

# Dr. Elaine Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 14, Extra-Canonical Literature: An Introduction Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 14, Extra-Canonical Literature: An Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

**Dr. Elaine Phillips' lecture** introduces extracanonical literature, exploring texts outside the biblical canon. The lecture utilizes a framework of four "C's"—**canon**, **community**, **commentary**, and **continuity**—to understand how these texts engage with and interpret canonical scripture. Key figures like **Philo** and **Josephus** are examined, highlighting their allegorical interpretations and historical accounts of first-century Judaism. The lecture also touches upon the **Dead Sea Scrolls** and other extracanonical works, emphasizing their historical and religious significance in understanding the diverse expressions of Judaism and the development of early Christianity. Finally, the lecture prepares students to examine the **Book of Enoch** in a future session.

**2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 14 –  
Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the  
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link  
there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series →  
Introduction to Biblical Studies).**



**Phillips\_IBS\_Session  
14.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Phillips\_IBS\_EN\_Session14.pdf":

#### **Briefing Document: Extracanonical Literature**

##### **Introduction:**

This document summarizes Dr. Elaine Phillips' lecture (Session 14) on extracanonical literature within the context of Biblical Studies. The lecture serves as an introduction to this vast and complex body of writings, focusing on its importance for understanding the historical, religious, and sociological contexts surrounding the canonical Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament. Dr. Phillips emphasizes that extracanonical texts are responses to the existing canon, written by diverse communities.

##### **Key Themes and Ideas:**

##### **1. Defining Extracanonical Literature:**

- Extracanonical literature is a broad and "unwieldy" category of texts outside the recognized biblical canon. There isn't one set way to categorize them.
- These texts are "tied into" and respond to the First/Old Testament, indicating a relationship and dependency on it. They are not independent creations.

##### **1. The Four "Cs": Shaping Forces of Extracanonical Literature**

- Dr. Phillips introduces a framework of four interconnected "Cs" to understand the creation and purpose of these writings:
- **Canon:** The recognized sacred texts of the Old Testament (Torah, Prophets, Writings) serve as the foundation and point of reference for these communities. They were seen as "sacred text" with "divinely revealed communication." The canonical structures, according to the lecture, were established by at least the second century B.C. , if not earlier, and include the Torah, the Prophets, and then "other books".

- The book of Ecclesiasticus (c. 180 BC) by Jesus ben Sirach, and its Greek translation in 132 B.C., makes a clear distinction between these three categories and indicates that at least some writers understood the distinctiveness of these sections, though other, later, texts are not considered part of the canon. Also, Luke 24 and 1 Cor 15 refer to scriptures using the same categories. The Dead Sea Scroll 4QMT also appears to make a similar distinction, separating out the Books of Moses, the Prophets, and writings from David.
- **Communities:** These texts are products of various Jewish communities, both within the land and in the diaspora (e.g., Qumran, Jewish communities in Egypt, early Christian communities). Each community responds through its own "lens" to the canon.
- **Commentary:** These communities produced commentaries on the canon, applying sacred text for the community's "admonition, edification, and encouragement." These commentaries connect the promises in scripture with the realities of their lives, often addressing suffering and hardship.
- **Continuity:** These writings seek to establish continuity between the biblical promises and the lived experiences of the communities, even questioning if the "promises have failed," as seen in the Psalms.

#### 1. Importance of Studying Extracanonical Literature:

- **Historical Background:** Provides historical context for the period between the Old and New Testaments, filling the "gap" between Malachi and the Gospels.
- **Philosophical, Religious, and Sociological Climate:** Offers insight into the philosophical, religious, and sociological conditions, especially during periods of suffering and oppression. Reveals how people remained faithful and understood God's nature amid struggles.
- **Complexity of Judaism:** Highlights the diverse and pluralistic nature of Judaism, and the point that we should discuss "Judaisms", rather than a monolithic category of Judaism.
- **Biblical Interpretation:** Provides examples of how the canon was interpreted and applied by different communities to create commentary and continuity. The communities were "infused with biblical text" and understood it deeply.

## 1. Categories of Extracanonical Literature:

- The lecture explores various categories, some based on person's name, some on genre:
- **Pseudepigrapha:** Falsely attributed writings, a significant genre. This will be the subject of future lectures.
- **Philo of Alexandria:** A Hellenistic Jewish writer from Alexandria (c. 20 BC – 50 AD), influenced by Neoplatonism. Philo allegorized the Hebrew Bible to make it palatable for his community's worldview, and he used the term *logos* frequently.
- Dr. Philips gives the example of Philo's interpretation of Genesis 3, where he allegorizes the Cherubim and the flaming sword as representing God's goodness, authority, and reason (*logos*). This connects to concepts in the New Testament, particularly regarding *logos* in John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 4.
- **Josephus:** A first-century Jewish historian, governor in the Galilee (c. 37 – c. 100 AD), who defected to the Romans, writing about Jewish history and sects, including *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Jewish Wars*.
- He provides information on the sects of Judaism (Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes) and offers descriptions of Jesus, John the Baptist, and Herod Agrippa. While it's thought some parts of Josephus' writing may have been added by Christian scribes, the core of his writings still give historical insight.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls:** Texts from Qumran, often having pseudepigraphic elements.
- **Rabbinic Materials:** Materials from Rabbinic communities (to be covered in another lecture).
- **Targums:** Aramaic translations of scriptures (will not be covered further).

## Key Quotes from the Source:

- "This is a vast, vast, vast arena to study. So, for us, we're simply going to do some selected texts within this broad scope, and these are going to be a set of different texts that respond in one way or another to what is in the First or the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible."
- "Think of them as all very much tied into that. That's going to be an extremely important point, and we'll come back to it multiple times."

- "Canon, community, commentary, and continuity, all working together as the shaping forces here."
- "Actually, they're all takeaways, but this is an important one as well because, you know if we're scholars of the Bible, we want to know how best to interpret it. And you have in these texts examples of interpretation..."
- "They knew their texts. And if we were to mention, well, maybe three words out of a text, that wasn't a proof text. That was a reminder to the listening or reading community of the whole context within which something was happening."
- "[Philo's] mission seemed to have been to make the narratives in the Hebrew Bible palatable for the worldview within which he lived and the Jewish community in Alexandria functioned."
- "Josephus...is going to help [his Roman audience] understand not just events as they're articulated in the Old Testament, but beyond that."

### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Phillips' lecture establishes a framework for understanding extracanonical literature, emphasizing its dependence on and response to canonical scripture, as well as the importance of the communities and the specific contexts in which these texts were produced. It reveals that these texts are a valuable tool for historical understanding and biblical interpretation, and can even be relevant for the context of present day study. The lecture sets the stage for future exploration of specific categories like the Pseudepigrapha and their relevant texts, such as the writings attributed to Enoch.

## 4. Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 14, Extra-Canonical Literature: An Introduction

### Extracanoncal Literature Study Guide

#### Quiz

1. What are the four "C's" that Dr. Phillips uses to discuss the shaping forces behind extracanoncal literature, and how do they relate to each other?
2. According to Dr. Phillips, what was the general understanding of the boundaries of canon in the first centuries BCE and CE?
3. How did Philo of Alexandria attempt to reconcile Hebrew Bible narratives with Neoplatonic thinking?
4. What are the three main Jewish sects described by Josephus, and how do their beliefs differ?
5. Why is Josephus considered an important source for understanding the historical and social context of the Second Temple period?
6. How does Dr. Phillips explain the possible presence of Christian additions in Josephus's writings about Jesus?
7. What does Josephus recount about John the Baptist's death?
8. How does the concept of "logos" function within Philo's allegorical interpretation of Genesis 3?
9. How does Dr. Phillips connect the writings of these extracanoncal figures to the ways in which communities understood and applied the biblical canon?
10. What does Dr. Phillips mean when she states that Judaism is "plural," and why is this important for understanding extracanoncal literature?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The four "C's" are **Canon**, **Community**, **Commentary**, and **Continuity**. These are not separate categories but are all interconnected. Communities respond to the canon by writing commentaries that seek to establish continuity between the promises of the sacred text and their current realities.

2. Dr. Phillips suggests that there was a good sense of what was canon by the second century BCE and well into the first century CE, specifically citing the three-part structure of Torah, Prophets (Nevi'im), and Writings.
3. Philo attempted to reconcile the narratives by allegorizing them. He used the concept of logos to mediate between God and the created world, making the narratives more acceptable within a Neoplatonic framework that struggled with a God who actively intervenes in the world.
4. The three main sects are the **Pharisees**, **Sadducees**, and **Essenes**. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection and the afterlife, while the Sadducees did not. The Essenes lived communally, practicing strict rituals and focusing on a life of purity.
5. Josephus provides historical background and insight into the philosophical, religious, and social climate of the period between the Old Testament and New Testament. His writings offer information about the sects, events, and personalities of the time.
6. Dr. Phillips explains that Josephus's work was preserved by Christian churches, and that it's possible that scribes added details, given that the idea of text fidelity was not always as rigid as it is today. She points to the use of "the Christ" as one example.
7. Josephus recounts that John the Baptist was killed by Herod because Herod feared John's popularity and potential to incite rebellion. The text adds that some believed that the destruction of Herod's army came from God as punishment for executing a good man.
8. In Philo's interpretation of Genesis 3, logos or "reason" is the mediating force between God's goodness and authority, symbolized by the flaming sword. The logos is the creative and active power through which God interacts with creation.
9. Dr. Phillips connects these writings to canonical understanding by explaining that the communities were deeply engaged with the biblical text, using their interpretations to create commentaries that applied the ancient texts to their contemporary challenges and circumstances.
10. When Dr. Phillips states that Judaism is "plural," she means it was a complex of diverse communities, each with unique interpretations and practices. This diversity is essential to understand the richness and variety of responses to the canon found in extracanonical literature.

## Essay Questions

1. Discuss how the historical and social contexts of the Second Temple period influenced the development and content of extracanonical literature. Provide specific examples from the texts and figures discussed in the lecture to support your arguments.
2. Analyze the role of interpretation within extracanonical literature. How do these texts reveal the ways in which different communities understood and engaged with the established canon?
3. Compare and contrast the approaches of Philo of Alexandria and Josephus in their writings. How do their backgrounds and intended audiences shape their perspectives on the Hebrew Bible and Jewish history?
4. Explore the significance of the four "C's" (canon, community, commentary, and continuity) as a framework for understanding extracanonical literature. How do these concepts contribute to a deeper understanding of the texts and their contexts?
5. Examine the concept of "logos" in Philo's writings. How does it relate to the biblical text and the broader philosophical ideas of the time?

## Glossary

**Extracanonical Literature:** Writings that are outside of the accepted biblical canon of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible).

**Canon:** The officially recognized and authoritative collection of scriptures within a religious tradition.

**Diaspora:** The dispersion of Jews outside of the land of Israel.

**Pseudepigrapha:** Falsely attributed writings, where the author is not who they claim to be, often taking the name of an important figure in the past.

**Philo of Alexandria:** A Jewish philosopher from Alexandria in Egypt, who sought to harmonize the Hebrew Bible with Greek philosophical ideas, particularly Neoplatonism.



**Logos:** In Greek philosophy and theology, the divine reason or the word of God; a mediating force between God and creation.

**Josephus:** A first-century Jewish historian who wrote about the Jewish wars, the fall of the temple, and the history of the Jewish people.

**Essenes:** A Jewish sect that lived in communal settings, emphasized strict purity laws, and may have been located at Qumran.

**Pharisees:** A prominent Jewish sect that emphasized adherence to the Torah as well as interpretations by religious leaders. They believed in the resurrection.

**Sadducees:** A Jewish sect mainly associated with the aristocracy, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and focused on the written Torah.

**Qumran:** The location near the Dead Sea where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

**Dead Sea Scrolls:** Ancient Jewish religious texts discovered in caves near Qumran, including biblical texts and extracanonical writings.

**Targums:** Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible.

**Rabbinic Materials:** Writings and discussions of Jewish rabbis that came after the destruction of the Second Temple.

**Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

**Deuterocanonical Books:** Books considered canonical in some Christian traditions but not in others. In this case, referring to the books contained in the Septuagint.

**Neoplatonism:** A philosophical system that developed in the Hellenistic world, based on Plato's teachings, often with an emphasis on the transcendence of God.

## 5. FAQs on Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 14, Extra-Canonical Literature: An Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ: Extracanonical Literature and Its Significance

- **What is extracanonical literature, and why is it important to study?**
- Extracanonical literature refers to writings that are outside the accepted canon of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament. Studying it is crucial because it provides a broader historical, sociological, philosophical, and religious context of the periods in between and surrounding these canonical texts. It offers insight into how various communities understood, interpreted, and applied scripture, shedding light on the development of Jewish thought and early Christian interpretations of scripture. It helps us understand the diversity of religious practices and beliefs that existed alongside the canonical narratives.
- **How does extracanonical literature relate to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)?**
- Extracanonical texts often respond directly to the Old Testament. They are written by communities that saw the Hebrew Bible as a sacred text and sought to apply its messages to their own lives and circumstances. These texts can be seen as commentaries or interpretations that were shaped by the communities' particular historical, social, and religious contexts. Many of the texts are attempts to establish continuity between the promises of the Old Testament and the realities these communities faced.
- **What are the four "C's" that help understand the creation of extracanonical literature?**
- The four "C's" are:
- **Canon:** These writings are a response to the existing sacred texts of the Old Testament.
- **Communities:** Diverse groups of people (such as those in Qumran, Jewish communities in Egypt, and early Christian communities) produced these texts, each with their own unique perspectives.
- **Commentary:** The communities were actively interpreting and applying the canonical texts for instruction, encouragement, and admonishment.

- **Continuity:** These texts sought to establish connections between the promises found in the scriptures and the current realities faced by the communities.
- **How were the boundaries of the Old Testament canon understood during the time when extracanonical texts were being written?**
- By the 2nd century BCE, there appears to have been a general understanding within Jewish communities of the three divisions of the canon: Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets) including historical material relating to the prophets, and Writings, although these "writings" had a more varied content. This is evidenced by texts like Ecclesiasticus which clearly differentiates between his grandfather's writing and the three established sections of the scriptures. It's also hinted at in Luke and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. While the specific boundaries weren't completely rigid, there was a recognition of a core collection of authoritative texts.
- **What are some of the key categories or genres of extracanonical literature?**
- Extracanonical literature includes several categories:
- **Pseudepigrapha:** Writings that are falsely attributed to biblical figures or other significant personalities.
- **Writings by individuals:** Such as those by Philo (a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria) and Josephus (a first-century Jewish historian), who both provide their own unique interpretations of the scriptures.
- **Community writings:** Such as those found at Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls), which reveal the beliefs and practices of specific Jewish communities.
- **Rabbinic Materials:** Though not explored in depth, these are mentioned as a category for later discussion and include Talmudic literature.
- **Targums:** Aramaic translations of the scriptures (these are noted but not discussed in detail).
- **Who were Philo and Josephus, and what is their significance in the study of extracanonical literature?**
- Philo was a Jewish philosopher from Alexandria (approx 20 BCE - 50 CE). He used allegory to interpret the Hebrew Bible within a Neoplatonic framework and sought to reconcile Jewish scripture with Greek philosophy. Josephus was a first-century Jewish historian (approx 37-100 CE) who wrote extensively about Jewish

history and customs, including descriptions of the different Jewish sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes), and the life and death of Jesus and John the Baptist. He is vital for understanding the historical and social context of Judea during this period.

- **How does the allegorical approach of Philo change how we might understand biblical narratives?**
- Philo's allegorical interpretation of the Hebrew Bible often seeks to find deeper philosophical meanings behind the literal stories, making them more palatable to his Hellenistic audience. For example, his interpretation of the Garden of Eden narrative sees the cherubim, God's goodness and authority, and the flaming sword as symbols of God's power and the Logos (reason). Philo reinterprets biblical narratives in light of the philosophical concepts of his time, showing us one way the Hebrew texts were understood and reinterpreted in the ancient world.
- **What can Josephus's writings teach us about the historical context surrounding the New Testament era?**
- Josephus's writings provide invaluable historical background to the New Testament era. His descriptions of the various Jewish sects, the Roman occupation, and the reign of Herod, as well as his accounts of the deaths of Jesus and John the Baptist, and the death of Herod Agrippa I offer insights into the political, religious, and social environment of first-century Judea. These perspectives help us better understand the environment in which early Christianity developed, and can be cross-referenced with both New Testament texts and other historical records to create a rich and nuanced historical understanding.