Expansions of the Old Testament and legends, wisdom and philosophical literature, prayers, psalms and odes, and fragments of lost Judeo-Hellenistic works.

My Personal Review:
I finished reading Volume 1 of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha in August 2004, and after some further study of the development of early Christianity and much dithering, I finally acquired Volume II in May 2007. I got round to reading it in November 2007, and it was certainly an easier book to read than the first one. This volume was published in 1985, a couple of years after Volume I, but the layout is essentially the same, with the preliminary sections - Foreword, Introduction to General Reader, Abbreviations seemingly identical to that of Volume I. Despite this repetition, these are worth reading again if for no other reason to prepare the reader for reading the documents themselves. Volume II includes a full index for both volumes in this work, whereas none is included in Volume I.

The documents in this Volume II are all considered to have been written over a period of about five hundred years from the beginning of the 3rd Century BC to the beginning of the 3rd Century AD. They are grouped into 4 sections, each of which has a short introduction describing the nature of
the contents, and a list of documents included within the section. The documents within each section are in date order, and each is introduced by a discussion of the contents, the original language of the text, the probable date, and where it was written, its historical, theological, and cultural importance, the earliest translations, relationship to other books, and a select bibliography. The texts themselves contain cross references to other biblical texts as well as copious detailed notes on the text itself.

I found it was as important to read the introductory section and the detailed notes as it was to read the texts themselves. The commentaries on each document were generally most interesting and throw considerable light on the currents of theological thought which was occurring during this period, but with a caution. Many of the documents were preserved in Christian communities, and some were only available in a language of a much later period. The provenance of some of these works is therefore difficult to determine, and the analysis of the theology and the language of these documents indicate that they have been subject to some later editing and insertions by Christian writers. Of course, only some of the works have these Christian overtones, and in general, the commentaries make clear where these "adjustments" have occurred.

I am quite happy that I acquired Volume II, and do recommend it for those readers who have also succeeded in making it through to the end of Volume I. For those who may be interested, I have included the following brief summary of the contents of the Volume II

Section 1, which is half the book, includes 13 documents which are essentially expansions of the Old Testament and associated Legends. These include:
* The Letter of Aristeas, which is an account of the writing of the Septuagint, and which can be compared with the that of Josephus.
* Jubilees which is basically an expansion of the books of Genesis and Exodus, purporting to be an account of matters revealed to Moses during the 40 days he spent on Mount Sinai. Copies of this book were discovered at Qumran, which indicates its theological importance to that community, and allows it to be dated more precisely.
* The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah which is in two parts - the first being a Jewish account of the Martyrdom of Isaiah with an insertion which is clearly Christian, and the second part being a Christian addition of the Vision of Isaiah.
* Joseph and Aseneth which is an expansion of the biblical account where the Pharaoh gives Aseneth, the daughter of Potiphera, Priestess of On for his wife.
* Life of Adam and Eve
* Pseudo-Philo Biblical Antiquities being a retelling of the Old Testament from Adam to David and Saul.
* The Lives of the Prophets being a short account of the lives of the 23 prophets, some of which are only a few lines long.
* The Ladder of Jacob, being an elaboration of Jacob's dream at Bethel
* 4 Baruch, which is an expansion of items omitted from the book of Jeremiah the Prophet.
* Jannes and Jambres - with only short fragments of a pre-Christian tale whose base is the biblical account of the Exodus
* History of the Rechabites which is a description of Zosimus, a virtuous man who after 40 years of prayer is taken to the abode of the Blessed Ones - a sort of Utopian paradise in the middle of the great ocean. This was originally a Jewish account, but has many Christian interpolations to include Jesus Christ.
* Eldad and Modad - a discussion on the two line text from the Shepherd of Hermes of the 2nd century AD, which refers to two prophets who are mentioned in Numbers 11:26-29
* History of Joseph - which is a meager textual remnant of what appears to be a Midrashic expansion of the life of Joseph in the Book of Genesis.

Section 2 includes 5 documents which are all classified as Wisdom and Philosophical Literature. These include:
* The Word of Ahiqar, which was one of the best-known and widely disseminated tales of the ancient Mediterranean world. It is the oldest text in the collection, and probably antedates the post exilic portions of the Old Testament. It is in two parts, the first being the story of Ahiqar, scribe and counselor to the Kings of Assyria, the second contains a collection of about 100 sayings attributed to Ahiqar
* 3 Maccabees, the account of the visit of Ptolemy IV Philopator to the Temple of Jerusalem after his defeat of Antiochus III at Raphia.
* 4 Maccabees which is a discussion on devout reason's mastery over passions, based upon the martyrdom of Eleazar and of the seven sons and their mother
* Pseudo-Phocylides - a collection of sayings in Greek - attributed pseudonymously under the name of Phocylides, an Ionic poet living in Miletus during the 6th century BC
* The Sentences of the Syriac Menander - a collection of wisdom sayings written in Syriac probably during the 3rd Century AD which are in the form of practical rules for human behaviour and were attributed to the Greek Sage Menander,

Section 3 includes 7 documents which are classified as Prayers, Psalms, and Odes. These include:
* Six additional Psalms of David, beyond the 150 included in the Masoretic text,
* The Prayer of Manesseh,
* Eighteen psalms of Solomon,
* Sixteen Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers
* The Prayer of Joseph,
* The Prayer of Jacob
Forty two odes of Solomon, the origins and datings of which are quite uncertain.

Section 4 includes fragments of 13 lost Judeo-Hellenistic works of Poetry, Oracles, Drama, Philosophy, History etc., the general characteristics of the excerpts from these once voluminous works being a claim that the best Greek ideas were derived from the Jews. Many of the works in this section have been preserved in the works of later writers such as Alexander Polyhistor, Eusebius and others, but in general the discussion on the fragments is often more informative than the extant fragments themselves.

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