From the perspective of the writings, the Old Testament ends with the book of Malachi. However, there is a 400 year time span between the last book of the Old Testament and the book of Matthew in the New Testament. During this time, a new voice joined the orchestra that was telling the story of salvation history—the voice of Greek Hellenism.

The inter-testament period includes the time of Alexander the Great’s conquest of most of the known world. In addition to his many military victories, Alexander’s successes included the spread of the Hellenistic culture. Hellenistic Greek became the popular language of the whole region (Battle 1.6). When Hebrew mythical thought met Greek philosophical thought in the first century B.C.E., it was only natural that someone would try to develop speculative and philosophical justification for Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy.

Remember the Septuagint from an earlier module? This was the product of Jews living in Egypt who began speaking Greek as their first language. According to Battle, “It was inevitable that they translate the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek” (Battle 1.9). While there were multiple translations of various books produced over the years, the Septuagint was the one that achieved prominence.

One particular Jew stands out as a prominent example of the Hellenistic influence on Judaism. This was Philo Judaeus (Philo of Alexandria; c. 20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.). He was a Jewish exegete and philosopher. Philo's writings were in Greek, showing intimate familiarity with the Hellenistic culture. His Jewish training seems to have derived from growing up in a traditional Jewish home, but it apparently did not include knowledge of the Hebrew language (Amir and Niehoff 59).

Philo takes a conservative position, "insisting on the integrity of the biblical text and the absolute value of its contents" (Amir and Niehoff 61). He suggests that “the Torah in its Greek translation (Septuagint) was a perfect emanation of the Divine Logos” (Amir and Niehoff 61). In his interpretations of the story of creation and the Patriarchs, he enriched Scripture with ideas from Greek literature. Relying on Plato’s Timaeus, he “rewrote the story of creation by inserting a distinctly Platonic perspective” (Amir and Niehoff 61).

The whole of the Philonic philosophical system hinges on his doctrine of the logos. For Philo, this was the climax of Greek philosophical concepts with Hebrew religious thought (Hillar). Philo’s Greek heritage was indebted to Heraclitus who understood logos as an ordering principle of the world (Graham). Later he would draw on Plato who emphasized the aspect of logos as “the living dialogue” and the only context for the unveiling of logos (Gier).

After Philo, the Jew with the most noted use of this term is the apostle John (John 1:1). He applied this term to one of the most famous Jews who ever lived, Jesus.

Here, you will note the work cited information.

Works Cited


