

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 19

Taking the Bible's Own Context Seriously (Part 4 of 6-part series): 2nd Temple Texts in Translation

Recorded in 2012

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

The series on Bible study continues with the emphasis on interpreting the Bible in its own context. The context we're discussing is the world of the ancient Near East (with respect to the OT) and the Second Temple period (with respect to the NT). Interpreting the Bible in these contexts means thinking like a person living at these times. The best way to do that is to immerse yourself in the worldview of the civilizations of these eras with which the biblical writers had regular contact. That is accomplished by immersion in the written sources of these civilizations. The last episode of the podcast dealt with the need to tap into the written material of the ANE since that is the context for the OT. In this episode we'll turn attention to the NT context, the Second temple period (6th century BC-1st century AD). As in the last episode, all print and online sources I mention in the podcast are found (with links) at the "Bibliography" tab here on the podcast website. [Or use embedded links within this transcript.]

Transcript

Welcome back to the Naked Bible Podcast. We're still in the early stages of a series on Bible study. We began the series talking about how essential it is to interpret the Bible in its own context, that context being the world of the ancient Near East (with respect to the Old Testament) and the Second Temple period (with respect to the New Testament). Interpreting the Bible in these contexts means thinking like a person living at these times and in these places. The best way to do that is to immerse yourself in the worldview of the civilizations of these eras with which the biblical writers had regular contact. The best way to become familiar with how these people thought (and, therefore, how the biblical writers thought—either in agreement or in divergence from their neighbors) is to read the intellectual output of these other cultures. That means getting into their written sources.

The last episode of the podcast dealt with the need to tap into the written material of the ancient Near East, since that is the context for the Old Testament. In this episode, we'll turn our attention to the New Testament context: the Second

Temple period. As in the last episode, I'll introduce you to print and online sources for reading those texts in English translation.

As we begin, we should be clear on some terminology and exactly what literature we're talking about. The Second Temple period refers to the period in Israel's history right after the nation returned from exile in Babylon and built a new temple in Jerusalem. The first temple was, of course, Solomon's temple. That was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 B.C. Israel was allowed to return to her homeland in 539 B.C. Shortly thereafter, work began on building a new temple—the Second Temple. That temple was completed in 516 B.C. It stood until 70 A.D., when the Roman emperor Titus destroyed it. The Second Temple period, therefore, technically runs from 516 B.C. to 70 A.D. However, most scholars use the term a bit more broadly of the time period encompassing the sixth century B.C. through the first century A.D.

Only a handful of biblical books were written during this period: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are the obvious ones (but not the only ones). Many scholars would also assign parts of Isaiah, Zechariah, and Daniel to this period, as well. Typically, when scholars talk about Second Temple Jewish literature they aren't talking about biblical books. They *are* talking about non-biblical Jewish religious texts written during this time period—books that today we group into collections with labels like "apocrypha" and the "pseudepigrapha." The former term (apocrypha) contains books like 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, The Wisdom of Sirach, additions to the book of Daniel, and the Prayer of Manasseh. Outside academia, "apocrypha," though, is a term used by Protestants, as Protestants don't consider any of these books canonical or inspired as sacred texts. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, considers some of them as canonical, along with the books of the Protestant Bible. These books are referred to by Catholics as "deuterocanonical" to reflect that belief. The latter term (pseudepigrapha) is a collection created by scholars of books not found in the Bible or in the Apocrypha, into which other books of the Second Temple period are placed. Perhaps the most familiar of the pseudepigrapha would be the book of 1 Enoch, although books like Jubilees and the Letter of Aristeas, and Joseph and Aseneth might be familiar, as well.

5:00

Pseudepigrapha does not mean "false writings." You'll often see that. Many of these books were influential within the believing Jewish and Christian communities when you get into the first century (including some New Testament writers), despite the fact that they were not considered inspired or canonical. The term really refers to the fact that the names on these books (for example, 1 Enoch) do not reflect their true authorship. So in other words, 1 Enoch was not written by Enoch. There's no evidence to suggest that.

Aside from the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, Second Temple Jewish literature also encompasses the Dead Sea Scrolls and the writings of Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria—both very important writers for serious Jews during the Second Temple period.

So where can the English reader find good translations of all this literature? We'll start with print books for each category and then move on to websites. Of course, "print books" means you have to pay for the content and the websites you don't. But there are some downsides with websites, as well. I'll tell you right away that some of these hard copies are also found in digital version through software. I'll give you a few recommendations of translations in English that I think are of good quality. Don't forget that (just like the last episode), you can find all of these titles with links to where you can obtain them at www.nakedbiblepodcast.com. Look for the tab that says "Bibliography" and you'll see the links there [or use embedded links within this transcript].

Old Testament Apocrypha

Let's start with Old Testament Apocrypha (called "deuterocanonicals" by the Roman Catholic Church). We mentioned a few of these books (Maccabees, Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach, etc.). If you just want a simple English translation of the apocrypha, there are two that are commonly used today. One is the King James Version of the [Apocrypha](#). It's just the books of the apocrypha that were included in the King James Version translation in 1611 (or thereabouts). That might surprise some of you that weren't aware that the King James translation included books of the apocrypha, but it did. You can buy certain editions of the King James and get those, or you can buy just the apocryphal books in one small volume [or the digital [version](#)].

Another resource would be the NRSV. The NRSV translation also included the books of the apocrypha. On the website I have a link to [The New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version](#) and the digital [version](#). So the apocrypha is pretty easy to find in print or you can find these works in digital form through Logos Bible Software.

There's also an edition by R.H. Charles. He has a two-volume set: [The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament: Apocrypha](#). One volume is the apocrypha and the second volume is the pseudepigrapha. Charles' work is more recent than the King James, obviously (because the King James is very old). Charles would have been writing in the early 1900's, but it's not as recent as the NRSV. You will often see the Charles edition referenced. In fact, if you get the [version](#) from Logos, you can also get Charles' commentaries on these books (apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, some notes and things like) that in digital form. You should be aware (and again, I have it linked on the podcast website) that you can get Charles' Volume 1 of the two-volume set of the apocrypha by itself.

Now I should mention the New Testament apocrypha. To be honest, this isn't really pertinent to the biblical context because the New Testament apocrypha were books that were written in the early Christian era, so it's a little bit beyond the context of the New Testament itself. But some people might be thinking of apocrypha with respect to New Testament books. What I mean by that is you'll

get New Testament apocryphal works that will be like other gospels. These are not the *Nag Hammadi* (Coptic/Gnostic gospels), but you have other gospels (other lost books that were considered heretical). You have different versions of the Passion called Passion Gospels, you have Secondary Book of Acts, you have Epistles of Peter. You have a whole body of literature that bears some relationship (usually just the name) to New Testament characters or New Testament events. Whole books were written about that. So there are New Testament apocrypha.

Probably the cheapest and best one-volume edition is that of M. R. James: [The New Testament Apocrypha](#). That's available in digital form through Logos, as well. However, the scholarly reference edition for New Testament apocrypha is the two-volume set by Schneemelcher. They're expensive (each around \$45 or \$50), but they are pretty exhaustive. They're excellent if you really want anything that would conceivably be lumped into the category of New Testament apocrypha. This is the set to have. So two volumes by Schneemelcher ([New Testament Apocrypha, Vol. 1: Gospels and Related Writings Revised Edition](#), [New Testament Apocrypha, Vol. 2: Writings Relating to the Apostles Apocalypses and Related Subjects](#)).

Pseudepigrapha

Moving on to the pseudepigrapha... You can get an edition of the pseudepigrapha (as I mentioned a few moments ago) through R.H. Charles. Again, Charles had a two-volume companion set. One was apocrypha, the other was pseudepigrapha. You can buy them separately or as a set. So Charles has an edition of the pseudepigrapha: [The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, Pseudepigraph](#) (digital [version](#): Charles' Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in one set).

Probably the go-to resource when it comes to pseudepigrapha is the two-volume set by James H. Charlesworth. Distinguish the names. "Charles" and "Charlesworth" are two different people and two different sets. Charlesworth's two-volume set was published by Doubleday. I believe it's now under the Anchor Yale label. But this is the major academic resource for pseudepigrapha in English translation. These two volumes also contain fairly detailed introductions and textual histories of all of the books of the pseudepigrapha. So if you're at all interested in the pseudepigrapha, these are very, very much worth having: [The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha \(2 Volume set\)](#). Charles' collection of the pseudepigrapha and Charlesworth's two volume set are available in digital [versions](#) from Logos.

Dead Sea Scrolls

Let's move to the Dead Sea Scrolls. Right away, we need to distinguish the scrolls. There are basically two kinds of Dead Sea Scrolls: Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls, which would be material from the Hebrew Bible found at Qumran (in

other words, copies and different textual traditions of the Hebrew Bible itself), and then there are non-biblical scrolls (other books that were found at Qumran). Frankly, most of the Dead Sea Scroll material is non-biblical. When people usually talk about the Dead Sea Scrolls, they're usually not talking about the manuscripts that are related to the textual history of the Hebrew Bible. They're usually talking about documents that the Qumran community themselves wrote, or other books (for instance, fragments of 1 Enoch found among the Dead Sea Scrolls) that had a circulation within Judaism that were copied and kept at Qumran (the place where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found).

With respect to the non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls, there are some good English translations/editions of these. The one I would recommend most is that by Wise, Abegg, & Cook (three editors). Make sure if you select this resource, get the most recent edition. There was just a new edition that came out: [The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation](#) (or the digital [version](#)).

There's another frequently used set of English translations by Geza Vermes: [The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English \(Penguin Classics\)](#). His edition is widely available and widely used, as well.

Then there's another English translation by Garcia-Martinez: [The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English](#). I've put this in here mainly because of the digital [version](#). You can get Wise, Abegg, and Cook in digital form through Logos. You can get Vermes' edition through Logos, but it's quite expensive because of the publisher. Garcia-Martinez' comes in a two-volume digital set. This is *just* the digital now that I'm talking about with the two volumes. If you want just the English translation, you can get that in print in one volume. But if you go digital, you can get The Qumran Texts in English in a product called [The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition](#). You get the English translation and you get the Hebrew text with notes. So that's a very nice, handy set to have because you get both languages there.

15:00

As far as the biblical scrolls, I'm going to recommend one work. That is something called [The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English](#). This is a little bit peripheral to capturing the content of the New Testament since it's just biblical material, but I'm going to mention it anyway. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* is edited by Abegg, Ulrich, Flint. This is a collection and an English translation of all the biblical scrolls, so that once they're translated into English, this is the oldest known Old Testament translated into English. The way they have it set up visually is when you're looking at the translation, you'll be able to tell by verse reference what portions of your Old Testament were in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and then portions that were not found there. The manuscripts found at Qumran of the Hebrew Bible are incomplete because they were just in a state of decay or disrepair or they were fragmentary for some other reason. They're thousands of years old, so it's not all going to be intact. The edition does a nice job of showing you visually what was there, and then you can tell what wasn't there as far as the discovery. If you want

a Dead Sea Scrolls English Old Testament, that is the volume to get. That's also available in a digital [version](#).

Josephus

Moving on to Josephus... Josephus really is known for four works. One is called *The Jewish War*. It's an account of the war of the Jews against the Romans. His other major work is called the *Jewish Antiquities*. It's a 20-volume set, and it's a historiographical work. It's the history of Jewish people from Adam to the Jewish war with Rome. His third work was called *The Life*, and that's an autobiography. Lastly, there's something called *Against Apion*, which is Josephus' refutation of anti-Semitic writings circulating during the time roughly contemporaneous with him. These four works and all their volumes are available in English translation. The Whiston edition (again, if you get this in print, get the newest edition) is available. It's a full English translation of all the works of Josephus: [The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged, New Updated Edition](#). This is available in a digital [version](#), as well, from Logos.

Paul Maier has a translation of the works of Josephus: [The New Complete Works of Josephus](#). That is not available in digital form, but it's a recent collection in translation of Josephus.

Philo

Let's talk about Philo before we go to websites. Philo was an important Jewish theological, religious, and philosophical writer during the first century. I have a quote here from Philo... a Targumic scholar, as well... and rabbinics. Martin MacNamara says:

Philo's chief interest is in the allegorical interpretation of the scriptures. [MH: It's kind of what he's known for.] The titles of his works show that his thoughts centered around or flowed from the sacred text. However, he can be studied as both a philosopher and an exegete. Central to his teaching on God's relationship to the world is his doctrine of the *logos*. The term itself occurs repeatedly in his works but is never actually defined.

The *logos* is a New Testament concept that we know from the Gospel of John, where he refers to Jesus as the *logos*. That's one of the main reasons Philo draws a lot of attention. He's sort of an intermediary being, speaking as and writing as a Jew who was a monotheist, but Philo's idea of the *logos* is pretty important.

Philo wrote a lot of other things, too. He has a book on the giants and giant lore (that sort of thing). He has a very wide range of interest and works. You can get [The Works of Philo](#), the edition by Yonge, which was updated by David Scholer. You can find that on Amazon and that's available as well, through Logos

(digital [version](#)). So there's a nice edition in English of the works of Philo (the complete works).

Websites

Let's move to websites in the time we have remaining. These are free, of course, but the problem with websites is that they're sometimes incomplete. You don't always get all the books. And the translations are dated. They're usually from old public domain sources. Public domain is anything from before 1927 (currently), so they're not recent. They don't incorporate recent scholarship into them. But for their day, they were very good sources.

As far as the Old Testament Apocrypha, you could go to the [Sacred Texts](#) Archive. They have a little section for Old Testament apocryphal books. There's something called the [Non-Canonical Homepage](#). There's another site called [Apocrypha.org](#) that has links to apocryphal books in English translation. Also, [Pseudepigrapha.com](#). This site, which you would think is about the pseudepigrapha—and it is, but it's about more than the pseudepigrapha—if you go to [pseudepigrapha.com](#), you'll also find links to the apocrypha there.

With respect to the pseudepigrapha, naturally, you'd go to [Pseudepigrapha.com](#). You could also go to the [Sacred Texts](#) archive. But if you go to that link, you should note that the site labels the books of the pseudepigrapha as "other apocrypha," so it's a little confusing. The [Non-canonical Homepage](#) has a page dedicated with links to all the books of the pseudepigrapha in English.

For New Testament Apocrypha, you would go to a site called [Early Christian Writings](#). [Pseudepigrapha.com](#) also has links to some New Testament apocryphal books. The works of Philo can be found on the [Early Jewish Writings](#) website, as is the case for all the works of Josephus.

Again, just go to [www.nakedbiblepodcast.com](#). All these things are already linked for you so you can get there quickly and start reading [or use the live links within this transcript].

I hope this is helpful to be exposed to these resources. In the next episode of the podcast, what I'm going to do is go back to the Old Testament and start recommending books that are written by scholars for interested non-specialists that really distill and digest and order in a systematic way the content of the literature of the ancient Near East (in the Old Testament's case) and of the Second Temple period (when we get to the New Testament). There are lots of books out there that are excellent for helping you understand this body of ancient literature. I still recommend that you read a lot of it yourself, but there are books out there that really organize information well into very specific topics where you can find good essays on what Josephus thought about a given topic, or what the Egyptians thought about the afterlife, or Mesopotamian cosmology. There's all sorts of things that you can read so that you can begin to think like a person who

lived during these periods. And then we're going to talk about taking that back to the Bible to gain clarity and understanding of the Bible itself in its own context.