



Lesson 5: Between the Testaments

Dear friends,

Greetings once again from my office here at Wesley Theological Seminary. I hope that this finds you well.

A number of people have told me that they read Chapter Four at a slower pace since its subject matter was largely unfamiliar. This was especially true of the second half of the chapter, which deals with 1 Enoch, a text not widely known in the church. If you are curious, you can read all or part of 1 Enoch by going to the “Texts, Essays & Websites” portion of the course website (www.WesleyMinistryNetwork.com/igt) and clicking on the link to 1 Enoch. The chart on pages 87-92 of *In God's Time* contains quotations from a number of other ancient Jewish sources, many of which also can be found through the course website.

Why include these non-biblical materials in a book about the Bible? The reason is that such texts comprise the most important bridge between the Old and New Testaments. Most of the Hebrew Bible was completed five or six centuries before Christ. Half a millennium is a considerable gap, and too often this period is passed over as though it is of no importance. In fact, the Judaism of Jesus' day was not the Judaism of Isaiah or Amos or Malachi--that is, no more than the Protestantism of today is identical to the religion of the sixteenth-century Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin. To understand the New Testament, it is necessary to understand the world of its authors, a world heavily influenced by the hopes and expectations of what is called “Second Temple Judaism.” (The first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586/87 B.C.)

Having said that, it is important to avoid the “Nothing But” temptation. To say that Christianity is *nothing but* a Jewish apocalyptic sect is quite inaccurate. Existing apocalyptic ideas strongly shaped Christian interpretation, but they also were transformed by the church's experience of Jesus. This is true, for example, with respect to its claims about Jesus' messiahship. On the one hand, hopes for the coming “Son of David” are directly and unambiguously applied to Jesus. On the other hand, the whole notion of what such a Messiah would be is altered, probably by Jesus himself as well as by his followers. In other words, the relationship between past and present is dynamic, which also means that it is complicated. It is necessary to understand the New Testament's background but also to realize that the NT is something more than the sum of its influences. 1 Enoch helps us to understand Christianity, but without Jesus there would have been nothing to interpret.

Grace & peace,

Craig