
SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

Extra-Biblical Texts & Guided Reading Plan

A curated reference guide to the most historically significant Jewish texts from approximately 300 BCE to 150 CE — the world that produced the New Testament. Includes an annotated reading plan organized chronologically by historical period, with introductory notes and guided observations for each text.

Texts Covered:	16 extra-biblical texts across three tiers of significance
Reading Phases:	6 chronological phases from ~300 BCE through ~150 CE
Total Readings:	21 guided reading sessions
Primary Sources:	Charlesworth OTP (2 vols.) · NRSV Oxford Annotated · Nickelsburg/VanderKam 1 Enoch · Vermes Dead Sea Scrolls

Compiled by Zachary Denning for personal scholarly study of 1st century Jewish context for New Testament interpretation.

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PART ONE

Reference Lists — The Texts and Their Translations

The following lists catalogue the most historically significant extra-biblical Jewish texts for understanding 1st century Judaism and the New Testament. Texts are organised in three tiers based on their direct relevance to NT thought, the strength of their manuscript attestation, and their influence on the communities and individuals who produced the NT.

TIER 1 — ESSENTIAL

Texts that directly shape NT vocabulary, imagery, and theology.

1 Enoch (Ethiopic Enoch)

Dates:	Composed in stages, ~300–100 BCE
Origin:	Originally Aramaic; survives complete only in Ethiopic (Ge'ez)
Qumran:	11 Aramaic manuscript fragments (Cave 4); confirms pre-Christian antiquity
Canon Status:	Canonical in Ethiopian Orthodox Church; quoted in Jude 14–15
Find It In:	Nickelsburg & VanderKam, 1 Enoch: A New Translation (Fortress); also in Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1

Why It Matters:

The single most important non-canonical text for NT background. The 'Son of Man' exalted figure of the Parables of Enoch (chs. 37–71) is the clearest pre-Christian parallel to Jesus' self-designation. Judgment eschatology, fallen angel mythology, Gehenna imagery, angelic hierarchies, and the 'two-age' framework all flow through 1 Enoch into the NT. Jude quotes it as prophetic Scripture.

Jubilees

Dates:	~160–150 BCE
Origin:	Hebrew original; survives in Ethiopic with Latin and Greek fragments
Qumran:	14–16 manuscript copies at Qumran — more than most canonical OT books
Canon Status:	Canonical in Ethiopian Orthodox Church
Find It In:	Charlesworth OTP Vol. 2

Why It Matters:

A retelling of Genesis through Exodus organized around a 364-day solar calendar. Foundational for understanding why 1st century Jewish groups disagreed about feast days, sabbath observance, and covenant identity. The Qumran community treated it as Scripture. Its strict boundary-marking between Israel and Gentiles illuminates the debates Paul is fighting in Galatians and Romans.

Sirach (Ben Sira / Ecclesiasticus)

Dates:	~180 BCE (Hebrew original); Greek translation ~117 BCE
Origin:	Hebrew; partial Hebrew manuscripts survive (Cairo Geniza, Masada, Qumran)
Qumran:	3 copies at Qumran; substantial Masada manuscript

Canon Status: Deuterocanonical (Catholic, Orthodox); included in NRSV Apocrypha

Find It In: NRSV Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha

Why It Matters:

The most widely-read Jewish wisdom text outside the Hebrew canon. The personified Wisdom of Sirach 24 ('I came forth from the mouth of the Most High') is essential background for John 1:1–18 and Colossians 1:15–20. Likely familiar to Jesus himself. Bridges Proverbs-style wisdom with Torah observance and priestly theology.

Psalms of Solomon

Dates: ~63–45 BCE (response to Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem)

Origin: Hebrew original lost; survives in Greek and Syriac

Qumran: Not found at Qumran

Canon Status: Non-canonical; sometimes listed in early Christian canon lists

Find It In: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 2

Why It Matters:

18 psalms of lament and hope written in the wake of Rome's conquest of Jerusalem under Pompey. The clearest pre-Christian articulation of a Davidic, royal Messiah who will defeat Gentile oppressors and restore Israel. Psalm of Solomon 17 is the definitive text for understanding what '1st century Jews expected the Messiah to do' — and therefore why Jesus' ministry was both familiar and shockingly different.

Dead Sea Scrolls — Sectarian Texts

Dates: ~150 BCE – 70 CE

Origin: Hebrew and Aramaic; discovered in 12 caves at Qumran, 1947–1956

Qumran: These ARE the Dead Sea Scrolls

Canon Status: Non-canonical

Find It In: Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Penguin Classics)

Why It Matters:

Primary texts from a living 1st century Jewish community. The Community Rule (1QS), War Scroll (1QM), Hodayot (Thanksgiving Hymns), Damascus Document, and Temple Scroll provide unmediated access to the theology, eschatology, and community structures of a sect likely related to the Essenes. Parallels to John the Baptist, the Lord's Prayer, the 'sons of light vs. sons of darkness' dualism, and early Christian community organization are extensive and striking.

TIER 2 — VERY IMPORTANT

Major historical and theological background for understanding the NT world.

1 Maccabees

Dates: ~100 BCE (describing events of 175–134 BCE)

Origin: Hebrew original lost; survives in Greek (Septuagint)

Qumran: Not found at Qumran

Canon Status: Deuterocanonical (Catholic, Orthodox)

Find It In: NRSV Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha

Why It Matters:

The most historically reliable account of the Maccabean revolt. This is the political and religious crucible out of which all 1st century Jewish sects — Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots — emerged. The question 'how should Jews relate to Gentile imperial power?' that dominates 1 Maccabees is the same question structuring every NT encounter between Jesus and the religious establishment.

2 Maccabees

Dates:	~100 BCE (epitome of an earlier work)
Origin:	Greek original (Alexandria)
Qumran:	Not found at Qumran
Canon Status:	Deuterocanonical (Catholic, Orthodox)
Find It In:	NRSV Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha

Why It Matters:

Theologically richer than 1 Maccabees. Contains the earliest unambiguous Jewish articulation of bodily resurrection (ch. 7, the martyrdom of the seven brothers). Also develops martyrdom theology and intercession for the dead. These ideas are fully alive in the NT — Paul's resurrection theology in 1 Corinthians 15 is arguing within this tradition, not creating it from scratch.

Wisdom of Solomon

Dates:	~100 BCE – 50 CE (Alexandria, Egypt)
Origin:	Greek original (no Semitic source)
Qumran:	Not found at Qumran
Canon Status:	Deuterocanonical (Catholic, Orthodox)
Find It In:	NRSV Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha

Why It Matters:

The most philosophically sophisticated Jewish text of the period, blending Torah theology with Greek philosophical categories. Romans 1–2 shows extensive structural and verbal parallels — Paul appears to be in direct dialogue with it. The Logos theology implicit in Wisdom's personification of divine Wisdom is critical background for John 1. Also important for understanding Paul's use of 'righteousness' and 'immortality' language.

4 Ezra (2 Esdras 3–14)

Dates:	~100 CE (responding to the fall of Jerusalem, 70 CE)
Origin:	Hebrew or Aramaic original lost; survives in Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic
Qumran:	Not found at Qumran
Canon Status:	In some Eastern Orthodox canons; included in many NRSV editions
Find It In:	Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1; also in NRSV with Apocrypha (as 2 Esdras)

Why It Matters:

One of the most theologically profound Jewish texts ever written. Written in the anguish after Rome destroyed the Temple, it wrestles unflinchingly with theodicy, the fate of the wicked, and whether God can be trusted. Its eagle vision (chs. 11–12) is a coded critique of Rome that reads like a rough draft of Revelation. Essential for understanding the apocalyptic mode of thought that John of Patmos is working in.

Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs

Dates:	Jewish core ~200–100 BCE; Christianized in transmission
Origin:	Hebrew/Aramaic original; survives in Greek
Qumran:	Related Aramaic Levi Document found at Qumran

Canon Status: Non-canonical
Find It In: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1

Why It Matters:

Deathbed speeches of Jacob's twelve sons, combining ethical exhortation with messianic expectation. Scholars note heavy parallels to Paul's ethical sections (Galatians 5, Romans 12–13). The Levi and Judah strands articulate a priestly-plus-royal messianic expectation that may illuminate early Christology. Note: the surviving Greek text has been Christianized; read with critical awareness that the original Jewish theology is being filtered.

TIER 3 — SIGNIFICANT

Broader cultural, theological, and historical context for the NT world.

Letter of Aristeas

Dates: ~200–100 BCE
Origin: Greek (Alexandria, Egypt)
Qumran: Not found at Qumran
Canon Status: Non-canonical
Find It In: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 2

Why It Matters:

A fictional account of how the Septuagint (LXX) came to be — the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Important for understanding why the LXX became the authoritative Bible for Greek-speaking Jews and the early church, and therefore why NT authors often quote the OT in forms that differ from the Hebrew.

Tobit

Dates: ~225–175 BCE
Origin: Aramaic and Hebrew; 5 copies at Qumran
Qumran: 5 manuscript copies (most of any deuterocanonical text)
Canon Status: Deuterocanonical (Catholic, Orthodox)
Find It In: NRSV Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha

Why It Matters:

A narrative wisdom tale of diaspora piety, righteous suffering, and divine provision. Introduces Raphael, one of the named archangels, contributing to the angelology that flourishes in 1st century Judaism. Its ethics of charity, prayer, and endurance parallel the Sermon on the Mount in several places.

2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch)

Dates: ~100 CE (same context as 4 Ezra — post-70 CE)
Origin: Hebrew or Aramaic original lost; survives in Syriac
Qumran: Not found at Qumran
Canon Status: Canonical in the Syriac Peshitta tradition (some versions)
Find It In: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1

Why It Matters:

A close companion to 4 Ezra, responding to the same trauma of Jerusalem's fall. Develops resurrection theology in striking ways — the resurrected body will first be recognized and then transformed. This tradition sits directly behind Paul's language in 1

Corinthians 15:35–58 about the nature of the resurrection body.

Apocalypse of Abraham

Dates:	~70–150 CE
Origin:	Hebrew or Aramaic original; survives in Slavonic
Qumran:	Not found at Qumran
Canon Status:	Non-canonical
Find It In:	Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1

Why It Matters:

An expansion of Genesis 15 — God's covenant with Abraham. Abraham's heavenly journey and vision of history illuminates the apocalyptic framework within which Paul re-reads the Abrahamic covenant in Galatians 3–4 and Romans 4. Important for understanding how 1st century Jews interpreted the promise and who counted as Abraham's heirs.

Joseph and Aseneth

Dates:	~100 BCE – 200 CE
Origin:	Greek; possibly a Jewish original
Qumran:	Not found at Qumran
Canon Status:	Non-canonical
Find It In:	Charlesworth OTP Vol. 2

Why It Matters:

A retelling of Joseph's marriage to his Egyptian wife, structured as a conversion narrative. Illuminates Jewish attitudes toward Gentile inclusion — Aseneth must abandon idols, fast, and be transformed before she can marry the patriarch's son. This is the cultural logic Paul is working within (and reforming) when he argues for Gentile inclusion without circumcision in Romans and Galatians.

Sibylline Oracles

Dates:	Various: ~150 BCE – 300 CE (Books 3–5 most relevant)
Origin:	Greek; Jewish and later Christian compositions
Qumran:	Not found at Qumran
Canon Status:	Non-canonical
Find It In:	Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1

Why It Matters:

Jewish prophecies written in the style of Greek oracular literature — a fascinating example of cultural apologetics. Shows how diaspora Jews framed their theology in categories accessible to Greeks and Romans. Book 3 especially presents Israel's God as the universal deity judging all nations, a move Paul makes in Romans 1–3.

Recommended Translations & Source Books

These four volumes contain virtually every text in this guide. Acquiring these will give you a complete library for this reading plan.

ABBREVIATION	FULL TITLE	TEXTS COVERED
Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1	The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 1 James H. Charlesworth (ed.) Doubleday / Hendrickson	1 Enoch, Jubilees, Psalms of Solomon, Testament of XII Patriarchs, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, Apocalypse of Abraham, Sibylline Oracles
Charlesworth OTP Vol. 2	The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 2 James H. Charlesworth (ed.) Doubleday / Hendrickson	Letter of Aristeas, Joseph and Aseneth, and 50+ additional texts
NRSV Oxford Annotated	The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha (NRSV) Michael Coogan (ed.), 5th Edition Oxford University Press	Tobit, Sirach, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, 2 Esdras (4 Ezra), and all deuterocanonical texts
Nickelsburg / VanderKam	1 Enoch: A New Translation G.W.E. Nickelsburg & J.C. VanderKam Fortress Press	Complete 1 Enoch — all five books, incorporating Qumran Aramaic fragments
Vermes DSS	The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English Geza Vermes Penguin Classics (rev. ed.)	Community Rule, War Scroll, Hodayot, Damascus Document, Temple Scroll, and all major Qumran texts

PART TWO

Guided Reading Plan

The reading plan below organizes all Tier 1–3 texts into six chronological phases, tracing the development of Jewish thought from the Persian period through the aftermath of the Temple's destruction in 70 CE. Following the plan in order will allow you to witness how each crisis — exile, Hellenization, the Maccabean revolt, the Roman occupation, and finally the Temple's fall — reshaped Jewish theology, messianic expectation, and eschatological hope. By the time you reach Phase 6, you will be reading the New Testament's latest books in their proper intellectual context.

How to use this plan: Each reading session includes an introduction to the text's historical setting, the source book where you will find it, and a set of guided observations — specific passages and themes to watch for as you read. The observations are not exhaustive; they are entry points. Follow your own questions wherever they lead.

PHASE 1

The World Before the Crisis

These texts either predate the Maccabean crisis or are set in the earlier Persian/early Hellenistic period. They establish the baseline — what faithful Jewish life looked like before Rome and Greek philosophy shook everything loose.

1 Tobit

Source: NRSV Oxford Annotated with Apocrypha **Date / Length:** ~225–175 BCE | Short narrative (~14 chapters)

Introduction

Begin here. Tobit is the most accessible of all these texts and functions as a perfect introduction to the world of Jewish diaspora piety. A devout Israelite living in Assyrian exile suffers unjustly and is ultimately vindicated through divine providence — and the ministry of the angel Raphael.

What to Watch For

- The angelology: Raphael is one of the seven angels who stand before God (12:15). This tradition feeds directly into Revelation 8:2.
- The ethics of almsgiving, prayer, and endurance under suffering — compare to Matthew 6:1–18.
- The geography of exile: these Jews are displaced but fiercely maintaining covenant identity. This is the posture of most NT-era Jews.
- Raphael's self-disclosure at the end: angels acting as hidden divine agents is a recurring motif in the NT (Hebrews 13:2).

2 Sirach (Ben Sira / Ecclesiasticus)

Source: NRSV Oxford Annotated with Apocrypha **Date / Length:** ~180 BCE | 51 chapters — read in sections over several sessions

Introduction

Ben Sira is a Jerusalem scribe writing just before the Maccabean crisis — the last major wisdom voice before everything ruptures. He represents the 'establishment': Torah, Temple, and wisdom are unified. Read chapters 1–2, 24, 38–39, 44–50 as priority if time is short, but the full text rewards patient reading.

What to Watch For

- Chapter 24: Wisdom's self-praise — 'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High... I dwelt in the highest heavens.' This is the direct background for John 1:1–18 and Colossians 1:15–20.
- The identification of Wisdom with Torah (24:23): for Ben Sira, studying the law IS communing with divine wisdom.
- Chapters 44–50 ('Praise of Famous Men'): a hymn to Israel's heroes culminating in the High Priest Simon II — showing how priestly leadership was idealized just before the Maccabean crisis exploded it.
- Ben Sira's view of the afterlife (14:16–17, 17:27–28): no bodily resurrection. Death is final. Notice how different 2 Maccabees will be.

3 Letter of Aristeas

Source: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 2 **Date / Length:** ~200–100 BCE | Medium length essay

Introduction

A fictional account of how the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek (the Septuagint / LXX). Read this as context-setting, not devotional material. It helps you understand why the NT authors quote the OT the way they do — they were using the Greek Bible, not the Hebrew.

What to Watch For

- The claim that 72 elders independently produced identical translations: this legend elevated the LXX to inspired status in the Greek-speaking world.
- The political framing: Jewish wisdom is presented as compatible with, even superior to, Greek philosophy. This is diaspora apologetics.
- Why this matters for NT study: when Paul or Matthew quotes Isaiah and it doesn't match your Hebrew-based OT, the LXX is usually the reason.

PHASE
2

The Crisis That Changed Everything — Maccabees and Apocalypticism

167 BCE: Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrates the Jerusalem Temple, bans Torah observance, and attempts to force Hellenization on Judea. This is the wound from which all 1st century Judaism — and therefore the NT — bleeds. These texts are either responses to that crisis or take their final shape in its aftermath.

4 1 Maccabees

Source: NRSV Oxford Annotated with Apocrypha **Date / Length:** ~100 BCE (covering 175–134 BCE) | 16 chapters

Introduction

This is history told as theology. The Maccabean family (the Hasmoneans) leads a military revolt against Antiochus and ultimately wins Jewish independence. Read it like you'd read a political thriller — because it is one. Every group Jesus encounters (Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, Zealots, Essenes) traces its roots to the fault lines exposed here.

What to Watch For

- The opening description of Hellenization (1:11–15): some Jews voluntarily adopted Greek culture, even reversing circumcision. The community split was cultural before it was military.
- Antiochus's desecration of the Temple (1:54): the 'abomination of desolation' — Jesus quotes this in Mark 13:14.
- Mattathias's zeal (2:24–26): he kills a fellow Jew who complies with Greek sacrifice. This Phinehas-like act of violent zeal echoes in Paul's pre-Christian identity (Philippians 3:6, Galatians 1:14).
- The growing political compromise of the later Hasmoneans: by the end, the liberators have become a new dynastic power. This disillusionment is what drives groups like the Qumran community into the desert.

5 2 Maccabees

Source: NRSV Oxford Annotated with Apocrypha **Date / Length:** ~100 BCE | 15 chapters

Introduction

Where 1 Maccabees is political history, 2 Maccabees is martyrdom theology. The accounts of Jews who die rather than violate Torah — especially the mother and seven sons in chapter 7 — gave Judaism its first clear articulation of bodily resurrection as the vindication of the righteous martyr. This is the theological air the NT breathes.

What to Watch For

- Chapter 7: The seven brothers each die declaring they will be raised. 'The King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life.' This is pre-Christian Jewish resurrection belief — bodily, future, and tied to covenant faithfulness.
- The concept of dying 'for the sins of the nation' (7:37–38): martyrdom as atoning sacrifice. This tradition stands behind Paul's reading of the crucifixion.
- Prayers for the dead (12:43–45): Judas Maccabeus collects money to offer sacrifice for fallen soldiers. The text explicitly says this is done in hope of resurrection. Important for understanding 1st century Jewish afterlife theology.
- The Temple's central importance: every desecration and rededication is charged with cosmic significance. The Temple is where heaven and earth meet — which is why Jesus' actions there in Mark 11 are so explosive.

6 1 Enoch — Book of the Watchers (Chapters 1–36)

Source: Nickelsburg & VanderKam, 1 Enoch: A New Translation (Fortress) **Date / Length:** ~300–200 BCE | 36 chapters

Introduction

Now we enter the most influential non-canonical text of the NT period. The Book of the Watchers is the oldest section of 1 Enoch and the most foundational. It expands Genesis 6:1–4 — the sons of God who mated with human women — into a comprehensive mythology explaining the origin of evil, demonic spirits, and coming judgment.

What to Watch For

- The Watchers (fallen angels) and their leader Azazel: this is where NT demonology comes from. The 'ruler of this world' (John 12:31) and 'the god of this age' (2 Cor 4:4) presuppose this mythological framework.
- Enoch's heavenly throne room vision (chs. 14–16): the oldest Jewish throne-vision outside Ezekiel. Compare to Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, and Revelation 4–5. This is a living literary tradition.
- The binding of the Watchers until the final judgment (ch. 10): compare to 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 — both appear to quote or paraphrase this passage directly.
- Chapters 17–36 (Enoch's cosmic journeys): geography of the afterlife, the place of punishment for fallen angels, and the Garden at the ends of the earth. This cosmological map shapes NT apocalypticism.

7 1 Enoch — Astronomical Book & Dream Visions (Chapters 72–90)

Source: Nickelsburg & VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Fortress) *Date / Length:* ~300–160 BCE | Chapters 72–82 and 83–90

Introduction

Two more sections of 1 Enoch. The Astronomical Book (72–82) establishes the 364-day solar calendar — the same calendar used by the Qumran community and reflected in Jubilees. The Dream Visions (83–90) give a symbolic history of Israel from creation to the Maccabean period, using animals to represent nations and individuals.

What to Watch For

- The solar calendar conflict: this is not a minor technical dispute. If you use a different calendar than the Temple establishment, you are celebrating Passover on the 'wrong' day — your entire religious life is out of sync with the official system. This explains Qumran's radical separatism.
- The Animal Apocalypse (85–90): Israel is sheep, their enemies are predatory animals, and God is the Lord of the sheep. This symbolic mode of reading history is the same technique used in Daniel 7–12 and Revelation. Learn to read the code.
- The climax of the Animal Apocalypse: a new Jerusalem, the resurrection of the righteous dead, and a transformed creation. This eschatological pattern is foundational for NT hope.

8 Jubilees

Source: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 2 *Date / Length:* ~160–150 BCE | 50 chapters

Introduction

Jubilees retells Genesis 1 through Exodus 20 as if dictated by the Angel of the Presence to Moses on Sinai. Its major agenda is the solar calendar and the strict separation of Israel from Gentiles. It was almost certainly written in the heat of the Maccabean crisis as a manifesto: this is what authentic Jewish identity looks like.

What to Watch For

- The 364-day calendar as a divine ordinance: the angels in heaven observe the same feasts as Israel. Calendar obedience is cosmic obedience.
- The hardening of boundaries around marriage, food, and Sabbath: this is the legal logic behind the 'works of the law' disputes in Paul's letters. These boundary markers are the flash points.
- Chapter 15 on circumcision: uncircumcised males are cut off from covenant promises. Paul is dismantling a position this absolute.
- The angel of Mastema (Satan figure): an adversarial supernatural being with a role in testing humans. Develops the Satan tradition beyond Job and Zechariah 3.

PHASE 3

Wisdom, Diaspora, and the Greek-Speaking Jewish World

While Palestinian Jews were fighting for independence, the largest Jewish population lived in Alexandria, Egypt — speaking Greek, reading a Greek Bible, and engaging with Hellenistic philosophy. These texts come from that world and are essential for understanding Paul and John.

9 Wisdom of Solomon

Source: NRSV Oxford Annotated with Apocrypha **Date / Length:** ~100 BCE – 50 CE | 19 chapters

Introduction

The most philosophically sophisticated Jewish text of the period. Written in Greek by an Alexandrian Jew, it fuses Torah theology with Platonic and Stoic concepts. Paul knew this book. The parallels to Romans 1–2 are so extensive that most scholars believe Paul is in direct dialogue with it — sometimes agreeing, sometimes subverting.

What to Watch For

- Chapters 1–5: the righteous sufferer mocked by the wicked, then vindicated by God at the judgment. This narrative pattern is the template for early Christian passion theology.
- Chapter 2:12–20: the wicked plot against 'the righteous man' who calls himself 'son of God.' Matthew's passion narrative echoes this passage explicitly — it shaped how early Christians interpreted the crucifixion.
- Chapter 7: Solomon's praise of divine Wisdom as a 'breath of the power of God... image of his goodness.' Compare to Hebrews 1:3 ('the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of his nature').
- Chapters 13–15: the critique of idolatry. Paul's argument in Romans 1:18–32 follows Wisdom 13–14 almost step by step.

10

Joseph and Aseneth

Source: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 2 **Date / Length:** ~100 BCE – 200 CE | Novella length

Introduction

A retelling of Joseph's marriage to the Egyptian Aseneth, structured as a conversion narrative. Aseneth must renounce her idols, undergo a period of fasting and repentance, and be transformed before she can be joined to the covenant people. This is the social logic of Gentile inclusion that Paul inherited and then radically altered.

What to Watch For

- The conversion process: renunciation of idols, fasting, prayer, a transforming encounter with a divine figure. Compare to Paul's Gentile conversion theology in 1 Thessalonians 1:9.
- The honeycomb scene: a mysterious ritual involving honey that some scholars see as eucharistic or baptismal prefiguring.
- Aseneth's angelic transformation: she becomes 'a city of refuge' for the nations. The language of cosmic transformation through conversion anticipates Pauline 'new creation' theology (2 Corinthians 5:17).

1 1

Sibylline Oracles — Books 3 and 5

Source: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1 **Date / Length:** Book 3: ~163–45 BCE; Book 5: ~80–130 CE

Introduction

Jewish prophecy dressed in the clothing of Greek oracular literature. The Sibyl was a famous pagan prophetess — Jewish authors adopted her voice to claim that even Greek oracular tradition pointed to the God of Israel. This is diaspora apologetics at its most creative. Don't read exhaustively — sample Books 3 and 5.

What to Watch For

- The universal scope of judgment: all nations will face the God of Israel. This universalism underpins Paul's argument in Romans 1–3.
- Book 5's response to the fall of Jerusalem (70 CE) and the hope for a returning Nero-like figure: this is the same political geography as Revelation's 'beast from the sea.'
- The tone of these oracles: confident, public, addressed to the nations. Note the contrast with the more sectarian, insider eschatology of the Qumran scrolls.

PHASE 4

The Qumran Community — A Living 1st Century Jewish Sect

Now you read the people, not just the texts they loved. The Dead Sea Scrolls are firsthand documents from a community that was active from ~150 BCE to 68 CE — overlapping entirely with the NT period. They show you what radical covenant community looked like in practice.

1

Community Rule (1QS)

2

Source: Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* **Date / Length:** ~100–75 BCE | Medium length

Introduction

The governing document of the Qumran community — their constitution, initiation rites, disciplinary code, and theological framework. This is the closest thing we have to watching a 1st century Jewish community organize itself around a covenant ideal. The parallels to early Christian community structures (Acts 2, Matthew 18) are remarkable.

What to Watch For

- The dualism of light and darkness, the Spirit of Truth and Spirit of Deceit (cols. 3–4): this is the same dualism as John's Gospel ('light came into the darkness'). The language was in the air.
- The initiation process: a multi-year probationary period before full membership — compare to the developing catechumenate in early Christianity.
- The communal meals and property sharing (cols. 5–6): compare Acts 2:44–45.
- The 'Teacher of Righteousness': an authoritative founding interpreter of Torah. The community's identity is bound to his teaching. How does this parallel and differ from Jesus' role in the Gospels?

1

War Scroll (1QM) and Hodayot (Thanksgiving Hymns)

3

Source: Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* **Date / Length:** ~100 BCE – 50 CE

Introduction

Two very different but complementary Qumran texts. The War Scroll describes the final cosmic battle between the Sons of Light and Sons of Darkness — a military apocalypse complete with battle formations and angelic armies. The Hodayot are intimate hymns of personal lament and praise, likely composed by the Teacher of Righteousness himself.

What to Watch For

- War Scroll: the battle is both historical (Rome vs. Israel) and cosmic (angels vs. demons). Michael leads the heavenly army. Compare to Revelation 12:7–9 and 19:11–21.
- War Scroll: the language of 'the poor' (anawim) as the true Israel who will be vindicated — 'to the poor in spirit' (compare Matthew 5:3).
- Hodayot: the psalmist's sense of utter unworthiness before God contrasted with the grace of being chosen and enlightened. This theological tension is almost identical to Paul's in Romans 7.
- Hodayot: the imagery of a woman in labor bringing forth a child (col. 11): a community undergoing birth-pangs to produce the 'wonderful counselor.' This messianic birth imagery appears in Revelation 12 and echoes Romans 8:22.

1

4 Damascus Document and Temple Scroll

Source: Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* **Date / Length:** ~100 BCE – 68 CE

Introduction

Two more essential Qumran texts. The Damascus Document tells the community's own history and gives its legal rulings. The Temple Scroll is the largest scroll found at Qumran — a rewritten Torah imagining an ideal Temple and its regulations. Together they show how seriously this community took the project of faithful Torah interpretation.

What to Watch For

- Damascus Document: the 'new covenant in the land of Damascus' — the community understands itself as the true remnant fulfilling Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy (Jer 31:31). Compare to the NT's claim that Jesus inaugurates the new covenant (Luke 22:20).
- Damascus Document's interpretation of the 'Star and Scepter' prophecy of Numbers 24:17: the community expected a priestly Messiah (Star) and a royal Messiah (Scepter). A two-messiah expectation.
- Temple Scroll: the intensity of purity regulations around the Temple. This is the background for understanding why Jesus' healings of the unclean and table fellowship with sinners were so theologically loaded.

PHASE 5

Messianic Expectation on the Eve of Jesus

The 1st century BCE into the 1st century CE — the period directly preceding and overlapping with Jesus' ministry. These texts crystallize the messianic hopes and eschatological expectations that formed the cultural vocabulary Jesus and his followers were speaking into.

1

5 1 Enoch — Parables of Enoch (Chapters 37–71)

Source: Nickelsburg & VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation (Fortress)* **Date / Length:** ~100 BCE – 50 CE | Chapters 37–71

Introduction

The most theologically explosive section of 1 Enoch for NT studies. The Parables introduce the 'Son of Man' — a pre-existent heavenly figure who sits on the throne of God and will execute final judgment. These chapters are absent from the Qumran scrolls, suggesting they circulated in different circles — possibly closer to the tradition Jesus himself was drawing on.

What to Watch For

- The 'Son of Man' (also called 'Elect One' and 'Anointed One'): pre-existent, hidden, revealed at the end. Compare to Jesus' self-references as 'Son of Man' throughout the Synoptics — this is almost certainly the tradition he is invoking.
- Chapter 46: the Son of Man sits beside the 'Head of Days' (the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7). Jesus before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:62) quotes Daniel 7 — he and his audience both knew this tradition.

- Chapter 48: the Son of Man's name was named before the sun and stars were created. Pre-existence language. Compare to John 1:1–3 and Colossians 1:15–17.
- Chapter 62: kings and rulers will bow before the Son of Man. The reversal of earthly power is total and cosmic.

1 6

Psalms of Solomon

Source: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 2 Date / Length: ~63–45 BCE | 18 Psalms

Introduction

Written in the direct aftermath of Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE — the day a Roman general walked into the Holy of Holies. These are psalms of trauma, lament, and fierce hope. Psalm 17 is arguably the single most important text for understanding 1st century Jewish messianism. Read all 18 psalms; they are short.

What to Watch For

- Psalm 17:21–25: the Messiah is a Davidic king who will 'purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample her to destruction,' 'drive out sinners,' and 'gather a holy people.' This is what the crowds were hoping for when they shouted Hosanna on Palm Sunday.
- Psalm 17:26–27: the Messiah will 'distribute them (the tribes) upon the land.' The restoration of all twelve tribes is part of the expectation — which is why Jesus choosing twelve disciples is a deliberate symbolic act.
- Psalm 17:36: 'he will be pure from sin, to rule a great people... for God made him powerful in the holy spirit.' The Messiah is Spirit-anointed and sinless. Note the overlap with Jesus' baptism narrative.
- Psalms 2–3: the theology of divine chastisement and ultimate vindication of the righteous. The pattern shapes the Beatitudes.

1 7

Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs

Source: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1 Date / Length: Jewish core ~200–100 BCE | 12 sections

Introduction

Each of Jacob's twelve sons delivers a deathbed speech combining moral instruction with messianic prophecy. The text as we have it has been Christianized — you will notice 'interpolations' that sound overtly like NT theology. Read with that awareness, but don't dismiss the underlying Jewish material, which is rich.

What to Watch For

- T. Levi and T. Judah: a priestly Messiah from Levi and a royal Messiah from Judah are expected. Compare to Hebrews' argument that Jesus combines both offices — the argument makes most sense against this background.
- T. Issachar and T. Gad: practical ethics of love for neighbor, avoidance of hatred. The verbal parallels to Paul's ethical lists (Romans 12–13, Galatians 5) are extensive.
- T. Levi 18: the new priest will open the gates of paradise, give the saints access to the tree of life, bind Beliar. Compare to Revelation 2:7 and 20:1–3.

- Note which passages feel 'inserted' by Christian editors — this is good practice for learning to identify layers of tradition.

1 8 **Apocalypse of Abraham**

Source: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1 **Date / Length:** ~70–150 CE | *Medium length*

Introduction

An expansion of Genesis 15 — the covenant-making scene where God passes between the animal halves while Abraham sleeps. Abraham is taken on a heavenly journey and shown the history of Israel. Written after the fall of Jerusalem, it wrestles with how God's promises to Abraham can still be trusted.

What to Watch For

- The heavenly throne vision (chs. 15–18): among the most vivid of the Second Temple merkabah (chariot-throne) mysticism texts. This tradition feeds into Paul's 'caught up to the third heaven' (2 Corinthians 12:2) and John's throne vision (Revelation 4).
- Azazel as cosmic adversary: the fallen angel figure from 1 Enoch appears here as the tempter of Abraham. The demonological tradition is consistent across texts.
- The promise to Abraham reinterpreted: the 'chosen people' are those who follow Abraham's faith, not just his ethnicity. Compare to Paul in Romans 4 and Galatians 3:6–9.

PHASE
6

After the Catastrophe — 70 CE and the Reforging of Judaism

In 70 CE, Rome destroyed the Jerusalem Temple. This event shattered the world that all the previous texts assumed. Both Judaism and Christianity were reshaped in its aftermath. These texts are wrestling with that trauma — and they are writing at the same time as the NT's latest books.

1 9 **1 Enoch — Epistle of Enoch (Chapters 91–107)**

Source: Nickelsburg & VanderKam, 1 Enoch: A New Translation (Fortress) **Date / Length:** ~100 BCE | *Chapters 91–107*

Introduction

The final major section of 1 Enoch. A moral epistle containing the 'Apocalypse of Weeks' (93:1–10; 91:11–17) — the most compact summary of Enochic eschatology. All of human history divided into ten 'weeks,' with the final judgment and new creation at the end.

What to Watch For

- The Apocalypse of Weeks (93:1–10; 91:11–17): locate where the author places himself in the timeline. The 'eighth week' is the present age of righteousness and the sword. This periodization of history is the template for NT 'this age /

age to come' language.

- The woes against the wealthy and powerful (94–100): striking parallels to Luke 6:24–26 ('woe to the rich') and James 5:1–6. These social reversals are not new with Jesus — they are part of a continuous prophetic tradition.
- The final transformation: the righteous will 'shine like the lights of heaven' (104:2). Compare to Matthew 13:43 ('the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father').

20

4 Ezra (2 Esdras 3–14)

Source: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1 | Also in NRSV with Apocrypha as '2 Esdras' **Date / Length:** ~100 CE | 12 chapters (chs. 3–14 of 2 Esdras)

Introduction

The most theologically intense text in this entire reading plan. Ezra (the author's pseudonym) is in Babylon thirty years after Jerusalem's destruction — which is code for Rome, thirty years after 70 CE. He argues with an angel about God's justice with a ferocity that rivals Job. Do not rush through this book.

What to Watch For

- The dialogues with the angel Uriel (chs. 3–7): Ezra asks why the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. The angel's answers are uncomfortable. This is theodicy at its rawest.
- The 'evil heart' theology (3:20–22): Adam's transgression left something corrupting in human nature. Compare to Paul's 'sin dwelling in me' (Romans 7:17) — both are grappling with the same anthropological problem.
- The narrow road / few who are saved (7:47–48): only a few will pass through the narrow way. Jesus's language in Matthew 7:13–14 is part of this same discourse.
- The Eagle Vision (chs. 11–12): Rome as a terrifying eagle. The symbolism of Revelation's beast is doing the same thing with the same technique.
- Chapter 14: Ezra dictates 94 books — 24 public (the Hebrew canon) and 70 secret. The secret books are for 'the wise.' This is the framework behind the very concept of apocalyptic literature.

21

2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch)

Source: Charlesworth OTP Vol. 1 **Date / Length:** ~100 CE | 87 chapters

Introduction

4 Ezra's companion and counterpoint. Where 4 Ezra is all anguished questioning, 2 Baruch is more consolatory — the community must grieve, but they must also hope and keep Torah. The resurrection theology here is among the most developed outside the NT.

What to Watch For

- Chapters 49–51: the resurrection of the body — the dead will first rise in the same form they had in life (so they can be recognized), then be transformed into glory or shame according to their works. Compare to 1 Corinthians 15:42–44 and Daniel 12:2.

- The parable of the vine and cedar (36–40): the final Davidic king will destroy the last worldly empire. The same expectation driving Revelation 19.
 - The letter to the nine and a half tribes (78–87): Baruch writes to diaspora Jews that the Torah is their portable homeland. When the Temple is gone, the law remains. This is the theological move that rabbinic Judaism will build everything on.
 - The shift from Temple-centered to Torah-centered piety: both 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch are navigating the same turn that nascent Christianity is making simultaneously — a new center of gravity for covenant life.
-

A Final Word on Method

Reading these texts historically does not require you to treat them as Scripture. The question is not 'is 1 Enoch inspired?' but 'what did 1st century Jews believe, and how does that belief shape what the NT authors wrote and assumed?' These texts are the cultural vocabulary the NT speaks in.

Think of it this way: you would not need to believe Homer was divinely inspired to recognize that understanding Greek mythology is essential for reading Greek tragedy. These texts stand in the same relationship to the NT.

As you read, keep a running note on three questions:

- What does this text assume about God, creation, and human nature?
- What is the expected shape of God's redemption — how does it come, through whom, and for whom?
- Where do I see the NT authors affirming, subverting, or reframing this tradition?

The most productive moments in this kind of study are the moments of friction — when Paul says something that sounds strange until you read what he is arguing against, or when a Gospel scene suddenly makes three-dimensional sense because you have read the tradition it is standing in. That friction is the sign that your historical imagination is sharpening.

Happy reading.
