

**April Q & A:
Why Don't We Use the Apocrypha?**

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Assembly

Introduction:

If you have ever studied with someone of the Catholic faith, one of the questions you almost always get is, "Why doesn't your Bible have the same books mine does?" Catholic bibles such as the New American Bible (not to be confused with the New American Standard Bible) and the New Jerusalem Bible contain additional books as well as some additional sections in **Daniel** and **Esther**. If you have ever discussed this with a Catholic, you may have been told that the Catholic Church compiled our Bible and everyone used these "extra" books until the Protestant reformation. If that is true, why don't we use them anymore?

As you are aware, we are reinstating our second Sunday evening Question and Answer lessons. This question was submitted by one of our teenagers who has been talking with a friend about the gospel. I hope we all run into questions we have to study further and dig harder to answer because we are talking about Jesus, His gospel and His church to our friends and neighbors. As always I repeat that I do not know the answer to all questions. I am not the authority and I trust that you will not use these sessions as an excuse to let me do your study for you. Please, use these merely as a jumping off point for your own study. Do not accept anything because I have said it. Look to the word of God to answer your questions. We have merely started this practice as a means to edify, uplift and help. If you have a question you would like to see dealt with in one of these sessions, please e-mail me or leave a written copy in the boxes outside my office door.

Discussion:

I. What are the Apocrypha?

- A. These extra books are commonly referred to as the Apocrypha, seen as a collection of 15 books and addition to books written between 250 BC and 100 AD. (The following summaries are borrowed from a sermon presented by Max Dawson at the Dowlen Road Church of Christ on April 15, 2001.)
1. **First Esdras** is a historical book from the early first century AD. It somewhat parallels the last chapters of 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It is a Jewish history that covers the period from Josiah to the reading of the Law by Ezra.
 2. **First Maccabees** is the most important book among the apocrypha. It covers the history of the period from 180 to 134 BC. It shows how God used Mattathias and his sons to deliver the Jews from Syrian oppression. This book shows in a very direct way the fulfillment of prophecies from Daniel 11.
 3. **Second Maccabees** also gives the history of the revolt against Syria, covering the period from 180 to 161 BC. It is not considered as accurate as 1 Maccabees.
 4. **Tobit** is a historical romance written about 200 BC. It is about a couple, Tobit and Anna, who were exiled in Assyria when Israel was destroyed. The book emphasizes the importance of Jewish customs and worship.
 5. **Judith**, written around 250 BC, emphasizes obedience to the Law, but is historically inaccurate. Nebuchadnezzar is pictured as king of Assyria, reigning at the time the Jews returned from exile. Judith, a widow, is the story's heroine.
 6. **Additions to Esther**. This work, probably done about 100 BC, contains a dream of Mordecai and the prayers of Esther and Mordecai. It tries to correct what some Jews saw as an error—that God's name is not found in the book of Esther.
 7. **Song of the Three Young Men** is one of three additions to the book of Daniel. It is a legendary story about what went on in the fiery furnace into which the three Hebrew boys were thrown.
 8. **Susanna** is a second legendary addition to Daniel. It tells of two men who were enraptured by Susanna's beauty. When she rebuffed them, they accused her of immorality. Daniel, the hero of the story, vindicated Susanna's reputation.
 9. **Bel and the Dragon** is a third addition to Daniel. It ridicules idol worship. Bel was an idol worshiped in Babylon. Again, Daniel is the hero as he proved Bel to be a false God and as he also killed a dragon that was worshiped in Babylon.

10. **Wisdom of Solomon** was not produced by Solomon; it was written about 100 BC in Egypt. It condemned Jews who turned from God. But it also advances the Greek concept of immortality rather than the Bible's teaching of resurrection.
 11. **Ecclesiasticus** is also known as **Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach**. This is the only apocryphal book whose author is known. Jesus was a devout Jew who combined what he found of value from both Judaism and Greek wisdom.
 12. **Baruch** was written shortly before 100 BC and contains three sections. The first claims to be a history of Jeremiah though it differs from that book. The second is poetic and praises wisdom. The last section gives a word of hope to the Jews.
 13. **The Epistle of Jeremiah** is often added as a sixth chapter to Baruch. As the basis for his work, the author likely used Jeremiah 29:1-23. This letter strongly condemns idolatry. There is no evidence of its existence much before 100 BC.
 14. **The Prayer of Manasseh** is a devotional writing. It claims to be the prayer of the wicked Old Testament king who repented of his evil ways (2 Chronicles 33:11-13, 18-19). This writing was evidently done sometime before 100 BC.
 15. **2 Esdras** dates to about 20 BC. However, chapters 1-2 and 15-16 seem to be from a later date and may be Christian writings. This writing is apocalyptic in nature and speaks of coming judgment.
- B. The word "apocrypha" means "things that are hidden." Historically, we are not completely sure why this term was attached to these books.
1. Some have suggested a positive sense, that is, these books were kept hidden because they were so esoteric and deeply spiritual only the initiated could read or understand them.
 2. Others have suggested a negative sense, that is, these books were kept hidden because they were considered spurious and heretical and therefore needed to be censured.
- C. While there were multiple books written during inter-testamental and post-New Testament times that have been rejected to which the word "apocrypha" can apply, Protestants and Christians use the word "Apocrypha" to refer specifically to this group of books about which we disagree with the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches. While we call them "Apocryphal," the Catholic church refers to them as "deutero-canonical," which indicates they are still canon but were accepted at a later time than other canonical books.

II. The Apocrypha throughout history.*

- A. Despite how often we are told the Catholic Church determined in its early councils what books were in the Bible, that is simply not true, especially for the Old Testament. Before Christ's church was even established the Hebrews already had a known and established canon. None of these extra books were part of that canon. Though in common conversation about the Apocrypha with most of our friends this fact is overlooked, it is firmly established even by the Catholic Church and in versions of the Apocrypha. Considered the following quotes:
1. "None of these books is included in the Hebrew canon of Holy Scripture..." (NOAA, p iii)
 2. Commenting on additions to Daniel: "They are excluded from the Jewish canon of Scripture, but the church has always included them among the inspired writings." (NAB, p 1145)
 3. "Tobit and Judith were not accepted by the Hebrew bible..." (NJB, p 621)
 4. "The two books of Maccabees were not in the Jewish canon of scripture, but their inspiration has been recognized by the church." (NJB, p 674)
 5. Commenting on *Ecclesiasticus*, "This book forms part of the Greek Bible though it does not appear in the Jewish canon..." (NJB, p 1076)
 6. "The Book of Baruch is one of the deutero-canonical books not found in the Hebrew Bible." (NJB, p1173).
 7. When commenting on *Wisdom of Solomon*: "When the author quotes scripture it is from the Septuagint..." (NJB, p 1042) That is an interesting statement because it demonstrates the

* All information regarding the historical use of the Apocrypha and critical comments on the Apocrypha come directly from modern versions of the Apocrypha and essays included in those versions. My three sources were as follows:

- 1) *The New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1991. (NOAA)
- 2) *New American Bible: The Saint Joseph Family Edition*, Catholic Book Publishing Company, New York. (NAB)
- 3) *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday, New York, 1985. (NJB)

original Greek translation of the Hebrew canon was already written when the *Wisdom of Solomon* was written and therefore it was not part of the Hebrew canon. Additionally, it was not even part of the original Greek canon but was only added in later.

- B. Josephus, writing after the time of Jesus and during the time the New Testament canon was being established testified that even then, despite the inclusion of some of these books in the Septuagint, the Jews did not regard these extra books as part of scripture.
1. First recognize the books accepted in the Hebrew canon. Note their division and order was different than ours. They divided their canon into three parts.
 - a. **The Law (Torah):** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
 - b. **The Prophets (Neb'im):** Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve (the minor prophets).
 - c. **The Writings (Kethuvim):** Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.
 - d. We have 39 books in our Old Testament. However, the Jews viewed **Samuel, Kings** and **Chronicles** each as one book instead of two. Additionally, **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** were combined to form one book. Finally, the section we refer to as *The Minor Prophets* was all in one book called **The Twelve**. Thus, the Jews had 24 books. Some Jews combined **Ruth** with **Judges** and **Lamentations** with **Jeremiah**, thus enumerating 22 books. However, despite the different divisions, combinations and order the books were the same as what we use today.
 2. Now, consider the following quote from Josephus:

For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, but only twenty-two books which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; (*The Life and Works of Josephus*, "Against Apion," 1.8, Tr. William Whiston, John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia.)
 3. While Josephus used the enumeration that combined **Ruth** and **Judges** as well as **Jeremiah** and **Lamentations**, we see his understanding of the Jewish canon had no room for 15 extra books. Remember this is more than 200 years after the Septuagint was translated and is even after the life of Jesus.
- C. Though not a part of the Hebrew canon, each of these books and additions were later added into the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. While an argument might be made that the New Testament authors (who sometimes quoted from the Septuagint translation) alluded to statements in apocryphal books, such cannot be verified. Additionally, we do know that while they repeatedly quoted from books in our accepted Old Testaments, no New Testament author ever quoted from the Apocrypha. That alone should tell us something.
- D. The early post-New Testament Christians almost exclusively used the Septuagint and almost never pursued how it compared to the original Hebrew canon. Therefore, many of the early "church fathers" quoted from Apocryphal works. However, in about the 4th century many of them recognized a difference between the Hebrew canon and what had come to them in the Septuagint. At the end of the 4th century, Jerome, the most learned biblical scholar of his day, prepared a standard Latin version of the scriptures that we call the *Latin Vulgate*. He did include the apocrypha. However, he quite clearly annotated that none of the books or additions to the books that are apocryphal were to be viewed as part of the scriptural canon. Regrettably, the ongoing Latin copyists continued to contain the apocryphal books but dropped out the notes demonstrating they were not part of scriptural canon.
- E. Local synodical councils, which eventually gave rise to the Roman Catholic church as we know it, often gave consent to these books despite the fact that they were never part of the Hebrew canon (e.g. Hippo in 393 and Carthage in 397). It was not until the Council of Trent on April 8, 1546 that the Roman Catholic church issued what is regarded as its first infallible declaration on the canon of Scripture declaring the apocryphal books as canon. Keep that in mind, that means while the apocryphal books were often included in the Bible, even the Roman Catholic church did not officially recognize them as scripture until 1546 and even then there was debate and opponents to it among the Catholics.

- F. Please recognize what this means. While our Catholic friends tell us the Apocrypha were part of the Bible up until the Reformation, that is only painting part of the picture. Yes, most versions of the Bible included them, but many viewed them merely as helpful books that were not to be regarded as Scripture even though they were bound together with Scripture.
- G. The complete excision of the apocryphal books from our Bibles did come out of the Reformation. Early reformers, including Martin Luther, typically maintained the apocryphal books in their Bibles, but put them together as an addendum at the conclusion of the Old Testament or even after the New Testament with explanations that while the books were helpful and of value, they were not inspired, not canon, not scripture and not authoritative. During the debates of the time, the Protestant Reformers realized they needed to make an exact determination on which books were truly canonical. This played into some of their debates on purgatory and indulgences as passages like *II Maccabees 12:43-45* supported those errors that were not at all supported in the books universally recognized as Scripture. Some Geneva Bibles dating around 1599 were the first to completely exclude the apocryphal books. From there, the exclusion of the Apocrypha became the eventual norm. Thus today, only Bibles used by the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches maintain the apocryphal books.

III. Why don't we use the Apocrypha?

- A. We earlier demonstrated the first reason. The Hebrews did not view them as canon.
- B. The second reason is problems within the Apocrypha which demonstrate they were not inspired. Just consider the following statements:
 - 1. "Ostensibly historical but actually quite imaginative are the books of Tobit, Judith, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon, which may be called moralistic novels" (NOAA, p v)
 - 2. "The Book of Tobit, named after its principal hero, combines specifically Jewish piety and morality with oriental folklore in a fascinating story..." (NAB, 547)
 - 3. Commenting on *Judith*: "Any attempt to read the book directly against the backdrop of Jewish history in relation to the empires of the ancient world is bound to fail." (NAB, p 563)
 - 4. "The Book of Judith shows a bland indifference to history and geography. The scene is set in the time of 'Nebuchadnezzar who reigned over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh', Jd 1:1, but Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylonia and Nineveh had been destroyed by Nabopolassar, his father. Despite this, the return from the exile under Cyrus is regarded as having taken place already, Jd 4:3, 5:19." (NJB, p 622)
 - 5. Commenting on the addition to **Daniel** called *Bel and the Dragon*: "This story preserves the fiction of successive Median and Persian rule." (NAB, 1147)
 - 6. Commenting on the additions to **Esther**: "The additions are clearly intrusive and secondary, for they contradict the Hebrew at a number of points." (NOAA, p 41)
 - 7. Commenting on the *Book of Baruch*: "Certainly Baruch himself would not have made the numerous mistakes contained in Baruch 1:1-14." (NOAA, p 161)
 - 8. Do these statements sound like books we should accept as canonical, inspired scripture? Books filled with mistakes, fiction, folklore and human imagination?
- C. The third reason is even the Apocryphal books demonstrate there were no prophets within the time of their writing.
 - 1. First, let me go back to the earlier quote from Josephus and share more of it with you:

It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time; and how firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add any thing to them, to take any thing from them, or to make any change in them; but it is become natural to all Jews immediately, and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain Divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them (*The Life and Works of Josephus*, "Against Apion," 1.8, Tr. William Whiston, John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia.).

2. Josephus claimed that the Jews recognized no prophets after the time of Artaxerxes. That is, after the time of Nehemiah when Malachi wrote, there was no succession of prophets. Therefore, the Hebrews, while recognizing benefits in other books did not see scripture and were even willing to die to keep from adding to their canon.
3. Interestingly, the Apocrypha testifies to this very same concept.
 - a. "Despite the diversity of literary form, most of which are parallel to, or developments from, similar genres in the Old Testament, the attentive reader of the Apocrypha will be struck by the absence of the prophetic element. From first to last these books bear testimony to the assertion of the Jewish historian Josephus, that 'the exact succession of the prophets' had been broken after the close of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament." (NOAA, p v).
 - b. From *I Maccabees 4:45-46*: "So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them." (NOAA, p 196)
 - c. From *I Maccabees 9:27*: "So there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them." (NOAA, p 208).
 - d. From *I Maccabees 14:41*: "The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise." (NOAA, p 224).
- D. The final and greatest reason is Jesus' testimony to the Hebrew concept of canon.
 1. Remember for Jesus every issue was settled when the Old Testament had its say for "Scripture cannot be broken" (**John 10:35**, ESV).
 2. Additionally remember the threefold division of scripture the Jews maintained—Law, Prophets and Writings. In **Luke 24:44**, Jesus said, "...everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (ESV) Here Jesus uses a common figure of speech called synecdoche, that is, taking the part for the whole, and names the larger group of Writings after the largest book within that group. Jesus here places His stamp of approval on the Hebrew canon.
 3. Additionally, you notice in the Hebrew order demonstrated above, the first book in the Old Testament was **Genesis** and the last was **Chronicles**. Notice Jesus' statement in **Luke 11:51** as He claimed the Pharisees would have the blood of the prophets laid at their feet "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah"(ESV). Jesus is not saying the prophets from A to Z will be laid at their feet. Rather, Abel was the first martyr in **Genesis** and Zechariah was the last martyr in **Chronicles**. Jesus' statement is a subtle stamp on the Hebrew understanding of the canon from **Genesis** to **Chronicles**.
 4. If Jesus accepted the Hebrew understanding of Old Testament canon, which one should we accept. Over and again the Catholic bibles will tell us that certain books were not accepted in the Hebrew canon but were accepted by the Church. For the Catholic Church, the church itself is the judge of what should be accepted. We must remember however that the servants are not above their master (**John 15:20**). If Jesus accepted the Hebrew concept of canon, who are we to go beyond that?

Conclusion:

According to **II Timothy 3:16-17**, Scripture is God-breathed. With that comes a level of accuracy that precludes numerous historical and geographic errors and folklore. According to **II Peter 1:20-21**, Scripture did not come from man's own interpretation, but came about as men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. Without prophets, you can't get scripture. Additionally, with that comes a level of purity that does not allow for human imaginations and fables. We do not use the Apocrypha for good reason. Instead, we will continue to rely on the Scriptures that early on were demonstrated to come from God's prophets and apostles.