

# The Apocrypha

**There are those among us who think it is necessary for the people of God, in these last days, to study the Apocrypha. At the request of friends, this brief overview has been prepared in order to save our people a lot of work. After reading this, your curiosity about the Apocrypha will very likely be exhausted. How thankful we can be that there is so much beautiful light and truth in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. In strong contrast, the Apocrypha is very, very empty.**

With the exception of 1 Maccabees (a valid historical account), the Apocrypha is not worth reading.

## THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

The Old Testament Scriptures were completed when Malachi penned his book, about the year 400 B.C. From that time, down to the birth of Christ in 4 B.C., is about 400 years. During those years of Scriptural silence, there was a lot of activity in Palestine, both political and written.

From the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great (332 B.C.) to the destruction of the Temple (A.D. 70), there was considerable religious and political activity. Four events immensely affected the Jewish people: (1) the Babylonian captivity (605-538 B.C.), (2) the uprising under Antiochus Epiphanes (c.175 B.C.), (3) the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple (A.D. 70), and (4) the Bar Cocheba revolt (A.D. 132-135).

Because of one or more of those events, many uninspired Jewish writings were produced. These writings include the *Apocrypha*, the *Pseudepigrapha*, and the *writings of the Qumran community of Essenes*. We will briefly look at each of these.

## 1 - THE APOCRYPHA

The term, "Apocrypha," means "something hidden" and usually refers to a group of writings that appeared in the Greek (Septuagint) translation of the Old Testament; but these were never accepted in the Hebrew canon. Both Jews and Christians always recognized that the Apocrypha was not divinely inspired.

The Apocrypha is several uninspired books which were added to the Septuagint (the Greek translation

of the Hebrew Old Testament) about a hundred years before the birth of Christ.

Because the Apocrypha contains several Roman Catholic teachings, the papacy requires every faithful Catholic to accept the Apocrypha as fully inspired. Not to do so, according to a decree of the Council of Trent (April 18, 1546), is to be guilty of a mortal sin. Oddly enough, it was not until that date that the Vatican ever ruled that the Apocrypha was divinely inspired!

When the 16th-century Reformation began, it took time for the Protestants to successfully part with many of the errors and myths of Romanism. For this reason, some of the earliest Protestant Bibles had the Apocrypha in them,—although Christians have never accepted those writings as inspired.

Interestingly enough, Jerome only included the Apocryphal books in his Latin Vulgate at the insistence of the pope. Jerome did not believe they were divinely inspired.

## WHY CHRISTIANS REJECT THE APOCRYPHA

There are several very good reasons why Christians do not accept the Apocrypha as divinely inspired writings:

1 - The Apocryphal books are not included in the Hebrew canon of Scripture.

2 - Though they are included in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), Jesus never quoted from them.

3 - The early Christian church totally rejected them from the canon.

4 - The writer of 1 Maccabees recognized that there was no prophet among the Jews at that time (1 Maccabees 4:46; 9:27; 14:41).

5 - They teach false doctrines:

- An angel says of the smoke of a burning fish heart that it "driveth away all kinds of devils."

- God is urged, "Hear now the prayer of the dead of Israel" (Baruch 3:4).

- "It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins" (2 Maccabees 12:43-45).

6 - They contain major historical and geographical errors.

7 - Josephus, contemporary of John the Revelator, mentions the Apocrypha, but never considers it inspired.

**This study is taken from one chapter in our book, *The King James Bible and the Modern Versions*, which is currently included in installments in our monthly Information Packs.**

8 - Philo Judaeus, Jewish leader at Alexandria during the time of the apostles, left a large collection of writings and quoted extensively from the Old Testament—but never from the Apocrypha.

9 - They lack the high spiritual tone and general excellence of the Biblical writings.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

These are the books that Roman Catholics are required to accept as inspired of God, on pain of mortal sin if they do not do so. What is in these books, that the Vatican is so intent on keeping them?

#### HISTORICAL APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

**1 Maccabees**—This is the only worthwhile book in the Apocrypha. It is fairly reliable history and covers the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes, from 175 to 135 B.C.

This is an important historical book, and tells about the struggles of the Jews for religious and political liberty in the 2nd century B.C. The name is derived from Judas Maccabeus, the third son of Mattathias, a priest. (The word, “Maccabeus,” comes from the Hebrew word for “hammer.”)

Written in Hebrew by a Palestinian Jew about 100 B.C., it is our best source for the history of the first 40 years of the Maccabean wars and gives a reasonably dependable account of the period from Antiochus Epiphanes (175 B.C.) to John Hyrcanus (c. 135 B.C.). We are first told of events leading up to the Maccabean rebellion (1:1 to chapter 2); then about the military exploits of Judas (3:1-9:22) and his brothers, Jonathan (9:23-12:53) and Simon (13:1-16:24), who succeeded him in the ongoing struggle first for religious and political freedom. The emphasis of the book is on military activity; and little is told about the social, economic, and religious aspects of the period.

**2 Maccabees**—This book is a mixture of history and legendary narratives, covering the period 175-160 B.C. An independent, divergent, and more elaborate account of events in 1 Maccabees 1-7, it was written by moralizing Jews about the 1st century B.C. and includes a variety of supernatural miracles which helped the warring Jews.

#### ETHICAL APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

**Wisdom of Solomon**—This book, written in Greek about 50 B.C. (probably at Alexandria), says that good living is best and sin and idolatry are wrong. The author claims to be King Solomon.

Scholars who study ancient manuscripts declare that this book combines Old Testament teachings with Alexandrian ideas derived from Platonism and Stoicism.

**Ecclesiasticus (also called Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach)**—The theme is also about good living. In some passages, the book sounds like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

The most famous passage in Ecclesiasticus is a series of stories (chapters 44-50) beginning with the familiar words, “Let us now praise famous men.” Yet that is a concept foreign to true Scripture!

There are errors in both the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus.

#### LEGENDARY APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

**Tobit**—a legendary romantic narrative, said to have occurred during the Babylonian captivity and written about 200 B.C.

According to this novel, Tobit was a Jew living in Babylon who became blind (chapter 1:2); and, then, after a quarrel with his wife, he wished he might die. At the same time, a widow named Sarah, living in Ecbatana in Media, had seven husbands slain on her wedding night by a demon named Asmodeus. So she also prayed that she might die. The angel, Raphael, was then sent to help them both (3). Raphael comes to Azaria and lies to him, saying he is a man named Azarias. Leading him to the Tigris River, Raphael has him catch a large fish (6), the intestines of which later help banish the demon, Asmodeus, and cure Tobit’s blindness. Arriving in Ecbatana, the angel helps Tobit find a lot of money; and he marries the woman who, according to the angel, was destined for him from all eternity (7:9). Yet Tobit was already married to another woman! Tobit then praises God (10-14).

**Judith**—The story of the bravery of Judith, a Hebrew widow, written about 150 B.C.

In this totally fictitious story, after the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity, Nebuchadnezzar, the Assyrian king ruling from Nineveh, decided to punish the Jews for not assisting him in his conquest of Media. (As you know, Nebuchadnezzar was a Babylonian king, ruling from Babylon, and he was not alive after the Babylonian captivity.)

Holofernes, his Assyrian general is said to have besieged the city of Bethulia; but, through trickery, Judith cuts off his head with his own sword while he is in a drunken stupor.

**Additions to Esther**—Fictitious stories, written about 150 B.C., are inserted in various places in the book of Esther; and part of a chapter and six other chapters are added at the end of Esther. A total of 107 verses are added.

**Additions to Daniel**—There are three of these. Here they are:

**The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Holy Children**—The prayer of Abednego, plus the song of the three Hebrews, because their prayer in the fiery furnace was heard. This is the first of the additions to Daniel and is inserted between Daniel 23 and 24 in the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and most Catholic Bibles.

As the three stand inside the fiery hot furnace, Azariah prays for help so they will not die (1-22). Then, when it comes (23-28), the three praise God

for deliverance (29-68). Ignored is the fact that they had to be helped as soon as they were pushed into the fiery furnace!

**Susanna and the Elders**—A story about how Daniel saved Susanna from being condemned to death as a result of false accusations.

In the Vulgate, this religious romance follows the last chapter of Daniel and is numbered as chapter 13. It apparently was written in Hebrew in the 1st century B.C.

Two Jewish judges tried to seduce Susanna, the godly wife of Joakim, a prominent Babylonian Jew. When she refused, they accused her of adultery. Daniel rescued her by independently cross-examining each of the elders, proving their stories contradictory and fallacious.

**Bel and the Dragon**—This consists of two fabulous stories, written probably in Hebrew during the 1st century B.C. and included as chapter 14 of Daniel: (1) Daniel proves that Bel's priests and their families ate food offered to an idol. (2) After Daniel kills a dragon, he is then put in the lions' den.

In the first story, the Babylonian priests of Bel (Marduk) have claimed that their heathen idol was eating the food presented to it. Daniel disproves this claim by sprinkling ashes on the floor, demonstrating that the 70 priests and their families would sneak in by a secret door and take the food.

In the second story, a great dragon was being worshiped by the people. Daniel kills it by feeding it a concoction of pitch, fat, and hair, boiled together. The creature bursts and dies. Because he did this, Daniel is cast (a second time) into a lions' den for not one, but six days. While there, he is miraculously fed by Habakkuk, the prophet, who is flown by an angel from Judea to Babylon for this purpose.

## PROPHETIC APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

**Baruch**—This book purportedly was written by Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, during the Babylonian exile. It is thought to have been written, in the first century A.D., by a Jew in order to warn his people that the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) happened because of the sins of the Jewish nation. The final chapter promises the restoration of Israel and predicts the humbling of all her oppressors.

**Letter of Jeremiah (also known as the Epistle of Jeremy)**—This book is included at the end of Baruch in ancient manuscripts. But it is a separate production which non-Catholic scholars believe to have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, to encourage them to remain true to Judaism.

In this manuscript, based on Jeremiah 10:11, the writer warns his people not to forsake Judaism, lest they experience another captivity.

## 2 - THE PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

By order of the Council of Trent, the above books are all included in Roman Catholic Bibles. There are also five other books which are called the Pseudepigrapha.

Roman Catholics are not required to accept any of the following books, and they have never been considered canonical by any denomination.

**3 Maccabees**—This book of seven chapters is clearly folklore; it tells the story of the victory of Ptolemy IV Philopator, over Antiochus the Great, at the Battle of Raphia (217 B.C.) in order to deliver the Jewish people.

**4 Maccabees**—This brief book urges the Jews to practice temperance and self-control by studying the Torah.

**Prayer of Manasseh**—You will recall that King Manasseh was carried to Babylon; and, while there, he repented and was restored to his throne (2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20).

This Pseudepigraphal document, written in Hebrew about 150-100 B.C., purports to be Manasseh's prayer while in captivity. It is not considered canonical even by Catholics.

**1 Esdras**—Written by an Egyptian Jew about 150 B.C., this book is often described as historical fiction. Neither Catholics nor Protestants accept it as canonical. 1 Esdras purports to tell more about portions of 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

It is best known for its account (1 Esdras 3:5-4:63) of three young bodyguards of Darius I who, one day, sought the best answer to the question, What is the strongest thing in the world? The first said, "Wine is strongest." The second said, "The king is strongest." The third said, "Women are strongest, but truth is victor over all things." At this, the people applauded him and cried, "Great is truth, and strongest of all." Does that sound like anything worth reading? This event is supposed to have given Zerubbabel the opportunity to obtain from Darius the command to resume building on the Temple in Jerusalem (4:48-57).

A point of confusion needs to be mentioned here. In Catholic Bibles, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are called 1 and 2 Esdras. But, of course, the Pseudepigraphal books, 1 and 2 Esdras, are quite different!

In the Latin Vulgate, 3 and 4 Esdras are included as an appendix to the New Testament, as is the Prayer of Manasseh.

**2 Esdras**—This book apparently was written by Christians between A.D. 150 and 250. It speaks of the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles (chapters 1-2) in chapter 1 and verse 30. This is similar to Matthew 23:37; chapter 1 and verse 37 is similar to John 20:29.

Chapters 3-14 are supposed to have been written by someone named Salathiel, who is identified with Ezra. It is thought that the book was written by a

Christian and named “Ezdras” in order to get the Jews to read it. At its end (14:48), Ezra is supposed to have been translated to heaven, without experiencing death.

**Jubilees**—Written in Hebrew apparently by a Pharisee or an Essene about 125 B.C., Jubilees teaches that the coming Messianic kingdom will gradually develop until both man and nature will reach perfection, happiness, and peace. At that time, everyone will live a thousand years; and, at death, all will then go to heaven. A fragment of this work was discovered among the Dead Sea scrolls in Qumran Cave I.

**First Enoch (or Ethiopic Enoch)**—This is a compilation, partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic, of the works of several authors who were Pharisees. It is called “Ethiopic Enoch” because our only source is an Ethiopian version.

It has a variety of teachings, some contradictory, about the coming Messiah and his kingdom: It will be eternal on earth and in heaven and will begin after the last judgment (37-71); it will be eternal only on the earth, beginning after the last judgment (1-36); it will be temporary and on earth, and will be followed by the last judgment (91-104).

The evil one is Azazel who “hath taught all unrighteousness on earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were (preserved) in heaven, and which men were striving to learn” (9:6).

**Second Enoch (Slovonic Enoch)**—Extant only in a Slavonic version, this manuscript has some similarity to First Enoch, but also to early Christian literature. Part of it is thought to have been written by Christians in a later century A.D.

**Second Baruch**—A compilation of several works, this book declares that men are saved solely by their works and that the Messianic kingdom is soon to be established; then Israel will be a world empire with Jerusalem as its capital. Probably written during the first or second century A.D., it is extant only in a Syriac version.

**Third Baruch**—This book, probably written in the second century A.D., advocates a belief in seven heavens and three classes of angels who intercede for three classes of men.

**Fourth Ezra**—Probably written about the end of the first century A.D., this book teaches that Israel is great, the Jews are God’s only people, the law was a special gift to them after its rejection by other worlds, and that God loves the Jews more than any other people.

**Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs**—This book, which may have been written by a Jew during the Maccabean rule, teaches that through the Jews all the Gentiles will be saved. The promised Messiah

will come through the tribe of Levi, not Judah. Part of this book was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran Cave I.

**Sibylline Oracles**—This is a work comprised originally of 15 books and several fragments containing oracles developed by Jews and probably also Christian authors, from the 2nd century B.C. to about the 5th century A.D.

**Assumption of Moses**—Probably written during the 1st century A.D. by a patriotic Jew, this work originally had two different books: the *Testament of Moses* and the *Assumption*. The author teaches that the ten tribes will return and rejoin Judah and Benjamin; and, eventually, Israel will be the greatest nation on earth.

**Psalms of Solomon**—This is a collection of 18 psalms which declare that Israel is righteous and all other nations are wicked. It probably was written in Hebrew in the first century B.C.

### 3 - THE QUMRAN DOCUMENTS

It is believed that the Jews who lived in the Qumran Community, near the Dead Sea (1st century B.C.-1st century A.D.), were Essenes. In addition to preparing copies of Old Testament books, they also wrote several original documents; only a few of these are complete enough to be useful.

**The Manual of Discipline**—This is the most important of the non-Biblical books found at Qumran. It contains the rules and regulations of the group which had a democratic organization, but no private ownership of property or even money. Strict rules include making false or foolish statements, interrupting another’s speech, or sleeping during a meeting. Everyone was required to eat together. Initiation rituals, water purification rites, etc. are included. The rules are similar to the Essene rules which were described by Philo and Josephus.

**The Habakkuk Commentary (1Qp Hab.)**—Habakkuk 1 and 2 are said to be prophecies which were fulfilled in the times in which the writer lived.

**The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness (1QM)**—Rules of warfare are outlined, which the faithful Jews are to obey in their soon-coming war against evil forces.

**The Damascus Document**—Discovered in a Genizah (manuscript storeroom) of a Cairo synagogue near the close of the 19th century, this document parallels rules and teachings found in the *Manual of Discipline* and *Habakkuk Commentary*.

**Consider how empty and dreary your life would be, if you did not have the precious Bible and Spirit of Prophecy! The Inspired Writings are your path to heaven. Stay on the path. Nothing else is safe.**

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