

Dr. David deSilva, Apocrypha: Witness Between the Testament, Session 6, A Closer Look Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, 3 Maccabees Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 6, Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, 3 Maccabees, [Biblicalelearning.org](https://www.biblicalelearning.org), BeL

Dr. DeSilva's lecture explores three texts from the Apocrypha: **Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, and Third Maccabees**. The Wisdom of Solomon, attributed to Solomon but likely written in Alexandria, Egypt, addresses the persecution of the righteous, the nature of wisdom, and God's judgment of idolaters, using the Exodus story as a key example. The lecture contrasts the Greek version of Esther with the Hebrew version, highlighting its overt religious themes, anti-Jewish sentiments, and emphasis on maintaining Jewish identity. Lastly, Third Maccabees, set in Egypt under the Ptolemies, parallels Second Maccabees in plot while affirming the connection between diaspora Jews and the Jerusalem temple, and also highlights the tensions and anti-Judaism present during the time. These apocryphal texts provide insight into Jewish life, faith, and identity in the Hellenistic period, also showcasing tensions between Jews and Gentiles, as well as divisions within the Jewish community.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 6 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the [Biblicalelearning.org](https://www.biblicalelearning.org) [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → NT Introduction → Apocrypha).



deSilva_Apocrypha_
Session 06.mp3

3. Briefing Document: deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 6, Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, 3 Maccabees

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from Dr. deSilva's lecture on Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, and Third Maccabees.

Briefing Document: Apocrypha - Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, and Third Maccabees

Source: Excerpts from "deSilva_Apocrypha_EN_Lecture06.pdf" by Dr. David deSilva

Overview: This lecture examines three texts from the Apocrypha: Wisdom of Solomon, the Greek version of Esther, and Third Maccabees. Dr. deSilva explores their themes, historical context, and significance, highlighting their perspectives on Jewish identity, Gentile-Jewish relations, the nature of wisdom, and the power of God in both Jerusalem and the Diaspora.

I. Wisdom of Solomon

- **Authorship and Setting:** An anonymous work written in Greek, likely in Alexandria, Egypt, during the early Roman period (a few decades BC/AD). The text reflects the concerns and experiences of the large Jewish diaspora community in Egypt. The hostility towards Egyptians and the condemnation of "zoolatry" (animal worship) point to its Egyptian origin.
- **Structure:** The book is divided into three main sections:
- **Chapters 1-5:** Focuses on the persecution of the righteous by the ungodly and God's eventual vindication of the righteous. It examines the mindset of the ungodly and their disregard for others, driven by a focus on earthly pleasures and a denial of an afterlife. The ungodly target the righteous to disprove their faith claims.
- **Chapters 6-9:** A prayer and discourse on the nature of wisdom, reminiscent of Solomon's prayer in canonical scriptures.
- **Chapters 10-19:** Retells the story of the Exodus plagues as a demonstration of God's judgment of idolaters. Important excurses in the midst of that retelling of Exodus.
- **Key Themes and Ideas: Immortality and the Fate of the Righteous:** The text offers a powerful expression of the hope of immortality. "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them." This passage is

frequently read at funerals. Trials faced in life are interpreted as divine discipline and testing, similar to refining gold.

- **The Nature of Wisdom:** Wisdom is personified as the "very reflection of God's image," an "effulgence" of God's glory and God's agent in maintaining the order of the cosmos. It connects righteous people to God.
- **Critique of Gentile Idolatry:** The third section critiques Gentile religious practices, offering a humanistic explanation for their origins. The author presents the idea that idolatry originates from mourning the dead or flattering distant rulers.
- **God's Patience and Judgment:** God gives Gentiles opportunities to repent, even though the author suggests this is more a reflection of God's character than an expectation that Gentiles will actually change. "You love everything that exists; you despise nothing that you have made." God's forbearance toward Gentile nations in the end says more about God's patient and merciful character rather than about any real hope for non-Jewish peoples.

II. Greek Esther

- **Overview:** A longer, more overtly religious version of the Book of Esther, containing six additional blocks of material compared to the Hebrew version.
- **Additions: Additions A and F:** Frame the narrative with Mordecai's dream and its interpretation.
- **Additions B and E:** Include the full text of the edicts for and against the Jews.
- **Additions C and D:** Feature Mordecai and Esther's prayers and a more detailed scene of Esther before the king, where God intervenes.
- **Key Themes and Ideas: Increased Religious Emphasis:** The Greek version includes more references to God, prayer, divine intervention, and observance of Jewish law. "The Greek version of the story, from beginning to end, has a lot more of God in it."
- **Anti-Judaism:** Addition B offers insight into anti-Jewish prejudices in the Hellenistic period, highlighting the perceived separateness of the Jews, their "peculiar laws," and the resulting "misoxenia" (hatred of foreigners) from Gentiles. Haman states, "These people are at odds with every nation because of their peculiar laws. They constantly ignore the king's decrees so that the government, although well managed by us, is never secure."

- **Embodied Spirituality:** Emphasizes physical expressions of piety, such as wearing sackcloth and covering oneself with ashes during prayer. "Esther doesn't just, you know, seek God's help...Instead of the finest spices, she smears her head and body with ashes and dung and humbles herself before God before making her petition."
- **Maintaining Ethnic Boundaries:** Addition C addresses concerns about Esther's marriage to a Gentile king by portraying her as detesting the relationship and adhering to Jewish dietary laws. "'I, your servant, didn't dine at Haman's table, nor did I honor the king's banquet or drink wine that had been offered to the gods...I detest sharing the bed of this uncircumcised king or, indeed, of any foreigners.'"
- **Heightened Jewish Identity:** The Greek version promotes awareness of God and the observance of Jewish practices, even in the face of prejudice. The interpretation of the "lots" (Purim) emphasizes the separate destinies of Jews and Gentiles.

III. Third Maccabees

- **Overview:** A work of historical fiction set in Ptolemaic Egypt, unrelated to the Maccabean revolt. It shares plot parallels with Second Maccabees but is a distinct story about Diaspora Jews.
- **Setting:** Egypt, early period of Augustus' reign. Concerns emerge about the laographia, the enrollment of the people that clarifies the status between Greek citizens in Egypt from the indigenous Egyptian population.
- **Plot:** Ptolemy IV Philopater, after a victory, attempts to enter the Jerusalem Temple but is thwarted. He then persecutes the Jews in Egypt, offering them Alexandrian citizenship in exchange for participating in Alexandrian religion. Those who refuse are to be registered and reduced to slavery. The majority refuses, leading Ptolemy to attempt to execute them using war elephants, but God intervenes.
- **Key Themes and Ideas: Anti-Judaism:** The text witnesses Gentile prejudice against Jews due to their adherence to Jewish law and their separation in matters of food and worship. "For this reason, they appeared hostile to some people...they kept harping on the differences in worship and diet and claimed that the Jewish people were loyal neither to the king nor to the authorities."

- **Internal Jewish Tensions:** Highlights the conflict between Jews who assimilate ("apostates") and those who remain Torah-observant. Apostates were willing to "readily surrendered themselves to share in great fame through all the association they would have with the king," referring to becoming Alexandrian citizens. Those who remained faithful used shaming techniques to ostracize the apostates. "They considered those who gave in to be enemies of the Jewish nation and no longer associated with them or offered them assistance."
- **Prayer and Divine Intervention:** Features prayers by Simon the High Priest and Eleazar, both anchored in historical precedents of God's intervention on behalf of the Jewish people. Eleazar recalls, "the examples of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, how God delivered the people there. The deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib and the deliverance of the faithful four, Daniel and the three young men, in Babylon from Nebuchadnezzar." These prayers exemplify praying in line with what can be known about God from the sacred record.
- **Affirmation of Diaspora Jewry:** Affirms the connection between Egyptian Jews and the Jerusalem Temple, as well as God's ability to deliver Jews in the Diaspora. "[I]t affirms that God hears and God delivers God's people in the diaspora setting just as surely as God does in Jerusalem itself."

Overall Significance:

These texts provide valuable insights into the diverse experiences and beliefs of Jewish communities in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. They explore themes of identity, faith, persecution, and the ongoing relationship between Jews and Gentiles in a complex and dynamic world. They also shed light on the development of religious practices and beliefs within Judaism during this period.

4. Study Guide: deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 6, Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, 3 Maccabees

Wisdom, Piety, and Persecution: A Study Guide to Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, and Third Maccabees

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is significant about the attributed authorship of the Wisdom of Solomon, and where was it likely composed?
2. Describe the mindset of the ungodly as presented in the first section of the Wisdom of Solomon.
3. How does the Wisdom of Solomon explain the origins of Gentile religious practices, and what Greek philosopher does this explanation resemble?
4. How does the Greek version of Esther differ from the Hebrew version, and what are the key additions?
5. According to the Greek Esther addition B, what are some of the genuine sources of anti-Judaism?
6. How does Greek Esther portray Esther's piety differently from the Hebrew version?
7. Why is Third Maccabees titled as such, and what would be a more appropriate title?
8. What offer does Ptolemy make to the Jews in Alexandria, and what are the consequences of accepting or refusing?
9. According to Third Maccabees, what are some of the reasons that Jews were seen as hostile by their neighbors in Egypt?
10. How do the prayers of Simon and Eleazar in Third Maccabees reflect the importance of historical precedent in supplication?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The Wisdom of Solomon is attributed to Solomon, the patron saint of sages, but is an anonymous work. It was likely composed in Greek in Alexandria, Egypt, due to its hostility towards Egyptians and condemnation of zoolatry.

2. The ungodly are depicted as living only for pleasure, disregarding morality and exploiting others to advance their own interests. They deny an afterlife and believe might makes right, leading them to oppress the righteous.
3. Wisdom of Solomon explains Gentile religious practices through understandable human origins like a grieving father creating an image of his dead child or a flattering statue of a distant ruler. This explanation resembles that of Greek philosopher Euhemerus.
4. The Greek Esther is more overtly religious than the Hebrew version, with more references to God, prayer, and adherence to Jewish law. Key additions include Mordecai's dream and its interpretation, the full text of the edicts, and the prayers of Mordecai and Esther.
5. The Greek Esther, addition B, shows that separateness of Jews from other peoples, peculiar laws, and dietary restrictions led to anti-Judaism. Gentiles found it impossible to understand the Jewish way of life.
6. In Greek Esther, Esther engages in embodied spirituality by removing her royal garments and putting on sackcloth, smearing her head with ashes and dung to humiliate herself before praying. This differs from the Hebrew version, where her piety is not expressed so physically.
7. Third Maccabees has nothing to do with the Maccabees and the Seleucid rule in Jerusalem. A more appropriate title would be Ptolemaica, as it concerns the situation of Diaspora Jews in Egypt under the Ptolemies.
8. Ptolemy offers the Jews Alexandrian citizenship in exchange for participating in Alexandrian religion. Those who accept are favorably disposed to the king, while those who refuse are reduced to slavery.
9. According to Third Maccabees, Jews were seen as hostile due to their adherence to their particular law, and especially their dietary practices that kept them separate. Additionally, they would worship one God while the rest of the people of Egypt worshipped multiple gods.
10. Both Simon and Eleazar's prayers reference God's past actions, such as the destruction of Sodom or the deliverance from Pharaoh, as a basis for requesting intervention in their present circumstances. They ask God to stay in character and do as he has done in the past to assist them in their time of need.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the themes of persecution and vindication in Wisdom of Solomon and Third Maccabees. How do these texts portray the relationship between the righteous and the ungodly, and what is the ultimate fate of each group?
2. Analyze the portrayal of anti-Judaism in Greek Esther and Third Maccabees. What specific practices or beliefs are identified as sources of tension between Jews and Gentiles, and how do these texts respond to these accusations?
3. Discuss the significance of divine intervention in Greek Esther and Third Maccabees. How do these texts depict God's role in protecting the Jewish people, and what do they suggest about the relationship between human action and divine will?
4. Examine the theme of assimilation versus separation in Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, and Third Maccabees. How do these texts portray the challenges faced by Jews in the Diaspora, and what strategies do they advocate for maintaining Jewish identity?
5. Compare and contrast the prayers found in Greek Esther and Third Maccabees. What do these prayers reveal about the religious beliefs and practices of Diaspora Jews, and how do they reflect the influence of the Hebrew Bible?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocrypha:** Books written mainly by Jewish authors in the time between the end of the Old Testament and the appearance of Jesus Christ. These books are included in the Septuagint and Vulgate versions of the Old Testament, but excluded by Protestants and Jews.
- **Diaspora:** The dispersion of Jews beyond Israel, particularly after the Babylonian exile. More generally, it refers to any people living outside their traditional homeland.
- **Hellenistic Period:** The period in history following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC to the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BC, characterized by the spread of Greek culture and influence.
- **Idolatry:** The worship of idols or images as gods.
- **Misoxenia:** Hatred of foreigners or strangers.
- **Ptolemies:** The Macedonian Greek royal dynasty that ruled the Ptolemaic Kingdom in Egypt during the Hellenistic period.
- **Purim:** A Jewish holiday commemorating the deliverance of the Jewish people from Haman's plot to annihilate them, as recorded in the Book of Esther.
- **Seleucids:** A Hellenistic dynasty that ruled a large part of Western Asia from 312 BC to 63 BC.
- **Septuagint (LXX):** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, traditionally said to have been produced by seventy scholars.
- **Torah:** The first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), also known as the Pentateuch.
- **Zoolatry:** The worship of animals.

5. FAQs on deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 6, Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, 3 Maccabees, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Here is an 8-question FAQ based on the provided source material:

FAQ

- **What are the main sections of the Wisdom of Solomon, and what is the focus of each?**
- The Wisdom of Solomon is divided into three main sections. The first (chapters 1-5) focuses on the persecution of the righteous by the ungodly and God's eventual vindication of the righteous. The second (chapters 6-9) contains a prayer and discourse on the nature of wisdom, reminiscent of Solomon's prayer in the canonical scriptures. The third and largest section (chapters 10-19) is a discourse on God's judgment of idolaters, primarily through a retelling of the Exodus plagues, with critiques of Gentile religious practices.
- **According to the Wisdom of Solomon, what is the mindset of the "ungodly," and how does it affect their actions?**
- The "ungodly," according to the Wisdom of Solomon, live only for earthly pleasures and believe death is the end. This mindset leads them to exploit others, disregard morality, and oppress the righteous, thinking that might makes right. They target the righteous in an attempt to disprove their faith claims and justify their own lawless behavior.
- **How does the Greek version of Esther differ from the Hebrew version, and what are some of the key additions?**
- The Greek Esther contains six additional blocks of material not found in the Hebrew version. These additions include a framing narrative with Mordecai's dream and its interpretation (Additions A and F), the full text of the edicts against and then in favor of the Jews (Additions B and E), and prayers by Mordecai and Esther (Addition C). Addition D replaces a shorter scene in the Hebrew version with a more elaborate account of Esther's audience with the king and God's intervention. The Greek version emphasizes God's role and the importance of Jewish practices.

- **What insights does the Greek version of Esther provide into anti-Judaism in the Hellenistic period?**
- The Greek Esther highlights the separateness of Jews due to their unique laws and customs as a source of anti-Jewish sentiment. Haman's edict, included in the additions, accuses Jews of being hostile, ignoring the king's decrees, and following a peculiar way of life, reflecting the misoxenia (hatred of foreigners) prevalent in the Hellenistic period.
- **What are some of the tensions that "Third Maccabees" highlights within the Jewish community?**
- Third Maccabees highlights the tensions between Torah-observant Jews and those who sought assimilation and Alexandrian citizenship by participating in pagan religion. The apostate Jews were shamed and ostracized by their community.
- **What is the main setting and storyline of "Third Maccabees", and why is the title misleading?**
- The story of Third Maccabees takes place in Egypt under the Ptolemies, focusing on Ptolemy's attempt to force Jews in Alexandria to participate in Alexandrian religion, which they largely resisted. The king then tries to execute the Jews, but God intervenes and saves them. The title is misleading because the book has nothing to do with the Maccabean revolt or the events described in 1st and 2nd Maccabees. It's named 'Third Maccabees' simply because it narrates a persecution that is, in some ways, similar to those described in First and Second Maccabees.
- **What elements from the Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, and Third Maccabees suggest the importance of maintaining distinct Jewish identity in the diaspora?**
- All three texts show a concern with maintaining distinct Jewish identity in the diaspora. The Wisdom of Solomon critiques idolatry. The Greek Esther adds elements like Esther's adherence to kosher laws even in the king's court. Third Maccabees shows the conflict between Jews who remain faithful to the Torah and those who assimilate. These elements indicate the importance of adhering to Jewish law and customs to avoid being dissolved into the surrounding Gentile culture.

- **How do prayers function within these Apocryphal texts, and what do they reveal about the authors' understanding of God?**
- Prayers in these texts, particularly in Third Maccabees, often serve as appeals to God based on past interventions and historical precedents found in scripture. Simon's and Eleazar's prayers invoke God's earlier judgments against arrogance and deliverances of the Jewish people, demonstrating a belief in God's consistency and faithfulness to his promises. This also reflects an understanding of God's character as revealed in sacred tradition and an expectation that prayers should align with this established understanding.