

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 16, Testamentary and Martyrdom Literature 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 16, Testamentary and Martyrdom Literature, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. Elaine Phillips' "Introduction to Biblical Studies" examines **pseudepigraphical literature**, specifically **testamentary and martyrdom literature** from the Second Temple period. The lecture focuses on the **Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs**, highlighting its structure, common themes (confessions, ethical instruction, prophecy), and its preservation across various languages, while also discussing **Christian interpolations**. The lecture then explores the **Martyrdom of Isaiah**, analyzing its narrative structure, historical context, and its potential connection to Hebrews 11:37. Finally, the lecture connects these texts to the broader **cultural and religious landscape** of the Second Temple period, contrasting the patriarchal views on women with Jesus' teachings.

**2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 16 –
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
16.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Phillips_IBS_EN_Session16.pdf":

Briefing Document: Testamentary and Martyrdom Literature in Second Temple Judaism

Introduction:

This document summarizes a lecture by Dr. Elaine Phillips on Testamentary and Martyrdom literature, two significant genres within the pseudepigrapha of Second Temple Judaism. These genres emerged during a time of great turmoil and persecution for God's people. The lecture emphasizes the deep scriptural knowledge of the authors of these texts, their engagement with contemporary issues, and the diverse contexts in which their works circulated.

Key Themes and Concepts:

1. Deep Scriptural Knowledge & Interpretation:

- The authors of these texts were intimately familiar with the Hebrew Bible, using it as a foundation for their own works.
- They actively interpreted biblical texts, interfacing them with their own experiences, ideas, and concepts.
- Dr. Phillips states, "I can't emphasize enough how well these folks knew their scriptures and explored the meaning for their day." They engaged in "canon, community, commentary, continuity" which allowed them to connect scripture to their present day.

1. Testamentary Literature:

- **Definition:** This genre features a prominent biblical figure, often near death, offering ethical teaching and prophetic statements to those around them.
- **Canonical Base:** The model for this genre is found in Genesis 49, where Jacob blesses his twelve sons on his deathbed.
- **Common Characteristics:** Often begins with a confession of sins.
- Includes ethical instructions.
- Frequently incorporates prophetic statements, including apocalyptic elements.

- **The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (TTP):** A central example of the genre, attributed to the twelve sons of Jacob.
- The TTP is preserved in Greek, Armenian, Slavonic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, indicating its widespread use across various communities.
- The TTP dates to approximately the second century B.C.
- The text presents the "final utterances of each of these sons of Jacob in order,"
- **Christian Interpolations:** Some passages in the TTP appear to be later Christian additions, suggesting that the text may have been adapted over time. Examples of these interpolations include:
 - Testament of Simeon: "God hath taken a body, and eaten with men, and saved men."
 - Testament of Levi: "Behold, I am cleared from your ungodliness and transgression, which you shall commit at the end of the ages against the Savior of the world, Christ...the veil of the temple shall be rent."

1. **Ethical Emphasis and Hellenistic Influence:**

- Testamentary literature emphasizes ethical teachings and instruction, which some scholars connect to the broader Greek cultural focus on virtues.
- Torah was sometimes presented as a Greek wisdom text, not just instruction.
- Hellenism also influenced the expression of piety in these texts.

1. **Apocalyptic Themes:**

- These texts include apocalyptic content, including:
 - Exhortations to avoid sumptuous and sensuous living.
 - Dualism: the presence of a spirit of truth contrasted with a spirit of error.
 - Emphasis on God's transcendence: multiple levels of heaven, including specific locations for judgement, holiness, and angels.
 - A focus on an eschatological end and God's judgement on evil.

1. **The Testament of Levi:**

- Levi is not presented on his deathbed like the other patriarchs, but in good health.

- The text explores the difficult question of how Levi, responsible for the slaughter of the Shechemites, could be the founder of the priesthood.
- **Embellishment of Genesis Narrative:** The text embellishes the Genesis narrative, claiming that the slaughter of the Shechemites was divinely ordained and written on the heavenly tablets due to the wickedness of the Shechemites and their past offences.
- **Heavenly Investiture:** Levi is invested into the priesthood through a vision in which he ascends through multiple heavens and receives his priestly garments. "Levi, enter...And I entered from the first heaven, saw a great sea hanging. Further, I saw a second heaven, far brighter and more brilliant, for there was a boundless light also there."
- The heavens have a hierarchical structure, with different purposes and inhabitants.
- The lowest heaven beholds the unrighteous deeds of men.
- The highest heaven is the dwelling place of the "great glory."
- **Priestly Garments:** The description of Levi's priestly garments echoes elements from Exodus 28 (the high priest's attire) and Isaiah 59 (where God dons garments to execute judgment).
- **Three offices from Levi's Seed** Levi's seed is divided into three offices which suggest the presence of multiple messianic figures. "Levi, your seed is going to be divided into three offices...The second shall be in the priesthood. And the third shall be called by a new name because a king shall arise in Judah..."

1. **Attitude Towards Women**

- The Testament of Reuben (T.R.) expresses distrust of women, viewing them as a source of temptation.
- T.R. retools Reuben's sin of sleeping with Bilhah to make an argument about the evil nature of women.
- "Women are evil since they have no power or strength over man...They deceive first their minds and by the glance of the eye instill the poison."
- The authors exhort men to "command your wives and your daughters that they adorn not their heads and faces."

- This view of women provides a point of contrast to the radical inclusivity of Jesus towards women.

1. **Martyrdom Literature:**

- **Context:** This genre emerged during times of severe persecution.
- **Pattern:** A true prophet envisions their own death.
- Wicked false prophets and Satan/Belial persecute the true prophet.
- A ruler condemns the true prophet to death.
- The prophet dies faithfully.
- **The Martyrdom of Isaiah:** Combines an account of Isaiah's ascension through the heavens with his martyrdom.
- Isaiah is prophesied to be killed by Manasseh.
- Isaiah is betrayed, captured, and brutally sawn in half with a wood saw.
- This martyrdom is possibly referenced in Hebrews 11:37. "Some were sawn asunder."

Conclusion:

Testamentary and Martyrdom literature offer valuable insights into the religious, theological, and cultural landscape of Second Temple Judaism. These texts demonstrate the authors' deep engagement with scripture, their responses to the challenges of their time, and the diverse theological themes that shaped their worldview. These genres help illuminate the context in which later Christian and rabbinic traditions developed. The lecture also draws attention to the "fluid boundaries" of the texts, emphasizing that they were not static but were often adapted and reinterpreted by various communities.

4. Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 16, Testamentary and Martyrdom Literature

Testamentary and Martyrdom Literature Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the foundational biblical text that serves as a model for testamentary literature, and what specific aspect of this text is imitated?
2. Describe the typical structure of testamentary literature, including its usual elements.
3. What are some of the common languages in which the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs is preserved, and what does this suggest about its use?
4. Provide two examples from the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs that appear to be Christian interpolations and explain why they seem out of place.
5. In what ways does the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs seem to interact with Hellenistic culture?
6. How does the Testament of Reuben reflect a particular cultural view of women, and what is the basis for this perspective within the text?
7. According to the lecture, what are three major theological emphases found within testamentary literature?
8. How does the Testament of Levi address Levi's sin, and what narrative embellishment is used to make sense of it?
9. Describe the heavenly investiture of Levi, highlighting the levels of heaven and the priestly garments.
10. What are the key elements of the pattern found in martyrdom literature, as illustrated by the martyrdom of Isaiah?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The foundational text is Genesis 49, where Jacob blesses his twelve sons on his deathbed. Testamentary literature imitates this structure by having a dying patriarch give final instructions and pronouncements to their descendants.

2. Testamentary literature typically begins with a deathbed scene, often modeled after Genesis 49, followed by a confession of sins. It includes ethical instructions and teachings, as well as prophetic statements about the future.
3. The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs is preserved in Greek, Armenian, Slavonic, Hebrew, and Aramaic. This suggests that it was a widely used and adopted text across diverse communities and languages.
4. One example is the Testament of Simeon, stating that "God hath taken a body, and eaten with men, and saved men," and the Testament of Levi's reference to "the Savior of the world, Christ," are examples that do not fit the context of a 2nd century BCE text. They appear to be later additions due to their explicit Christian language and ideas.
5. The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs seems to interact with Hellenistic culture through its emphasis on ethical teaching, virtues, and the idea of Torah as a form of wisdom. It also shows evidence of Greek piety and asceticism.
6. The Testament of Reuben presents a negative view of women, attributing blame to Bilhah for Reuben's transgression and stating that women lack power, are deceitful, and lead men into sin. This is based on the incident where Reuben defiled his father's bed by sleeping with Bilhah, Jacob's handmaid.
7. Three major theological emphases are the judgment of evil, the concept of dualism between a spirit of truth and a spirit of error, and the transcendence of God, often expressed through hierarchical levels of heaven.
8. The Testament of Levi reinterprets Levi's slaughter of the Shechemites as divinely ordained and written on heavenly tablets, thus justifying his role as a priest, despite his past sin. They also embellish the Genesis story, suggesting that the Shechemites had also abused Abraham and others.
9. Levi's heavenly investiture involves entering into multiple levels of heaven, with each level having unique features. He is also given priestly garments, including a robe, crown, breastplate, and ephod, symbolic of his priestly role and ordained by God.
10. Martyrdom literature typically features a true prophet foreseeing their own death, wicked false prophets opposing them, Satan (or Beliar) instigating the conflict, and a ruler condemning the prophet, despite this, the prophet will die faithfully. Isaiah's martyrdom illustrates this pattern through his persecution by Manasseh.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer the following questions in essay format, citing material from the text.

1. Analyze the significance of testamentary literature as a bridge between the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish and Christian thought. How do the literary and theological features of texts like the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs reflect this transition?
2. Compare and contrast the ways in which the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Martyrdom of Isaiah deal with the themes of good and evil. How do these texts conceptualize the forces of evil, and how do they envision God's judgment and ultimate triumph?
3. Discuss the treatment of women in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, particularly in the Testament of Reuben. How does this portrayal reflect or challenge the broader cultural context of the time, and what does it tell us about the social dynamics of this period?
4. Explore the development of messianic ideas within the Testament of Levi. What different figures are identified in the text, and how do they connect to broader messianic expectations of the period?
5. Examine the ways in which pseudepigraphal texts like the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Martyrdom of Isaiah engage with biblical narratives. How do they reinterpret, embellish, and adapt biblical stories for their own purposes, and what do these changes tell us about the authors and their audiences?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Pseudepigrapha:** Writings falsely attributed to an author, often a well-known biblical figure. These texts were common during the intertestamental period.
- **Testamentary Literature:** A genre of pseudepigraphal literature, often featuring a dying patriarch or matriarch giving final instructions, blessings, and prophetic statements to their descendants.

- **Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (TTP):** A collection of testaments attributed to the twelve sons of Jacob, containing ethical teachings, confessions, and prophetic visions.
- **Martyrdom Literature:** A genre of literature that recounts the persecution and death of faithful individuals, often prophets or righteous figures, as a way to encourage steadfastness in the face of suffering.
- **Martyrdom of Isaiah:** A pseudepigraphal text that includes an account of the prophet Isaiah's martyrdom under the wicked King Manasseh, which also includes an ascension narrative not highlighted in this session.
- **Canon:** The collection of books recognized as divinely inspired and authoritative for a religious community.
- **Hellenism:** The influence of Greek culture, thought, and language on other cultures, especially during the Hellenistic period.
- **Apocalyptic:** A genre of literature characterized by prophetic visions of the end times, often involving cosmic battles between good and evil.
- **Dualism:** The belief in two opposing forces or principles, often good and evil, light and darkness, or truth and error.
- **Eschatology:** The study of the end times, including beliefs about the final judgment, resurrection, and the ultimate destiny of humanity.
- **Interpolation:** The insertion of new material into an existing text, which may alter its original meaning or intent.
- **Beliar/Belial:** A Hebrew term meaning "worthless" or "wicked," and becomes a proper name for a figure akin to Satan or the Devil in intertestamental and later Jewish texts.
- **Asceticism:** A lifestyle characterized by self-discipline and abstinence from worldly pleasures for religious or spiritual reasons.
- **Investiture:** The act of bestowing an office or position upon someone, often accompanied by the giving of symbolic garments or objects.

5. FAQs on Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 16, Testamentary and Martyrdom Literature, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Testamentary and Martyrdom Literature

1. What is testamentary literature and what are its main characteristics?

Testamentary literature, as exemplified by the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, is a genre of pseudepigraphal writing often presented as the final words or "testaments" of significant biblical figures near death, modeled after the blessings in Genesis 49. It generally includes a deathbed scene (though not always), a confession of sins by the dying figure, ethical instructions, and often prophetic statements about the future. These testaments serve to provide guidance and moral teaching to the community, with some apocalyptic tendencies.

2. What is the significance of Genesis 49 for understanding testamentary literature?

Genesis 49, which contains Jacob's blessings upon his twelve sons, serves as the canonical base and model for testamentary literature. It establishes the idea of a patriarch on their deathbed offering prophetic pronouncements about the future of their descendants. Testamentary works like the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs utilize this template, imagining each son of Jacob giving a similar testament, continuing and expanding upon the original blessings and curses in Genesis.

3. How is the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs preserved, and what does that suggest about its influence?

The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs is preserved in multiple languages, including Greek, Armenian, Slavonic, Hebrew fragments and Aramaic. This wide range of languages indicates that the text was widely circulated and utilized within various communities, both within and beyond Jewish circles. This widespread preservation suggests that the text held significant importance, impacting many audiences.

4. **What are some examples of Christian interpolations within the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and how do scholars interpret them?** Some passages within the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs appear to be later Christian additions, referring to the Messiah in ways that are inconsistent with the second-century BC context of the texts. Examples include references to God taking a body and eating with men, as well as statements about the Savior of the world, Christ, the tearing of the temple veil. While some scholars have suggested that the Testament may have started as a Christian document, most view these interpolations as later additions due to its widespread use by various groups.
5. **How does the Testament of Levi address the apparent conflict between Levi's actions in Shechem and his role as a priest?** The Testament of Levi attempts to resolve this conflict by claiming that Levi's actions in Shechem were divinely ordained, prewritten on heavenly tablets as judgement against the evil inhabitants of Shechem, which had a history of ill designs against other women of the covenant. This explanation essentially whitewashes Levi's sin, portraying his violent act as part of God's plan and thus makes it allowable for him to have the priesthood. The text also emphasizes that his priesthood was ordained in the heavens as well, with his investiture taking place in the third and highest heaven.
6. **What does the Testament of Levi reveal about the understanding of heavens and priesthood?** In the Testament of Levi, the heavens are not just a physical space but are presented as layered, each with different purposes. The lowest level observes human sin, while the highest levels are home to God's glory and the angelic host. The text describes Levi being taken through these heavens and being invested with priestly garments in the presence of God. This depiction emphasizes that true priestly authority originates in the heavens. Levi's vestiture mirrors the high priest in Exodus, but also has elements echoing descriptions of God putting on truth and righteousness, from Isaiah.
7. **What are the key characteristics and themes of martyrdom literature, as exemplified by the Martyrdom of Isaiah?** Martyrdom literature, such as the Martyrdom of Isaiah, generally involves a prophet who has visions of their own death, faces opposition from wicked false prophets, endures persecution and torture, and is ultimately killed while remaining faithful. The literature often highlights a dualism between the true prophets of God and the false ones influenced by Satanic forces. The true prophet may be killed by an earthly ruler under the influence of evil forces. The text emphasizes the faithfulness of the prophet even in death.

8. **How does the Martyrdom of Isaiah reflect and reinforce theological themes seen in other pseudepigraphal texts?** The Martyrdom of Isaiah reiterates themes found in other pseudepigraphal and apocalyptic literature, like dualism, which presents clear-cut distinctions between good and evil, with forces behind each. It also includes a sense of a wicked world that will persecute the faithful, and the idea that divine judgment is forthcoming. It also makes reference to the same themes that the testamentary literature also uses, like the heavenly realms. The themes of good versus evil, God's judgment and the faithfulness of believers highlight some of the common concerns in the various genres of the time.