

# Bible Stories for Adults

## Between the Testaments

### Malachi, Apocrypha & Pseudepigrapha

## Opening

Gathering: Share an experience through which you learned a valuable lesson that has since guided you.

Today's Focus: The Jews took to heart the punishment of the Babylonian exile and strove to obey God.

Key Verses: *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.*  
1 Peter 2:9

*"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart."*  
Jeremiah 29:11-13

Opening Prayer

## Lesson

Returning to the Lord (*Nehemiah*)

How did the people learn about God's Law after returning to Judah?

Nehemiah 8:2-3 = Ezra read the Book of the Law to the large assembly

How did the people respond when they realized how they had been sinning?

Nehemiah 8:9 = They cried and mourned

How did they respond later in the month after their situation sank in?

Nehemiah 9:1-3 (8:1-9:37) = They were greatly moved and confessed their sins

What did they understand to be the reason their ancestors had been exiled?

Nehemiah 9:29-30 = Disobeyed God's laws and ignored His messengers

What did they do to show their sincerity in being faithful to God?

Nehemiah 9:38; 10:29 = Rededicated themselves and made an oath to keep God's Laws

The Last of God's Prophets (*Malachi*) = Late in Nehemiah's life, 1000 yrs after Conquest, 400 yrs before Christ

Did the Jews persevere in their dedication to obey God's Law?

Nehemiah 13:6-7, 10-11 (1-31) = Strayed while Nehemiah was gone in Babylon

Why were the Jews so quick to stray?

Malachi 3:14-15 = Why obey when even the evildoers prosper?

What were some examples where the Jews cut corners in keeping God's Law?

Malachi 1:7-8 (6-14) = Brought blemished animals to sacrifice

Malachi 2:11 (10-12) = Married foreign wives

Malachi 2:14 (13-16) = Divorce

Malachi 3:8 (8-10) = Failing to tithe

Would God give up on these people or would He send yet another messenger?

Malachi 3:1 = He'd send a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah

Who would this messenger be?

Malachi 4:5-6 = Elijah

Did this messenger come as God promised?

Luke 1:13, 17 = Yes, John the Baptist was sent in the spirit and power of Elijah

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### Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

Religious writings not accepted as divinely inspired (not in *canon*)

Old Testament canon defined by rabbis at Jamnia in 90 AD

Produced and circulated during period of 200 BC - 100 AD

Contain various historical references and stories

Recommended by Jerome and Luther for ethical but not doctrinal teaching

Many apocryphal New Testament writings also exist, such as:

*Gospel of the Infancy, Gospel of Thomas, ... Nicodemus, ... Bartholomew*

*Acts of John, ... Paul, ... Peter, ... Andrew, ... Philip, ... Thomas*

Apocrypha = Greek for *hidden things*

Contain ideas that disagree with Protestant doctrine

Purgatory, masses for the dead, good works earn merit with God

Roman Catholics accept 12 of these 15 books as *Deuterocanonical* = *deutero* means *secondary*

Accepted at *Council of Trent* in 1546 in response to reformers

Eastern Orthodox accept all but 2 Esdras as canonical

*1 & 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions To Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch,*

*Letter of Jeremiah, Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon,*

*Prayer of Manasseh, 1 & 2 Maccabees*

Pseudepigrapha = Greek for *false authorship*

Falsely claimed to be written by a well-known ancient figure

Given even less credence than apocrypha

Called Apocrypha by Roman Catholics

Eastern Orthodox accept 3 & 4 Maccabees as canonical

*Enoch, Psalms of Solomon, Books of Adam and Eve, Martyrdom of Isaiah,*

*Testament of the 12 Patriarchs*

### Persian Period (539-333 BC)

Aramaic became common language of the Jews while in captivity (replaced Hebrew)

Cyrus conquered Babylon and allowed exiles to return

Temple and city walls were rebuilt, God's Law was reinstated (Ezra and Nehemiah)

Jewish high priest was appointed as head of church and state

Persians allowed Jews to set and administer their own religious laws

Artaxerxes III assassinated by Bagoas (his minister of state)

Artaxerxes' son Arses set up as puppet king by Bagoas

Arses replaced by Darius III (Codomanus) when he disagreed with Bagoas

### Alexander the Great (336-323)

Strong Greek military developed by Philip of Macedon (358-336)

Alexander took rule after his father Philip was assassinated

Conquered the eastern world to build Greek empire and spread Greek culture to unify the world

Defeated Persians in 333 BC at Issus

Established Alexandria in Egypt in 331 BC

Died soon after returning to Babylon in 323 BC

Greek empire was divided between his 4 generals - Two grew into dynasties

Ptolemy - Ruled Egypt, Capital at Alexandria in Egypt

Seleucus - Ruled Babylonia, Capital at Antioch in Syria

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### Greek Period (333-63 BC)

#### Ptolemies (323-198)

- Egypt flourished under the 15 Macedonian kings called Ptolemies
  - Government patterned after pharaohs instead of Greeks
- Ptolemy wrestled control of Palestine away from Seleucus
  - Palestine changed hands numerous times in this period
- High priest served as top administrator of Judea, line of Zadok (David's priest)
  - Pentateuch (Torah) served as Judea's constitution
  - Sanhedrin served like a senate and supreme court
- Septuagint made during prosperous reign of Ptolemy II (Philadelphus)
  - 72 elders translated Hebrew Pentateuch (Torah) into Greek (6 per tribe)
  - Rest of Old Testament was translated and added to Septuagint over following years
- Cleopatra's son by Julius Caesar, Ptolemy XV, was the last Ptolemy
  - Murdered with mother by Octavian's orders in 30 BC

#### Seleucids (198-165) = Named after Seleucus or his son Antiochus

- Pushed Hellenism and built Greek cities throughout empire
  - Hellenism* - Greek thought, customs, lifestyle
  - Intended to unify diverse peoples and cultures
  - Threatened Jewish faithfulness to God and His Law
- Antiochus III recaptured Palestine from Ptolemy V in 198 BC
  - Gave Jews right to make their own laws, Donated to temple
- Antiochus IV forced unity (Hellenism) and expansion (heavy taxation)
  - Self-named Epiphanes (*Manifest*) = Said Zeus was manifest in him
    - Nicknamed by his subjects Epimanes (*madman*)
  - Sold high priesthood to highest bidder, then deposed and resold
  - Plundered and desecrated the temple - altar to Zeus (167-164 BC) and sacrificed pig
  - Forbade circumcision, Sabbath, festivals, Torah - punishable by death
  - Tried to destroy all copies of the Torah

### Maccabean Period (165-134 BC)

- Elderly priest Mattathias destroyed Greek altar built in his town (ex. Judges 5:25-32 – Gideon)
  - He killed the official demanding pagan sacrifice and began a Jewish revolt
  - Fled to hills with 5 sons and others - Judas, Jonathan, Simon, Eleazar, John
  - Organized an army, destroyed altars, killed Hellenized Jews, circumcised Jewish boys
  - Mattathias killed within 3 months, succeeded by son Judas

#### Judas Maccabeus led surprise attacks against Seleucids and won independence

- Nicknamed Maccabee = *hammerer* (for great might as a warrior)
- Temple was cleansed and rededicated (celebrated at Hanukkah)
- Skirmished around Palestine and Galilee to bring scattered Jews back to Jerusalem
- Killed in political battle against Seleucid army

#### Jonathan followed brother Judas and gained power with shrewd politics

- Awarded role of high priest although not of Zadokite line
- Taken prisoner and killed by Trypho under Antiochus VI

#### Simon took title of *great high priest and commander and leader of the Jews*

- Qumran community was established in protest (Dead Sea Scrolls)

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Hasmonean Period (134-63 BC) = Hashmon was father of Mattathias

John Hyrcanus installed as Priest-Prince after his father Simon was killed by son-in-law

Defeated by Antiochus VII, Later won freedom and Samaria from Demetrius II

Two parties emerged during John Hyrcanus I

Pharisees - Focus on obedience to God's Law (study, apply, develop)

Opposed Judas Maccabeus' efforts to win political freedom

Content with cleansing of Temple and reestablishment of Jewish worship

Sadducees - Priests and nobles opposed Pharisees to protect privileges

Aristobulus (John's son) called himself king (instead of ethnarch)

Imprisoned brothers and mother to protect reign

Alexander Jannaeus (Aristobulus' brother) expanded borders to include David's territory

Power-hungry, hated by his own people, persecuted the Pharisees

Alexandra Salome (Alexander's widow) brought time of peace and prosperity

Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II (Salome's sons) fought for leadership

Rome intervened and Palestine became part of the Roman Empire

Pompey besieged temple, massacred priests while performing duties, entered Most Holy Place

Emperor Pompey imprisoned Aristobulus II and appointed Hyrcanus II high priest

Roman Period (63 BC-)

Julius Caesar took Syria from Pompey in 47 BC

Appointed Hyrcanus as ethnarch and high priest, Antipater as procurator

Antipater's sons as governors - Herod over Galilee, Phasael over Jerusalem

Herod married Hyrcanus' granddaughter after Antipater was killed

Parthians gained power over Syria after Julius Caesar was killed in 44 BC

Parthians helped Aristobulus's son Antigonus become high priest

Hyrcanus exiled to Babylon, Phasael commit suicide, Herod ran to Rome

Herod the Great won favor of Mark Antony and Octavian, named *King of the Jews*

Took over 3 years later after Romans executed Antigonus

Reported directly to Rome, a Hellenist at heart, not accepted by Jews

Became paranoid, killed some of his wives and kids to protect throne (Matthew 2:16)

Used heavy taxation for a lavish building program (inc. 2nd Temple)

Herod's territory was divided between his 3 remaining sons when he died (4 BC)

Herod Archelaus ruled Judea 10 yrs, replaced by procurators - Pontius Pilate was 5th procurator

Herod Antipas ruled Galilee, Jesus' homeland - He killed John the Baptist and tried Jesus

Closing Prayer

**Response** - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. When have I seen the evil prosper? Why should I bother being faithful? (*Malachi 3:14-15; Job 21:7-16; Psalm 119:1-8; Proverbs 28:4-20; Matthew 5:1-12; 6:19-21; Romans 9:14-33*)
2. When have I given God less than my firstfruits and my best?  
(*Malachi 1:6-9; Exodus 22:29-30; 23:16-19; Philippians 4:14-19; Hebrews 13:15-16; James 1:18*)
3. How have I bonded my self with things outside of God's family?  
(*Malachi 2:11-12; Deuteronomy 7:3-4; Jeremiah 3:6-13; Mark 8:34-38; 1 John 2:15-17*)
4. When have I broken promises that I have made to God?  
(*Malachi 2:14-16; Leviticus 5:4-5; Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Judges 11:30-40; Matthew 5:33-37*)
5. Do I faithfully tithe of my time, talents and treasures or do I rob God? (*Malachi 3:8-10; Genesis 28:20-22; Leviticus 27:30-33; Matthew 22:17-21; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:1-7; 1 Peter 4:10-11*)