
The Old Testament Apocrypha

The Books called the Apocrypha consist of 14 books originally attached to the Greek Old Testament that were not in the Hebrew-written Bible. That is because they were "first-written" in the Greek language. They were considered scripture and used as such by the Jews of the Dispersion (Jews living in foreign countries) at the time of Christ.

About 60 years after the crucifixion of Christ, a group of Rabbi's (survivors of the Roman annihilation of Jerusalem) met at Jamnia and canonized a Hebrew scripture specifically devoid of Greek writings. Any work of scripture not originally written in Hebrew was discarded as unclean.

This codification of the Hebrew Bible by the Jewish Rabbi's cancelled for the Jews the authority, not only of the contested books we now call apocryphal, but also the popular Greek Old Testament itself that foreign Jews had been using for the previous 300 years. That work had earlier been authorized for publication by the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem for use by the Jews of the Dispersion whose language was primarily Greek.

Jamnia was a seminal decision because it isolated Christians from Jews on the basis, not just of scripture, but of language as well.

The early Christians stuck to the Greek Old Testament and the Jews concentered themselves on the Hebrew Old Testament decided on by the Rabbi's at Jamnia.

The early Christians had good reason for their decision to retain the Greek scriptures. Not only did the entire pagan

world speak Greek, but according to the Talmud, at the time Jesus preached, Hebrew and Greek scrolls hung side by side in Herod's Temple. Even the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran include fragments written in both languages. When Christ's disciples wrote the New Testament books, they, too were composed in the same Greek language, allowing the world at large to read them.

The Jewish action, fixated as it was on the Greek language, nullified both sets of Christian books. The New Testament and the apocryphal books were both relegated to pagan classification and permanently discarded.

In prophecy, this is why Jesus, quoting Isaiah, announced that He would speak to the Jewish people in a foreign language. Obviously, that 'foreign' language was Greek.

The early Christian Church in the first century A.D. quickly coalesced into two Roman churches, one in the east, which we call today Eastern Orthodox, and the other in the west now called Roman Catholic. Both adopted the Greek Old Testament. Owing, however, to the nature of some of the material and questions raised by the Jewish Rabbi's at Jamnia, the Roman Catholic Church did so with reservations. It was obvious to Catholic scholars that some of those apocryphal documents, though dating from antiquity, were less than inspired.

The strongest motivation for those reservations, however, came from the fact that in the writings of the Apostles, almost all of the Old Testament quotations used to emphasize their points, came from books outside those fourteen.

Consequently early Catholic scholars assigned those questionable Greek-written books to a middle category,. In doing so, they coined the term "Apocrypha" which meant "hidden" to define them. The title was not meant to disparage their claim to divine inspiration, but to suggest that their content was more for scholars because of the hidden nature of the revelations they contained. They felt the general public was not sufficiently enlightened to readily understand them.

Later, in the middle ages, the Roman Church, agreeing with what had been up to that time an unofficial policy of acceptance, officially moved a certain group of the apocryphal books back to the regular (or recognized) scriptures. That is where they remain to this day - i.e., true scripture to Greeks and Romans. Together, the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches represent about 75% of the world's Christians, so acceptance of these books as true scripture is substantial in the modern Christian community.

In the Protestant Church, it is a different matter.

When Martin Luther broke with the Catholic Church, he ordered the Greek Apocrypha placed between the Old Testament and the New Testament in his 1534 Bible, with the inscription:

"Apocrypha: these are book which are not held equal to the Sacred Scriptures and yet are useful and good for reading".

As the Protestant revolt swept Europe, and sects of all sorts began appearing and sparking centuries of bitter internecine Christian warfare, the apocryphal books of the Old Testament were removed entirely from most Protestant Bibles. The Anglican Church retained them, but with the caution that they be used only for "life, and instruction of manners; but not to establish any doctrine".

The caution about doctrine was irrelevant.

Soon after Pentecost, and long before the Jews codified their scriptures at Jamnia, the twelve Apostles, together with Paul and the other leading figures in the Jerusalem Christian movement met in that city to decide the fate of the Old Testament laws. In a single sweeping edict, they cancelled the Old Testament's entire doctrinal authority. Not just the 14 'apocryphal' books, but the entire Old Testament (Hebrew and Greek alike). None of it thereafter could be used to establish doctrine in the developing Christian community (Acts 15:1-29). From that point on, the Old Testament's messages could be used only for prophecy.

The authority for the twelve Apostles to do this stemmed from the fact that Jesus had changed the management. He had given the world an entirely new Covenant. The old Covenant no longer applied. It's authority had been cancelled by God.

Today, some Christians in Protestant circles regard the Old Testament Apocrypha as simply fiction, or worse. That is an overreaction. When we think about these books in terms of prophecy, many of them remain very valuable. Among them are serious works written by Hebrew scholars and prophets and the inspiration of their verses is obvious. Stemming as most of them do from a century or more before the birth of Jesus, they offer invaluable insight into the Jewish historical process. For those who continue to use them as scripture they offer far more (see list below).

The Old Testament Apocrypha consists of the following 14 books listed in two categories, those accepted as scripture by the Roman and Greek churches and those not accepted as scripture.

Accepted Books

Ecclesiasticus

This book, written about 180 B.C., contains proverbs and practical observations of life two centuries before the birth of Christ. The work closely resembles the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. It represents one of the most valuable records of early Rabbinical thought. It was translated into Greek in 132 B.C. by a grandson of the author (Jesus ben Sira)

Wisdom

In many respects this is one of the most valuable books of the entire Apocrypha. It was written by a Jew of the Dispersion about 65 B.C. It is similar to the Wisdom Books of the Old

Testament. It was written especially to combat the materialistic tendencies of the canonical book of Ecclesiastes. Filled with stunning prophecy and replete with the powerful and spiritual essence of God, this book is also sometimes referred to as the 'Wisdom of Solomon'.

1 Maccabees

First Maccabees, written by a Jew in Palestine during the latter part of the 2nd century B.C., is perhaps the best historical source on the period from 175 to 135 B.C. Well written, it reveals deep insight into the root causes of the Maccabean rebellion and details the rebellion itself down to the death of Simon in 135 B.C. This book is essential to both Christians and Jews. It gives detailed information relative to Antiochus Epiphanes and his desecration of the Jerusalem Temple, an action which Jesus said would be repeated at the time of the end. The book also contains a wealth of details relative to the Jewish feast of Hannukah (which celebrates the re-dedication of the Temple Antiochus debased). That information is available from no other source, Jewish or otherwise, and without it there would be no Hannukah celebration.

2 Maccabees

Unlike the first Book of the Maccabees, this work is a combination of history and fiction. It seems to be less useful than the first. It is an abridgment of a far more extensive work in existence at the time of its writing in the latter part of the 2nd century B.C. It presents information about the period leading up to the rebellion of the Maccabees under Mattathias in Modein and follows it down to 161 B.C.

Tobit

The Book of Tobit, a work of fiction, was very popular among Jews and early Christians. It is a story of romance and legend from the Jewish Dispersion in Egypt. It was written in the 3rd century B.C., and was based upon two well-known Egyptian stories. The purpose of this book was to teach useful lessons, and at the same time correct some of the then-current superstitions. It features prominently the angel Raphael.

Bel and the Dragon

Written about 100 B.C., this story reveals Daniel's wisdom in exposing the falsehood of idolatry and those who promote it. The book also reveals the existence in Babylon of a dragon-god. Information about this idol is available from no other source, but it is particularly relevant in light of dragon prophecies relative to the last days, scattered throughout the scriptures.

Judith

The Book of Judith relates a story of victory won by the chosen people over its enemies, thanks to the intervention of a woman. It is a legendary tale of a Jewish widow reminiscent of 'Joan of Ark' who succeeds in outwitting and finally slaying a great Assyrian general, thus bringing deliverance to her oppressed people. It was written in Palestine during the latter half of the 2nd century B.C., probably by a Pharisee

Esther (additional verses)

This work, written about 100 B.C., consists of a number of additions to the Biblical book of Esther. The additions were added for detail and to make up for some of the spiritual deficiencies of the canonical book. The added verses greatly enhance the apocalyptic nature of the story and bring enormous symbolic understanding to it, dramatically enhancing its relationship to God. It is replete with dragons, and images easily reminiscent of the most important tenants and personages involved in the last-day warfare between Satan and Christ. The symbolism it brings to the Book of Esther is powerful prophecy.

Baruch

The greater part of this book was written in the 1st century A.D. under the assumed name of Baruch, the private secretary of Jeremiah. The 6th chapter is known as the Epistle of Jeremiah. Both books contain a series of exhortations, encouragements and severe denunciations.

Books Not Accepted

The Prayer of Manasses

This work dates from the first century B.C. It was intended to be used in connection with the story of Manasseh's Babylonian captivity (2 Chron. 33). Parts of the Prayer have found their way into Protestant liturgy.

The Song of the Three Holy Children

This addition to the Book of Daniel was written about 100 B.C. and was found inserted in his book, in the third chapter, right after the 23rd verse.

The History of Susanna

This is another 1st century B.C. addition to the book of Daniel. It is generally found prefixed to the book. The purpose of the story is to magnify Daniel's powers and the judgment.

1 Esdras

This is the Greek version of, and in some parts a reconstruction of the canonical Book of Ezra. It was written about 100 B.C. Some of the subject matter added is from the book of Nehemiah.

2 Esdras

This book is an apocalypse, especially chapters 3-14. It is composite in origin, dating from 65 B.C. to 120 A.D. The value of the book lies in the fact that it focuses heavily on the period of Jewish thought surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The views it expresses on eschatology are closely allied to the teachings of the New Testament.

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**"I Will Speak To The Prophets,
I Will Increase The Visions"**

Hosea 12:11

