

## THE APOCRYPHA

The four hundred years between the prophecy of Malachi and the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, are frequently described as *silent* or *mute* years; however they were full of activity. Although no inspired prophet appeared in Israel during those years, events occurred that gave Judaism its distinctive creed and proper preparation for the birth of Christ and the gospel message.

During this time frame the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, and Zealots—who all played important parts in the four gospels—had their origins. They represented different reactions to the continuing clashes between Hellenism and Judaism. While the Maccabean struggle had settled the political problem between the Syrian Seleucids and Judea, it forced Judaism to determine its relationship with other nations.

### Definition

The term *Apocrypha* (*Gr., hidden*) is a collection of ancient Jewish writings and is the title given to these books, which were written between 300 and 30 B.C., in the era between the Old and New Testaments. It contains, among other things, historical events of the Jewish people of that time.

In 1546 A.D., the Council of Trent declared these *books* to be authoritative Scripture; however, Protestant churches have never accepted them as part of the canon. The teachings of purgatory, prayers for the dead, and salvation by works are found in these books.

### Why Protestants Reject the Apocrypha

Many Protestants study the Apocrypha for the light it sheds on the life and thought of pre-Christian Judaism. However, they reject it as inspired Scripture for several specific reasons.

First, the Apocryphal books were not a part of the Old Testament of Jesus and the early church. The three-fold division of the Old Testament—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—which is still used in the Hebrew Bible, does not include the Apocryphal books. Jesus and His disciples never quoted from it as authoritative Scripture.

Second, ancient Jewish writers who used the Greek Bible— notably Philo and Josephus were acquainted with the Apocrypha but never quoted it as Scripture. In fact, Josephus stated that nothing has been added to Scripture from “Artaxerxes until our time.”

Third, church fathers who were familiar with the Hebrew canon clearly distinguished between canonical and Apocryphal writings. The writings of Melito of Sardis, Cyril of Jerusalem, and St. Jerome show a difference between the inspired Scriptures and the Apocrypha.

Fourth, the Apocryphal books were never declared to be authoritative Scripture until the Council of Trent. At that time the following books were declared canonical by the Catholic church: Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch (including the Letter of Jeremiah), First and Second Maccabees, the additions to Esther, and the additions to Daniel (Susanna, the Song of the Three Young Men, and Bel and the Dragon). Some Roman Catholic scholars today distinguish between proto-canonical books (the Old Testament) and Deuter-canonical books (the Apocrypha). First and Second Esdras (Ezra) are considered part of the Apocrypha; however, they are not found in the oldest Greek copies of the Septuagint (LXX) and are not even found in many

collections of the Apocrypha. They are not frequently considered among the books of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Jewish non-rabbinical religious writings not included in the Old Testament or Apocrypha).

Fifth, most scholars feel that the Apocryphal books represent a lower level of writing than that of the canonical Scriptures. They include many historical and geographical inaccuracies and teachings that are chronologically out of place and do not breathe the prophetic spirit so evident in canonical writings.

Sixth, the Westminster Confession (1643 A.D.) states, "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are not part of the canon of Scriptures, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God, or to be any otherwise approved or made use of than human writing."

### **Apocryphal Books**

The Jewish people were continually wondering what God was saying to them during their difficult times. Out of their experiences arose the books of the Apocrypha. The following brief descriptions provide some background for the books in the collection. The individual Old Testament Apocrypha books are arranged in alphabetical order. The following listing shows the books as they are generally arranged in Bibles that contain the Apocrypha.

**First Esdras:** This is primarily an historical account of the return of the Jewish people from the Babylonian captivity and the reestablishment of the Temple and its worship. Its historical account is taken from 2 Chronicles 35:1; 36:23; Ezra 1:1-11, along with Nehemiah 7:73 - 8:12. It begins with the Passover celebration by King Josiah of Judah (640-609 B.C.) It discusses Josiah's death in the battle of Megiddo and continues with the events leading up to the fall of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jews to Babylon (586 B.C.)

**Second Esdras:** This book contains some visions and revelations of the early Jewish rabbis. It is helpful as a case history of Jewish thought and literature shortly before the time of Christ. It was probably written during the same time period as the Book of the Revelation (ca. 96 A.D.) by a Palestinian Jew who was disillusioned over the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. He was puzzled by the evil in a world where God was supposed to be in control. This gloomy book is tied together with a thread of hope as deliverance for God's people is assured. God is ultimately in control of history His Word will never disappear.

**Tobit:** This is a narrative about good and evil spirits and teaches several lessons in morals. It is about Tobit, a Jew who was taken into captivity to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, after the defeat of Israel in 722-721 B.C. Tobit was a strict observer of the Law who met with unfortunate circumstances. One night he was blinded when droppings from a swallow fell into his eyes. God heard the prayers of Tobit and another Jew, Sarah, who lived in Babylonia or Media. God sent His angel Raphael, to help and save both Tobit and Sarah with the aid of Tobit's son, Tobias. The story ends happily as Tobias marries Sarah and defeats a demon named Asmodeus. Order was reestablished in their lives. Tobit was written to show the place of fasting and prayer in the lives of the faithful It teaches that God uses His angels to help people during difficult times.

**Judith:** This book is a narrative of a pious woman who murdered the Assyrian General Holofernes. Its aim is to show God's ability to deliver His people in dire circumstances. Judith was a wise

and intelligent Jewish woman who was devoted to keeping the Law of Moses. The story takes place during the time when Holofernes was commander of the Assyrian army. He was about to destroy the Jewish inhabitants of the city of Bethulia when Judith came to the aid of her fellow Jews. The people prayed to God for help, allowing Him five days in which to help them or they would surrender. Judith went to the enemy camp, beheaded Holofernes, and took his head back to the Jews of the city. Terrified, the Assyrians fled and the Jews were saved. The book of Judith appealed to Jews living during a time of discouragement and defeat. It was probably written during the Hasmonean Period (142-63 B.C.). Judith exemplified the importance of faithfulness to the Law of Moses and the power of God in the lives of His people.

**The Additions to the Book of Esther:** The Old Testament Book of Esther does not mention the name of God or any worship rituals. These Apocryphal additions were written to connect the book of Esther to the traditions of Israel's faith in a more explicit way.

**The Wisdom of Solomon:** This is a collection of teachings in a system of moral philosophy, supposedly written in the style of Solomon to gain a wider readership. It reflects on the morality of the Book of Proverbs. Most scholars today do not believe that Solomon wrote it but that it was written by an Alexandrian Jew in the first century B.C. or A.D.

**Ecclesiasticus:** This book should not be confused with the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes. The Apocrypha book was written in Hebrew around 180 B.C. and was translated into Greek for the Alexandrian Jews. It deals with a wide variety of subjects from diet to domestic relationships. Ecclesiasticus upholds Israel's traditions as a channel through which God's Word is communicated. It indicates that a righteous person is rewarded by God, whereas a sinner will be punished.

**Baruch:** This book is attributed to the friend and scribe of Jeremiah. It offers encouragement to one in exile and is divided into three sections: a confession, a plea for mercy and pardon, and consolation and assurance.

**The Letter of Jeremiah:** The author of this letter, written around 300 B.C., is unknown. It is an impassioned sermon based on Jeremiah 11:10, in which Jeremiah showed the utter impotence of gods of wood, silver, and gold.

**The Prayer of Azariah and The Song of the Three Young Men:** The Prayer of Azariah was added to Daniel 3. It is the prayer spoken by Azariah from the Very furnace. The Song of the Three Young Men tells of their change as they walked about in the flames.

**Susanna:** This book relates the story of two Israelite elders in Babylon who falsely accused Susanna of adultery because she resisted their advances while she was bathing. She was condemned, but Daniel obtained a retrial and exposed her accusers.

**Bel and the Dragon:** This contains one of the world's oldest detective stories. Daniel plays detective to expose the priests of Bel for eating the food that they declared their god had eaten. The dragon was a serpent worshiped by the king until Daniel killed it by feeding it lumps of pitch, fat, and hair, thus exposing it as false.

**The Prayer of Manasseh:** This prayer is ascribed to King Manasseh of Judah, who, according to 2°Chronicles 33, was taken to Babylon, where he repented of the idolatry that had characterised the evil years of his reign. Some scholars believe that the prayer by Manasseh recorded in 2°Chronicles 33:19 is connected with this prayer.

**The Books of the Maccabees:** These two narratives contain much valuable historical matter about valiant priests, soldiers, and rulers of the Maccabean family. The first book is a history of the Jews from the beginning of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes to the death of Simon Maccabeus. The second book begins its account just before the time of the first book and relates much of the same material. However, it contradicts some of the first book and has less historical authenticity. There are three other *Books of Maccabees*, but they have never been recognized as canonical, except the third by the Greek Orthodox Church.

Among the other Apocryphal writings are the Book of Jubilees (or the Little Genesis), the Book of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, the Ascension of Isaiah, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Sibylline Oracles, the Psalter of Solomon, and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs. None of these are canonical books, although they have been recognized as important because of their various points of view.

---

## **WHY WE REJECT THE APOCRYPHA**

By Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.

If you have ever examined a Roman Catholic Bible, you will have discovered, even through a simple reading of the index, that the Roman Catholic Church has an additional thirteen books which are not found in most Protestant versions of the Holy Scriptures. These thirteen books are called the Apocrypha, which in Greek means, "hidden, or concealed." The term now refers, by Roman Catholic definition, to these books, which were written long after the Old Testament Canon of Scriptures was closed in 424 B.C.

### **The Books of the Apocrypha**

The catalogue of the Old Testament Apocrypha includes the books of 1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, with the following books as appendages to certain Old Testament books: The Song of the Three Holy Children, The History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, and The History of Esther. These writings include religious history, folklore, legend, poetic lyrics, and wisdom and apocalyptic literature.

### **Which Books Are Inspired?**

For centuries various individuals and councils debated the question of which books belonged to the recognized body of Holy Scripture. This was important and necessary because many so-called "holy books" were appearing, all claiming divine inspiration. How was anyone to know which books were canonical and which ones were not? A similar problem exists today relative to the recognition of the Book of Mormon, the Koran, the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, or the Indian Vedas, and a host of other religious books as being from God.

## **The Inclusion of the Apocrypha**

It is interesting to note that for centuries these thirteen books were widely accepted as having equal authority with the Bible. The Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek (250-150 B.C.) included a number of these Apocryphal books. Some of the so-called "Church Fathers," such as Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Cyprian of the third and fourth centuries sometimes quoted the Apocrypha as Scripture. Others, such as Cyril of Jerusalem and Jerome denied the canonicity of the Apocrypha. However, the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1548 approved these disputed writings as "sacred and canonical." At this pivotal council, the gathered bishops also pronounced an anathema upon anyone who dared dispute this ecclesiastical decision. In 1820 The Vatican Council reaffirmed these Apocryphal books as Scripture.

The Greek Orthodox Church also approved the acceptance of the Apocrypha in the canon of Scripture. However, the Reformers of the 16th Century repudiated the Apocrypha as being unworthy of the title: "Holy Scripture." Curiously, Martin Luther included the Apocryphal books as an appendix to his translation of the German Bible in 1534. The Coverdale and the Geneva Bibles, both published before 1629, included the Apocrypha but set them apart from the already recognized books of the Bible. It is only since 1827 that Protestant English Bibles have been issued without the Apocrypha because on that date the British and Foreign Bible Society banished these thirteen books. Soon after, The American Bible Society followed suit and today the only Protestant denomination that makes any use of the Apocrypha is the Anglican Church of Great Britain.

These disputed books were all written between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100 in a partial attempt to fill in the apparent lack of divine revelation from the days of Malachi in 425 B.C. until John the Baptist. During the so-called "four hundred silent years" of the inter-testamental period, many books appeared which were rightly called "pseudepigraphal," or "false writings," the Apocrypha being prominent among them. Why, if as Luther said, "They are profitable and good to read" do we reject these outright as false writings unworthy of recognition in the canon of the Word of God? The answer is four-fold.

## **The Reasons for Rejection**

First, the Jews universally denied any acceptance of these writings as being inspired of God. Not a single book even found its way into the Hebrew canon of Scripture. By contrast, they uniformly accepted the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible from Genesis to Malachi right from the initial writing of the individual books. This testimony of God's chosen people cannot be overlooked or discounted when considering this question of paramount importance. They unitedly refused to alter or enlarge the already accepted Holy Scriptures.

Second, neither Jesus, nor any of the writers of the New Testament ever quoted from the Apocrypha. This is significant since these books for the most part were in circulation and already were found in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament of Jesus' day. There are a few statements in the Apocrypha that seem to parallel New Testament teaching, but they are not identical nor are they direct quotations, but mere allusions.

This matter of New Testament quotation is crucial to the consideration of which books do belong in the canon. For example, Jesus' endorsement of Daniel as a prophet and a direct quotation from his book in Matthew 2:15 certainly validates the prophecy of Daniel as being authoritative and divinely inspired.

There are dozens of similar quotations by our Lord and the New Testament writers, which helps settle the matter of which books are inspired and which ones are not.

Third, it will be granted that a couple of the Apocryphal books contain accurate history, especially 1st Maccabees with its account of the wars of the inter-testamental period of Jewish history. However, elsewhere they abound in historical, geographic, and chronological errors. Many of them, such as the books of Tobit, Judith, and Bel and the Dragon, are pure fiction without any factual support whatsoever. For example, the book of Tobit is a short story which gives directions for casting out a demon by the burning of the heart and liver of a fish from the Euphrates River. It also includes an account of how Tobit regained her eyesight by applying the gall of the fish to her eyes. Bel and the Dragon is another fictitious story of how wicked priests were consuming food offered to the idol called Bel and how Daniel exposed their deceit which resulted in the destruction of the idol and its many priests. It also records how Daniel killed the "great dragon" that was worshiped in Babylon by feeding it balls made of pitch, fat and hair, which caused it to explode internally. Obviously such myths cannot be put on a par with the writings of Scripture and therefore must be rejected.

False names, such as "Betomesthaim" for Samaria is found in Judith 4:6. Baruch contains false historical statements such as the statement that the sacred vessels of the temple were returned to Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah, when in reality they were not returned until after the Babylonian Captivity according to Ezra 1:7. A careful reading of these thirteen books will reveal many such errors and a spiritual tone that is far below that of the canonical Scriptures.

Fourth, the books in the Apocrypha endorse many false doctrines that are totally at variance with the clear teaching of the Word of God. Suicide is justified in 2 Maccabees 14:41-46. Prayers to the dead are encouraged in chapter 12, verses 41-45. Almsgiving is considered efficacious for the forgiveness of sins according to Tobit 12:9. The Book of Wisdom teaches the heresy of the pre-existence of souls in 8:19-20. The Book of Judith portrays her as using deception, guile and outright lying with the apparent approval of God (9:10-13). It is in these books that the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory is found along with many other unscriptural concepts. The internal evidence is totally against the acceptance of these so-called "hidden and concealed" books as being a part of God's holy and "breathed-out" Word (see 2 Timothy 3:16). Isaiah 8:20 sums up the proper attitude of all Bible-believing Christians regarding these spurious books. "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

[Editorial note: Jerome, referred to by Dr. Knuteson, translated the Latin Vulgate (ca. 383-405). In his first edition he omitted the Apocrypha. At the behest of the Bishop of Rome, Jerome added several books of the current Apocrypha. Jerome did not believe they should be in the canon in a letter to the Bishop of Rome for the same reasons Dr. Knuteson cites.]

---

*This article may be freely distributed in its original form. For another copy of this study or for other materials like tracts and words of encouragement, please write to:*

**“THE HOLY SCRIPTURES” PO Box 677 Hawkesbury (Ontario) K6A 3C8 CANADA**

E-mail: [albouter@hawk.igs.net](mailto:albouter@hawk.igs.net) OR [alfredbouter@hotmail.com](mailto:alfredbouter@hotmail.com)

© Alfred E. Bouter 2006 (Printed/Updated July 7, 2008)

For free downloads: <http://www.theholyscriptures.org/alfredbouter/>