusting God as Deliverer. dream, a sort of vision. More than a daydream,
15 What he saw was this: Onias, who had been high priest, a noble and good man, of modest bearing and gentle manner, one who spoke fittingly and had been trained from childhood in all that belongs to excellence, was praying with outstretched hands for the whole body of the Jews. Then likewise a man appeared, distinguished by his gray hair and dignity and of marvellous majesty and authority. And Onias spoke, saying, “This is a man who loves the brothers and prays much for the people and the holy city—Jeremiah the prophet of God.” Jeremiah stretched out his right hand and gave to Judas a golden sword, and as he gave it he addressed him thus: “Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which you will strike down your adversaries.”

Encouraged by the words of Judas, so noble and so effective in arousing valor and awaking manliness in the souls of the young, they determined not to carry on a campaign but to attack bravely and to decide the matter by fighting hand to hand with all courage, because the city and the sanctuary and the temple were in danger. Their concern for wives and children and also for brothers and relatives lay upon them less heavily; their greatest and first fear was for the consecrated sanctuary. And those who had to remain in the city were in no little distress, being anxious over the encounter in the open country.

Defeat and Death of Nicanor

When all were now looking forward to the coming decision, and the enemy was already close at hand with their army drawn up for battle, the elephants' strategically stationed and the cavalry deployed on the flanks, Maccabees, perceiving the hosts that were before him and the varied supply of arms and the savagery of the elephants, stretched out his hands toward heaven and called upon the Lord who works wonders; for he knew that it is not by arms, but as the Lord decides, that he gains the victory for those who deserve it. And he called upon him in these words: “O Lord, in the time of King Hezekiah of Judaea you sent your angel, and he killed fully 185,000 in the camp of Sennacherib. So now, O Sovereign of the heavens, send a good angel to carry terror and trembling before us. By the might of your arm may these blasphemers who come against your holy people be struck down.” With these words he ended his prayer.

Nicanor and his men advanced with trumpets and battle songs; and Judas and his men met the enemy in battle with invocation to God and prayers. So, fighting with their hands and praying to God in their hearts, they laid low no less than 35,000 men and were greatly gladdened by God's manifestation. When the action was over and they were returning with joy, they recognized Nicanor, lying dead, in full armor. Then there was shouting and tumult, and they blessed the Sovereign Lord in the language of their fathers. And the man who was ever in body and soul

1 Some manuscripts to remain in the camp. 2 Greek beasts; also verse 21. 3 Greek as he
the defender of his fellow citizens, the man who maintained his youthful good will toward his compatriots, ordered them to cut off Nicanor’s head and arm and carry them to Jerusalem. 

And when he arrived there and had called his compatriots together and stationed the priests before the altar, he sent for those who were in the citadel. He showed them the vile Nicanor’s head and that profane man’s arm, which had been boastfully stretched out against the holy house of the Almighty; and he cut out the tongue of the ungodly Nicanor and said that he would give it piecemeal to the birds and hang up these rewards of his folly opposite the sanctuary.

He showed them the vile Nicanor’s head and that profane man’s arm, which had been boastfully stretched out against the holy house of the Almighty; and he cut out the tongue of the ungodly Nicanor and said that he would give it piecemeal to the birds and hang up these rewards of his folly opposite the sanctuary.

And they all, looking to heaven, blessed the Lord who had manifested himself, saying, “Blessed is he who has kept his own place undefiled.” And he hung Nicanor’s head from the citadel, a clear and conspicuous sign to everyone of the help of the Lord.

And they all decreed by public vote never to let this day go unobserved, but to celebrate the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—which is called Adar in the Syrian language—the day before Mordecai’s day.

Compiler’s Epilogue

This, then, is how matters turned out with Nicanor. And from that time the city has been in the possession of the Hebrews. So I too will here end my story.

If it is well told and to the point, that is what I myself desired; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do. For just as it is harmful to drink wine alone or, again, to drink water alone, while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one’s enjoyment, so also the style of the story delights the ears of those who read the work. And here will be the end.

15:30 cut off Nicanor’s head. Decapitation verified Nicanor’s death (1Macc 7:47). Cf Jth 13. arm. He had blasphemously made an oath with this arm (14:33). These were exceptional acts since Jews at this time rarely mutilated enemies’ bodies.


15:35 citadel. Military fortress tower outside the temple compound, which provided a venue for public spectacle of Nicanor’s head. Syrians occupied this section of the city. Cf biblical record of gruesome displays (1Sm 17:51–54; 31:8–10).


15:37 Hebrews. The terms here points to the fact that language and culture were at stake as the Jews faced Hellenistic influence.

15:38–39 Whimsical, self-deprecating closing without claim to divine inspiration. Mixing water with wine was considered beneficial (1Tm 5:23). Water alone could contain bacteria and parasites; wine alone could make one drunk. Mixing them avoided disease and drunkenness, and led to enjoyment. The author admits rearrangements in his condensation of Jason’s work (2Macc 2:23–28) to make the story more interesting and entertaining, his chief purpose.
Old Greek Esther

Order of Chapters in Greek Esther

The Greek version of Esther varies considerably from the Hebrew version because later writers inserted 107 verses of new material to create a unique composition, as represented on the second line of the chart below. Use the chart to gain a basic idea of the sequence of material.

In the ESV translation, the chapter and verse numbering of Greek Esther is based on both the traditional Hebrew chapters and the chapter divisions used for Greek Esther in the King James Bible. A fuller explanation of the additions and their complex history is provided in “Challenges for Readers” and in the introduction to the outline.

Reading Old Greek Esther

She kneels, trembling in prayer. On the one hand, she feels powerless due to the circumstances that surround and overwhelm her. On the other hand, she wants to step forward in faith, hoping to make a difference. She is afraid to speak up, yet also afraid not to speak when her silence means only greater suffering.

Esther faced personal and national dilemmas that Old Greek Esther intensifies: When does one speak out against evil? How much should an individual risk to rescue others? The writer(s) or compiler(s) of Old Greek Esther present a challenging message to all who are conscious of their responsibilities before God, fellow believers, and the world. Readers should recognize that the notes here comment on additions and significant points where Old Greek Esther differs from Hebrew Esther. For a thorough set of notes on Hebrew Esther, see TLSB, pp 760–74.
Gerhard on Additions to Esther

We say that a distinction must be made between the genuine and canonical Book of Esther, which contains nine chapters written in the Hebrew language, and the appendix, which contains the seven final chapters that we do not have in Hebrew. We are speaking about these last seven chapters when we deny that that section connected to the Book of Esther as an appendix is canonical...

It contains some things that conflict with the canonical Book of Esther. Therefore it cannot be canonical because the Holy Spirit never contradicts Himself. (1) In the canonical Book of Esther (2:16), the plot of the eunuchs was detected by Mordecai “in the seventh year” of Ahasuerus. The supplement (11:2) refers this “to the second year.”...

(2) The canonical Book of Esther says that “Mordecai received no rewards for detecting the plot” (Esther 6:3). The supplement (12:5) says that “they were given to him.”...

(3) The supplement to Esther (12:6) says that “Haman wanted to kill Mordecai because of the eunuchs who were put to death.” Canonical Esther 3:5 refers the cause for this to Mordecai’s denial of Haman’s speech....

(4) In the canonical Book of Esther, it says that the king looked favorably on the queen (Esther 5:2). In the supplement, he is said to have looked at her with anger ([15]:10)....

(5) In canonical Esther, the day appointed for the destruction of the Jews is said to have been the thirteenth day of Adar (Esther 3:13; 8:12; 9:1). The supplement says it was the fourteenth day of Adar (13:6).

(6) In canonical Esther 8:3, Haman is called an Agagite, that is an Amalekite, but the supplement calls him a Macedonian ([16]:[10]).

(7) In the supplement (13:14), Mordecai says that he was unwilling to bow down to Haman because he “was afraid, lest he transfer the honor of his god to a man and worship someone besides his God.” Yet canonical Esther nowhere says that the rest worshiped Haman as a God or that Haman wanted to be worshiped as God. Rather, it was this civil honor that Mordecai denied to wicked Haman because of the singular and heroic impulse of the Holy Spirit. (ThC E1 § 198, 201)

Challenges for Readers

Versions of Esther. The Hebrew edition of Esther stands together as a well-composed history of how Esther delivered her people from destruction by Haman. However, later writers sought ways to improve upon the story by adding more material. They did this for a variety of reasons, such as making the story more clearly religious and answering questions about the activities and motives of persons in the story.

Greek versions of Esther, which appear among the traditional apocrypha, have two basic forms. Scholars are not sure which of the two forms is older or how they might have influenced one another as they were copied over the centuries. Even the scholarly names for the forms have changed over time so that one may read about A-Text, B-Text; Old Greek, Lucianic Greek, or Alpha Text, etc.

Arrangement of Material. The different versions of Esther do not always present all the additions or put them in the same places. For example, the Old Latin translation included some of the additional material but not all of it. When Jerome prepared his translation of Esther for the Vulgate, he put all the additions at the end of the book like an appendix. Scholars variously describe the passages as six or seven additions (cf Gerhard’s reference to “seven chapters” above). Modern scholars label them A through F, and some divide C into two chapters. Although some of the additions may have been composed originally in Hebrew, additions B and E were likely composed in Greek, which suggests that different authors worked at different times on creating and ordering the material.

The ESV Apocrypha presents the common LXX text called “Old Greek.” Because of the complex history of the additions, the study notes will include references for readers who wish to consult other versions.

Contradictions with the Hebrew Edition. See Gerhard above. Although some of Gerhard’s criticisms might be softened, he presents a helpful illustration of how Old Greek Esther simply does not piece together well with the chapters of the Hebrew text.

Macedonians Mentioned. The Greek version of Esther includes reference to the Macedonians (16:14), associating them with a time when the Macedonian kingdom was little engaged with the Persian Empire. This reference to the Macedonians likely shows the late composition of the additions, at a time when the Macedonians were a significant factor in Persian politics.

Missing Verses. The Luther Bible tradition does not include Old Gk Est 12:1–6. This passage details the circumstances of the assassination plot that Mordecai
reported (cf Hbr Est 2:19–23). Although the LXX and Vulgate texts commonly include the six verses of Additions to Esther 12, the verses are missing from Old Latin manuscripts. Researchers believe that the Old Latin manuscripts represent an early version of Greek Esther. (See The Old Testament in Greek, vol. 3, pt. 1 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940], 2; see also Vetus Latina, vol. 7, pt. 3, “Hester” [Freiburg: Herder, 2003], 112.)

It is possible that the edition of the Septuagint that Luther used did not include the verses of Old Gk Est 12, which would explain why the verses did not appear in his translation. Other passages, such Ecclus 22:19, are also different in Luther’s edition of the Apocrypha. These circumstances have led to confusion about what Luther actually did in his translation work. (See, e.g., Helmut Lamparter’s conclusion that Luther had mixed editions in Die Apocryphen I: Das Buch Jesus Sirach [Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1972], 13 n. 4.) Scholars of Luther’s Bible publishing believe that Luther used the “Aldine Septuagint” begun by Aldus Manutius (1449–1515; see Hans Volz’s mention of the edition in WA DB 12:XX, n. 6; see also M. Reu, Luther’s German Bible [Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1934], 185; Willem Jan Kooiman, Luther and the Bible, trans. John Schmidt [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961], 131). The Aldine edition became the first complete printing of the Greek Bible, published at Venice in 1518. (The Greek text of the Complutensian Polyglot was compiled earlier, but was not released until 1521 or 1522.) The Aldine Septuagint was the base text for German editions of the Septuagint. (See notes by Henry Barclay Swete in An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914], 174.)

References to God. In contrast with Hebrew Esther, which never directly mentions God, the writers and editors of Old Greek Esther make God a clear character in the story. The LXX refers directly to God more than fifty times. This concern to make the story expressly theological was likely an important factor in the creation of the Greek versions of Esther.

Blessings for Readers

As you read the LXX edition of Esther, reflect on the biblical teaching and pray for strength to live by faith.

The following outline is based on the Old Greek form of Esther, which appears in LXX manuscripts and editions. To simplify matters somewhat, the divisions are based on the chapter headings of the ESV Apocrypha and include reference to the A–F designation of additions used by scholars. Readers should understand that they are experiencing Old Greek Esther in its usual verse-by-verse order.

Also, readers should recognize that the ESV Apocrypha text includes chapter divisions from the KJV tradition (labeled chs 11, 12, 13a, 13b, 14, 15, 16, 10:4–11:1 because the additions to Esther were treated as appendices in the KJV). To these the ESV editors have added the traditional chapter divisions of the Hebrew form of Esther. This makes it easier to compare the Hebrew and LXX forms of Esther. The result is a presentation of c 17 chapter divisions, depending on how one counts. However, because the two numeration systems are merged, the presentation of chapters does not flow in strict numerical order. This may confuse first-time readers. It is due to the complex history of the text and not to the indifference of the editors.

I. God Warns Mordecai about an Assassination Plot (11:2–12:6)
A. Mordecai’s Dream (11:2–12; Addition A:1–11)
B. Mordecai Discovers the Plot of the Two Eunuchs (12:1–6; Addition A:12–17)
II. Queens Vashti and Esther Characterized (chs 1–2)
A. King Artaxerxes Deposes Queen Vashti (ch 1)
B. Esther Becomes Queen (2:1–18)
C. Mordecai Discovers a Plot (2:19–23)

III. God Overturns Haman’s Plot (3:1–9:19)
A. Haman Undertakes to Destroy the Jews (3:1–13)
B. The King’s Letter (13:1–7; Addition B:1–7)
C. Posting of the Letter (3:14–15)
D. Esther Agrees to Help the Judeans (ch 4)
E. Mordecai’s Prayer (13:8–18; Addition C:1–11)
F. Esther’s Prayer (ch 14; Addition C:12–30)
G. The King Receives Esther (ch 15; Addition D:1–16)
H. Esther’s Invitations (5:3–8)
I. Haman Plans to Have Mordecai Hanged (5:9–14)
J. The King Honors Mordecai (6:1–13)
K. Haman’s Downfall (6:14–7:10)
L. Esther Saves the Judeans (8:1–12)
M. Decree of Artaxerxes (ch 16; Addition E:1–24)
N. Decree of Artaxerxes Posted (8:13–17)
O. Destruction of Enemies of the Judeans (9:1–19)

IV. Conclusion (9:20–11:1)
A. Feast of Purim Inaugurated (9:20–31)
B. Mordecai Succeeds Artaxerxes (10:1–3)
C. Mordecai’s Dream Fulfilled (10:4–13; Addition F:1–10)
D. Postscript (11:1; Addition F:11)
Mordecai’s Dream

In the second year when Artaxerxes the Great was reigning, on the first day of Nisan, Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, had a dream. He was a Jew, dwelling in the city of Susa, a great man, serving in the court of the king. He was one of the captives whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had brought from Jerusalem with King Jeconiah of Judea. And this was his dream:

Behold, noise and confusion, thunders and earthquake, tumult upon the earth! And behold, two great dragons came forward, both ready to fight, and they roared terribly. And at their roaring every nation prepared for war, to fight against the nation of the righteous. And behold, a day of darkness and gloom, tribulation and distress, affliction and great tumult upon the earth! And the whole righteous nation was troubled; they feared the evils that threatened themselves and were ready to perish. Then they cried to God; and from their cry, as though from a tiny spring, there came a great river, with abundant water; light came, and the sun rose, and the lowly were exalted and consumed those held in honor.

Mordecai saw in this dream what God had determined to do, and after he awoke he had it on his mind and sought all day to understand it in every detail.

Addition A

Plot against the King

Now Mordecai took his rest in the courtyard with Gabatha and Tharra, the two eunuchs of the king who kept watch in the courtyard. He overheard their conversation and inquired into their purposes and learned that they were preparing to lay hands upon King Artaxerxes; and he informed the king concerning them. Then the king examined the two eunuchs, and when they confessed they were led to execution. The king made a permanent record of these things, and Mordecai wrote an account of them. And the king ordered Mordecai to serve in the court and rewarded him for these things. But Haman son of Hamadathos, a Bougean, was in great honor with the king, and he sought to injure Mordecai and his people because of the two eunuchs of the king.

King Artaxerxes Deposes Queen Vashti

This happened in the days of Artaxerxes—this was the Artaxerxes who reigned over 127 lands from India—through those days when King Artaxerxes sat on his royal throne in the city of Susa, in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for his friends and for the rest of the nations and the highly esteemed of the Persians and the Medes and the rulers of the satrapies. After this, after showing them the riches of his kingdom and the glory of the celebration of his riches for 180 days, and when the days of the wedding celebration were completed, the
Appendices

Raymond Surburg, in his Introduction to the Intertestamental Period, included comments on numerous other categories of early Jewish and Christian literature. He did so because these other works are easily confused with the Old Testament Apocrypha. We have updated and supplemented Surburg’s comments and categories. We have also listed helpful resources for those who wish to explore the ancient documents in greater depth.

Readers should be aware that many scholars and media persons are prone to sensational announcements about lost books of the Bible or forbidden books of Scripture. Although many new manuscripts came to light in the twentieth century, ancient writers had already cited or commented on most of them. The Lutheran theologian, classicist, and philologist, Johann Albert Fabricius (1668–1736), had investigated much of this material some 300 years ago.

Apocryphal books, Pseudepigrapha, and Gnostic treatises were not so much “lost” books as they were books that Jews and Christians rejected or books of interest only to schismatic groups. In view of modern sensationalism, readers should exercise healthy reserve when considering new claims. This is especially the case when modern scholars wish to equate canonical books of Scripture with writings rejected by earlier generations of believers.
Appendix 1:
The Elephantine Papyri

These papyri found at or near Elephantine, Egypt, include 175 documents written in Egyptian, Aramaic, and Greek. The Elephantine Papyri include personal and official letters, contracts, judicial documents, literary works, lists, etc. They illustrate the life and struggles of Judean exiles interacting with their neighbors, who were mostly Egyptian but included many other ethnic groups.

Fifty-two of the papyri are in Aramaic, 10 of which have to do with the Jewish temple at Elephantine, on the border of the Persian Empire. These ten papyri were written in the late fifth century BC and have the greatest relevance for biblical studies. They describe worship activities and political intrigue surrounding the Elephantine Jewish temple.

Helpful resources include:
Appendix 2:
The Cairo Genizah Documents

In the 1800s, European scholars learned about a collection of Jewish manuscripts housed in the Ben Ezra synagogue near Cairo, Egypt. These worn-out manuscripts were kept in a storage room for scrolls (Hbr genizah, “archive” or “treasury”). Normally, a worker at a synagogue would periodically remove such old manuscripts and burn them. However, these scrolls were never removed. The scrolls ranged in date from the tenth century AD to the nineteenth century. They included biblical, liturgical, medical, accounting, and other documents.

Among the Cairo scrolls were fragments of previously undiscovered writings about the organization of a Jewish group that dwelt at Damascus, Syria. Solomon Schechter named these writings “Fragments of a Zadokite Work,” based on their content. The fragments are commonly known today as the “Damascus Document” or “Damascus Rule” because the pages refer to Damascus seven times.

Although the manuscripts were scribed in the tenth and twelfth centuries AD, Schechter concluded that the contents were much older, from a time before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (AD 70). The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1940s and 1950s proved Schechter correct. Three examples of the same text were found at Qumran.

Helpful resources include:
Appendix 3:  
The Dead Sea Scrolls

From 1947 to 1956, Bedouins and scholars working near the northwest corner of the Dead Sea discovered c 800 scrolls or portions of scrolls (dating from c 250 BC to c AD 70) written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and a few in Greek. Scribes had hidden or stored these scrolls in eleven different caves. Some were found stored in clay jars. Apart from one copper scroll and some papyri, the scrolls are made of sheep or goat leather. Scribes made lines and columns on the scrolls by scratching or drawing lines on the leather. This allowed them to write the lines and columns of text evenly in a carbon-black ink. Most scholars attribute the creation of the scrolls to the Essenes (see p 367) and associate them with archaeological remains at Khirbet Qumran, located near the caves. They believe that dissenting priests left the temple in c 150 BC to form a holy community. Their leader was called “the Teacher of Righteousness.”

The following is a summary of what the scrolls contain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Holy Scriptures</td>
<td>One fourth (c 200) of the manuscripts</td>
<td>All books of the Old Testament are represented among the scrolls, except the Book of Esther. This category of manuscripts includes Targums (Aramaic paraphrases) and other works that repeat passages of Scripture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books of the Apocrypha</td>
<td>A handful of manuscripts</td>
<td>Ecclesiasticus, Tobit, the Letter of Jeremiah, and Psalm 151 were found. The scribes of the Dead Sea Scrolls apparently had less interest in the Apocrypha.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and other Jewish Literature</td>
<td>One half (c 400) of the manuscripts</td>
<td>Jubilees, the Books of Enoch, the Book of Noah, various testaments, and writings based on persons in the Bible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique to Dead Sea Scroll Judaism</td>
<td>One fourth (c 200) of the manuscripts</td>
<td>These writings caused the greatest excitement. It included numerous previously undiscovered writings such as the Rule of the Community, the War Scroll, the Temple Scroll, the Copper Scroll, the Thanksgiving Scroll, hymns, calendars, liturgical works, commentaries, and more. It also included unique copies of existing documents such as the Damascus Document.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scholars have identified a broad range of literary styles, including rules, hymns, commentaries, biblical apocrypha, and Pseudepigrapha. The scrolls show that Jews of this era still actively conversed and composed in Hebrew and Aramaic. The texts illustrate a broader diversity in early Jewish teachings than one finds in the accounts of Josephus and Maccabees, which were preserved in Greek. For example, the theology in the scrolls often makes sharp contrasts between good and evil, which God has predestined for conflict and combat.²

The scrolls illustrate the great faithfulness with which the Hebrew Scriptures were maintained. Earlier, scholars had imagined that the Scriptures evolved slowly over time and that the Hebrew Scripture of the Jewish

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¹ This is why the scrolls are also called “Qumran manuscripts.” There are some dissenting opinions about whether the Essenes created the scrolls and whether Khirbet Qumran was an Essene or Jewish settlement. For example, one theory holds that scribes or priests from Jerusalem hid the scrolls in the caves as a result of the civil unrest and the Roman offensive that led to the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

² Many scholars use the term dualism to describe this contrast, though such a term may cause readers to confuse the theology of the scrolls with the theology of other religious systems such as Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism.