

## The Apocrypha

Ever wondered why Catholic Bibles contain extra books that aren't included in Protestant Bibles? These extra books are called the Apocrypha, and this short paper explains why we believe they shouldn't be in the canon of scripture.

### What is the Apocrypha?

The apocryphal books were written by Jewish authors during the period from 200 B.C. to 50 B.C. These include both historical works and wisdom literature. The Roman Catholic Bible contains the apocryphal books (Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch I & II, Maccabees I & II) and certain additions to Esther and Daniel. Since these works are the primary source documents for this period of Jewish history, they are a useful source of historical information.

### Why isn't the Apocrypha part of our Bible?

A. The apocryphal books never claim to be scripture.

B. Many apocryphal teachings do not harmonize with the rest of scripture.

“Any iniquity is insignificant compared to a wife's iniquity.” – Ecclesiasticus 25:19

“From a woman sin had its beginning. Because of her we all die.” – Ecclesiasticus 25:24

“It is a disgrace to be the father of an undisciplined, and the birth of a daughter is a loss.” – Ecclesiasticus 22:3

C. The Jewish historian Josephus rejected the canonicity of the apocryphal books, apparently reflecting current Jewish thought.

“From Artaxerxes to our own time *the complete history has been written but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit* with the earlier records because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.”<sup>1</sup>

Josephus refers to the apocryphal books when he mentions “the complete history,” clearly implying that these books were not part of the Jewish canon. This view is also reflected in *The Manual of Discipline* in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

D. Although they were occasionally quoted in early church writings, the Apocryphal books were not accepted as canonical. Melito (170 A.D.) and Origen rejected the Apocrypha, as does the Muratorian Canon. Pope Gregory the Great (600 A.D.) wrote of 1 Maccabees: “We address a testimony from books, though not canonical, yet published for the edification of the Church.”<sup>2</sup>

E. Jesus referred to the Old Testament as the Law and the Prophets, but the apocryphal books themselves admit prophets were not active in Israel during the time they were written.

“And they laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, *till there should come a prophet*, and give answer concerning them.” – 1 Maccabees 4:46

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<sup>1</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, book 1, paragraph 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church*, (Oxford: Parker, 1845), Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, Volume II, Parts III and IV, Book XIX.34, p.424.)

“And there was a great tribulation in Israel, such as was not since the day that *there was no prophet seen in Israel.*” – 1 Maccabees 9:27

“And that the Jews, and their priests, had consented that he should be their prince, and high priest for ever, *till there should arise a faithful prophet.*” – 1 Maccabees 14:41

### **How then did the Apocrypha find its way into the Bible?**

Apocryphal books were sometimes included at the end of a New Testament codex<sup>3</sup> copy. Since codices were cut and assembled before copying began, pages were often left over. These blank pages were often filled with one or more apocryphal books.<sup>4</sup>

The Catholic scholar Jerome (347-420 A.D.) vigorously resisted including the Apocrypha in his Latin Vulgate Version (400 A.D.), and initially refused to translate the books, but was overruled. As a result, the standard Roman Catholic Bible throughout the medieval period contained them. Thus, the apocryphal books gradually came to be revered by the average clergyman. Still, many medieval Catholic scholars realized that they were not inspired.

### **When and why did the Roman Catholic church canonize the Apocrypha?**

The Roman Catholic Church did not officially canonize the Apocrypha until the Council of Trent (1546 A.D.)! This was in part because the Apocrypha contained material which supported certain Catholic doctrines coming under criticism during the Protestant Reformation, such as purgatory, praying for the dead, and the treasury of merit.

“And the day following Judas came with his company, to take away the bodies of them that were slain, and to bury them with their kinsmen, in the sepulchers of their fathers. And they found under the coats of the slain some of the donaries of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbiddeth to the Jews: so that all plainly saw, that for this cause they were slain. Then they all blessed the just judgment of the Lord, who had discovered the things that were hidden. And so betaking themselves to prayers, they besought him, that the sin which had been committed might be forgotten. *But the most valiant Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, forasmuch as they saw before their eyes what had happened, because of the sins of those that were slain. And making a gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection, (For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead,) And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.*” - 2 Maccabees 12:39-46

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<sup>3</sup> A codex contains stacked pages bound on one edge—similar to a modern book.

<sup>4</sup> “Books which heretofore had never been regarded by the Jews as having any more than a certain edifying significance were now placed by Christian scribes in one codex side-by-side with the acknowledged books of the Hebrew canon. Thus it would happen that what was first a matter of convenience in making such books of secondary status available among Christians became a factor in giving the impression that all of the books within such a codex were to be regarded as authoritative.” Bruce Metzger cited in “The Biblical Canon,” in D.A. Carson, John D. Woodbridge, Eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books, 1986), p. 310.