

The Intertestamental Period: An Open Seminar

Syllabus

- Days:** Wednesday evenings, starting 28 October 2015
- Time:** Potluck starting at 6:00 PM, followed by seminar until 8:00 PM
- Location:** (Provisionally) Good Samaritan Episcopal Church, Corvallis, OR
- Seminar Leaders:** Sheldon Greaves, Ph.D., Scholar-in-Residence, Good Samaritan Episcopal
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Description:

This is an open-ended seminar in which we will explore the history, popular movements, and religious literature of the period spanning from roughly the beginning of the Fourth Century BCE through the early First Century CE. This course will include lecture, discussion, and close reading of several texts from this period, with passing references to additional primary and secondary sources, archaeological material, sociological studies, etc.

There is no proposed end date for this seminar. We will continue the seminar as long as there is interest.

Course Conduct:

Our style of teaching gives priority to people who are new to the subject, but we also do our best to bring them “up to speed” as quickly as possible. Participants may, for instance, be asked or volunteer to follow along in a certain commentary or translation while we work on a text, and mention anything that strikes them as interesting or significant.

Please note: religion can be a sensitive subject, especially when deeply-held beliefs are under discussion or analysis, even in what we hope is a dispassionate and respectful way. We expect seminar attendees to treat others, and their beliefs, with courtesy and respect.

How to Get the Most Out of this Seminar

- Show up as often as you can. It's okay if you have to miss now and then, or even for extended periods. We'll be glad to see you anytime.
- Keep a notebook. We are pretty big on handouts. We also provide “student copies” of the texts we read that encourage lots of note-taking and exploration
- Ask questions.
- On a related note, you will hear the phrase “I don't know” now and then, sometimes from the seminar leaders. Since we're not looking for tenure or anything, we don't get hung up on having

all the answers right away. Delving into these questions is part of why we do this.

- For our part, we will do all we can to make sure no one is “left behind” in the material. If you need a quick explanation of something, let us know and we'll get you caught up.
- We will set up a web site for this seminar where we will post information and handouts. We also have an email list. Make sure you are on our distribution list and know how to find our web site.

Other Considerations:

One of the “hidden agendas” in this seminar is to form a community of learners, teachers, and thinkers in which we support and encourage each other. For example, if you find some aspect of our studies particularly interesting and want to explore it on your own, that's great! We are happy to offer assistance and, if you like, give you a chance to share what you've learned with the rest of the seminar. More to the point, we want to see this seminar become self-sustaining and perhaps expand.

Scholarly Positions:

The period we are studying is where we get most of our apocalyptic traditions and ideas, many of which are still going strong. This is not a forum for speculating on the date for Armageddon, when the world will end, or when the Mothership will appear, returning Elvis in triumph. We see these texts as tied to their own time and, while they clearly spoke to many through time since then, we do not see them as predictive statements aimed at any one event or set of events, apart from those that seem to follow in the wake of the human condition.

Objectives:

Our primary objective in conducting our seminars is to teach participants how to become confident readers and interpreters of the biblical (or extra-biblical) text. Apart from that, upon completion of this seminar (or a sufficient portion of it) participants will be able to:

- Use basic tools of biblical scholarship such as dictionaries, commentaries, concordances, etc., as well as do basic word studies and employ other tools and findings of modern scholarship
- Outline the general historical trends and events of the period in question
- Name and describe the major Apocryphal and pseudepigraphic works that come from this time
- Explain the development and role of the Septuagint in Judaism of late antiquity and early Christianity
- Describe some of the major sects that came out of this period, e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Herodians, Zealots, etc. and their general activities.
- Explain major theological concepts that grow out of this time, such as Messianic expectations, apocalypticism, ideas regarding the afterlife, and so on.

Class Texts and Materials:

With a little help from the Good Sam Xerox machine, we will provide most of the necessary materials. Participants should have their own bible, of whichever translation they prefer. When doing textual studies, we will usually provide “study editions.” Typically we set up an email list for the Seminar, and try to disseminate any handouts for a given session ahead of time, so that everyone has a chance to print them out and review them before class.

Bibles:

Please bring a Bible in your favorite translation. This being the Intertestamental Period, we will be spending a lot of time in the Deutero-canonical/Apocryphal books, so you'll want an edition that includes the Apocrypha. Works from this period that are not in the Apocrypha (Pseudepigrapha and others) are often available online; we will either point you in the direction of these resources or provide hard copies for those who don't have one.

Tentative Schedule:

Given the less rigid nature of this seminar, we feel it best not to try to plan too closely too far out in advance. This is a tentative, suggested, pre- pro- antepenultimate schema.

The first two or three sessions will give a general overview of the period, highlight major historical events, cover some of the political, social, economic, and intellectual currents in play. We will pay special attention to the Maccabean Revolt, with some reference to 1 and 2 Maccabees.

We will follow this with a close reading of the *Book of Daniel*, plus other shorter Apocryphal books associated with it: *Song of the Three Children*, *Susanna*, and *Bel and the Dragon*.

Proposed Dates through the end of 2015:

Every Wednesday, with the exception of 25 November and 23 December

Resources:

This is just a tentative list. We will begin and maintain a more comprehensive resource list as we get going.

Seminar Web Page

Come here for handouts, calendar, and pointers to additional resources.

<http://www.guerrillascholar.com/intertestamental-period-seminar/>

Podcast: Discovering the Old Testament

This podcast is a fairly comprehensive overview of the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament in (soon to be) 50 episodes or just over 20 minutes each. The podcast is based on a class taught at Stanford University.

<http://www.lafkospress.com/>

Podcast: The Intertestamental Period

Sponsored by the Rational Faiths blog, this was a panel discussion including Sheldon and couple of others discussing some of the salient features of the Intertestamental Period.

<http://rationalfaiths.com/78-the-intertestamental-period/>

St. Andrew's School of Divinity Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Page

This is a page with links to what look like very useful explanations and discussions of the many pseudepigraphic books.

<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/divinity/rt/otp/abstracts/jcapoc/>