Article from the *Lexham Bible Dictionary* article on the Apocrypha:

APOCRYPHA, OLD TESTAMENT (ἀπόκρυφος, *apokryphos*). A collection of books included in the Old Testament of ancient Christian Bibles in Greek or Latin but not included in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible. Their canonical status in different Christian groups varies. The Old Testament Apocrypha were composed primarily during the period between the undisputed Old Testament books and the New Testament (ca. third century BC into the first century AD).

Terminology

The Old Testament Apocrypha—commonly referred to simply as "the Apocrypha"—should not be confused with the modern and very different collections known as the New Testament Apocrypha and the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.

For further details on distinguishing between these terms, see these articles: Apocrypha, New Testament; Pseudepigrapha, Old Testament.

Introduction

"Apocrypha," meaning "hidden," is commonly used to describe a group of approximately 20 ancient works, most of which appear in Greek in Bible codices from the fourth and fifth centuries AD. Throughout history, the church has debated the inspiration, value, authority, and usefulness of these books; these texts remain largely unknown to most Protestants. The label for these books is somewhat of a misnomer, and the collection itself is artificial—the books were never intended to be treated as a group. The Apocrypha grouping overlaps, but is not synonymous with, the term "deuterocanonical."

The exact range of books classified as Apocrypha varies slightly in different sources, depending on the boundary drawn between the Old Testament Apocrypha and the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha—books featuring an Old Testament setting that were historically, and are presently, less widely recognized as authoritative than the Old Testament Apocrypha, which in turn are less widely recognized as authoritative than the undisputed books of the Old Testament. The *Lexham Bible Dictionary* classifies books as Old Testament Apocrypha if they are not in the Hebrew Bible but are included either in the Septuagint as represented by the Old Testament section of Codex Alexandrinus or in the Latin Vulgate, including appendices (such as 2 Esdras).

The books of the Apocrypha have a long and complicated history of acceptance, especially relating to their inclusion in the canon of authoritative Scripture. Generally, Judaism and Protestant churches do not view the Apocrypha as canonical or authoritative, but the churches of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, and Syriac traditions accept most of them as part of the Old Testament.

Since the apocryphal books were mostly composed between the time range of the undisputed Old Testament books and the New Testament, they are a source of historical information on the background to the New Testament and are often described as the "bridge" between the Old and the New Testaments. The church at large has often praised their edifying value.

Contents

The Apocrypha is composed of a wide variety of Jewish literary texts, which cover a large span of interests, topics, styles, and human history. It includes histories, liturgies, wisdom sayings, and stories. Approximately 20 texts are included in this collection:

- Tobit (sometimes Tobias)
- Judith
- Additions to Esther
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Sirach (sometimes Ecclesiasticus or Wisdom of Ben Sira),
- Baruch
- Letter of Jeremiah
- Additions to Daniel
  - Prayer of Azariah
  - Song of the Three Young Men
  - Susanna
  - Bel and the Dragon
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees
- 3 Maccabees
- 4 Maccabees
- 1 Esdras (sometimes 3 Ezra or 2 Esdras)
- 2 Esdras (sometimes 3 Esdras or 4–6 Ezra)
- Prayer of Manasseh
- Psalm 151
- *Odes*

Because of the artificial nature of the Apocrypha's grouping, the various lists of the Apocrypha differ.

For further details on the individual books, see these articles: Tobit, Book of; Judith, Book of; Esther, Additions To; Wisdom of Solomon, Book of; Sirach, Book of; Sirach, Book of, Critical Issues; Baruch, Book of; Letter of Jeremiah; Daniel, Additions To; Prayer of Azariah; Song of the Three Young Men; Susanna, Text; Bel and the Dragon; Maccabees, Books of the; Maccabees, First Book of The; Maccabees, Second Book of The; Maccabees, Third Book of The; Maccabees, Fourth Book of The; Esdras, Books of; Esdras, First Book of; Esdras, Second Book of; Prayer of Manasseh; Psalm 151; Odes, Book of.

Historical Context

The books of the Apocrypha are varied and contain few similarities; their historical contexts also vary. While some of the books may claim earlier origins—such as Tobit, which could have been originally composed in the third or fourth century BC—the earliest identifiable book is Sirach; it was written by Joshua ben Sira, a Jewish scribe, in Hebrew around 180 BC and then translated into Greek circa 132 BC by his grandson (Sirach Prologue; 50:27). On the other hand, 2 Esdras, a group of three related texts, probably dates to AD 100 or later.

Many of these works were probably composed outside of Palestine, as far away as Egypt or Persia (DeSilva, *Introducing*, 16). Many also appear to be at odds with or at a distance from the world they purport to cover. With the exception of 2 Esdras, all come down to us today via the Greek (not counting recent archaeological finds such as the Aramaic fragments of Tobit found in

the Dead Sea Scrolls). Unfortunately, little concrete information exists about the origin or historical context of the books of the Apocrypha (Stone, *Jewish Writings*).

History of Reception

The reception history of the Apocrypha is not always very clear, especially in the early years of the church. A nonexhaustive timeline of the reception of the Apocrypha is below.

Negative Reception	Positive Reception
400 BC: End of the Old Testament age after Malachi (unless the later completion date for the book Daniel is accepted, as second-century BC)	
	250 BC: Beginning of the Septuagint translations (the Torah); through its transmission process, the Septuagint ultimately accepts most of the Apocrypha
132 BC: Sirach alludes to an Old Testament canon in its prologue	
100 BC: The Community Rule/Zadokite Fragments may ascribe inspiration only to books in the Old Testament canon	
AD 40: Philo omits apocryphal books from his writings	
AD 90: 2 Esdras argues for a closed Old Testament canon	AD 90: Clement references Wisdom of Solomon, Judith, and Additions to Esther
AD 95: Josephus argues for a closed Old Testament canon (*Against Apion* 1.39–40)	
	AD 150: Polycarp references Tobit (Polycarp, *To the Philippians*, 10.2)
AD 160: Melito of Sardis excludes all Apocrypha, except possibly the Wisdom of Solomon (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.26.14)	

	AD 200: Irenaeus references Wisdom of Solomon (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.26)
AD 230: Julius Africanus argues Susanna is fake in a letter to Origen	
AD 230: Origen includes the Letter of Jeremiah in his Old Testament canon list but excludes the rest (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.2)	
AD 300: Rabbinic consensus against canonization of all Apocrypha (*t. Yadayim* 2:13B)	
AD 350: Cyril of Jerusalem rejects all Apocrypha (*Cat. Lect.*, 4.35)	
AD 360: Council of Laodicea excludes the Apocrypha	
AD 367: Athanasius includes Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah in his canon list, but others are edifying, not canonical (*Ep. fest.*, 39.4)	
AD 370: Gregory of Nazianzus rejects the Apocrypha as noncanonical	
AD 392: Jerome rejects the Apocrypha as noncanonical	
	AD 397: Council of Carthage affirms the Apocrypha
	AD 692: Second Council in Trullo affirms the Apocrypha
AD 740: John of Damascus rejects Apocrypha (*De Fide Orth.*, 4.17)	
AD 1300: First known commentary on an apocryphal book (Wisdom of Solomon)	

AD 1382: John Wycliffe denies canonicity of Apocrypha	
	AD 1441: Council of Union affirms canonicity of Apocrypha
AD 1534: Martin Luther writes in his prefaces to the Apocrypha that they are useful but not sacred	
	AD 1546: Council of Trent affirms the canonicity of the Apocrypha
	AD 1566: Sixtus of Siena distinguishes between the biblical books and Apocrypha, coining the term "deuterocanonical"
	AD 1611: King James Version printed with the Apocrypha
AD 1643: John Lightfoot writes of "the wretched Apocrypha" (*Works of John Lightfoot*, 6.131)	
AD 1648: Westminster Confession excludes the Apocrypha	
	AD 1672: Council of Jerusalem affirms the canonicity of the Apocrypha
AD 1825: British and Foreign Bible Society drop the Apocrypha from Bibles	
	AD 1952: Semitic fragments of Tobit, Sirach and Psalm 151, and possibly Greek fragments of the Letter of Jeremiah, are found among the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Apocrypha's Relationship to the Bible

The relationship of the Apocrypha to the Bible—specifically their authority and canonicity—is complex because of insufficient knowledge of the past, dogmatic disagreements, and the temptation to oversimplify the issue. Understanding the relationship of the Apocrypha to the Bible requires consideration of several critical issues.

Usage of Terms

"Apocrypha" ("hidden") is a pejorative term that does not accurately describe the contents of the books or their reception throughout history. The books that comprise the Apocrypha were included in most Bibles throughout church history, but were usually ignored, not hidden.

The term "Apocrypha" as used in this article is primarily a Protestant term; Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians use other terminology to refer to the books of the Apocrypha discussed in this article.

The term "deuterocanonical" (literally, "second canon") is a Roman Catholic term for books that are in the Catholic Old Testament canon but are not in the Hebrew Bible; the books included in the Hebrew Bible are called "protocanonical" (literally, "first canon"). Both the protocanonical and deuterocanonical books are fully canonical from the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church reserves the term "apocrypha" for books outside the Roman Catholic canon, including ones that would be labeled as part of the Pseudepigrapha by Protestants.

Similarly, the Eastern Orthodox Church reserves the term "apocrypha" for books outside the Eastern Orthodox canon; books in the Eastern Orthodox canon that are not included in the Hebrew Bible are sometimes referred to as *anagignoskomena* (literally, "readables").

Thus, the books Protestants call "apocryphal" are canonical (for the most part) to Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians; the books Protestants call "pseudepigraphical" are "apocryphal" to Roman Catholics and Orthodox. Rabbinic Jews from the period of early Christianity referred to the Apocrypha as "outside books" (*m. Sanhedrin* 10.1)

Many church fathers, such as Jerome, believed the Apocrypha were edifying and had a level of authority but did not bear the same weight as the undisputed books of the Old Testament. Jerome referred to the books as "ecclesiastical," meaning "useful in church" (DeSilva, *Introducing*, 37).

Weighing the Evidence

Historically speaking, some of the books of the Apocrypha are considered more authoritative than others. For example, Sirach appears to have historically been used more like a biblical or canonical book than 4 Maccabees. Furthermore, Protestants, Roman Catholics, and the various Orthodox communions have different reasons and arguments for using or rejecting the Apocrypha. While the term "deuterocanonical" originates in the Reformation, it is inaccurate to say that the Roman Catholic Church canonized the texts of the Apocrypha at the Council of Trent (1546) as a reaction to Protestant thought; instead, the Roman Catholic Church can point to the Council of Carthage (397) and the long tradition in parts of the church proceeding from that time.

At the same time, much of the evidence for canonicity of the apocryphal texts is circumstantial; a church father's citation of an apocryphal book has limited relevance for its canonical status. Ultimately, much depends on where someone stands in the "canonical circle": If canonization comes before the church, the evidence for the Apocrypha falls short. If the church comes before canonization, then the Apocrypha may faithfully be considered canonical by segments of the church at large.

Origin of the Name "Apocrypha"

The exact origin of the name "Apocrypha" is uncertain. Irenaeus of Lyons is the first person recorded to have used the word "apocrypha" in a Christian context; in *Against Heresies*, he used it to describe a spurious text. However, Irenaeus was not referring to the books called apocryphal

today but some unknown legends from the New Testament period. Tertullian did the same thing a few years later, calling the *Shepherd of Hermas* (a well-regarded book in the early church) apocryphal and false.

Origen first used the term "apocrypha" to describe a group of texts in his letter to Julius Africanus (AD 230), which deals in part with historical problems in Susanna (Origen, *Ep. Afr.*). The meaning of the term "apocrypha" is uncertain; it apparently has a negative connotation in most instances of usage in the ancient world. Jerome uses the Latin *absconditus* for the Greek ἀπόκρυφος (*apokryphos*), perhaps to indicate that the books are not only "hidden" (put away from common usage) but are also "unknown" (hidden away from our ability to understand where they came from; Jerome, *Letters*, 96; compare Augustine, *City of God*, 15.23).

The Apocrypha in Popular Culture

The books of the Apocrypha have made a greater impact on popular culture than on theology over their 2,000-year history. This is due in large part to lingering questions over their authority and suitability for use in the development of doctrine; while texts or themes originating in apocryphal books do show up in some church liturgies (mostly in Roman Catholic and Orthodox tradition), they are typically used in special situations. Furthermore, the Apocrypha often enjoy more cultural interest because of what is sometimes viewed as their hidden or esoteric qualities.

The stories of several of the apocryphal books are ideal for popular enculturation. For example, Tobit introduces the idea of a "guardian angel" with Raphael disguising (Tobit 5:4), testing, aiding and even running errands (Tobit 9:2) for Tobias. The Apocrypha also influenced the literary works of Shakespeare and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and several of Handel's oratorios. Depictions of Tobit, Judith, and Susanna appear in many Renaissance-era works of art. Second Esdras 6:42 provided rationalization for Christopher Columbus' transatlantic journey (Metzger, *Introduction*, xvi).

Books in the Old Testament Canon of Other Christian Groups

The Protestant canon of the Old Testament includes only the books of the Hebrew Bible. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Old Testament canons include additional books from the Apocrypha as defined in this article but no further books outside those of the Hebrew Bible and the Apocrypha. However, some other Christian traditions include additional Old Testament books. In particular, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church includes *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *4 Baruch*, and a work known as *Meqabyan* or the Ethiopian books of *Maccabees* (unrelated to the Septuagint books of Maccabees); the broader version of the Ethiopian Orthodox canon also includes the book of *Josippon*. Churches of the Syriac tradition include *4 Baruch* and the *Letter of Baruch*. These books are usually classified in academic scholarship as Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, not as Old Testament Apocrypha, because they are not included in the Latin Vulgate or the Greek Septuagint. However, it should be recognized that, unlike most works classified as Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, the works mentioned in this section are canonical for some Christian traditions.

For a listing of books included in the biblical canons of different tradition, see this article: Canon of the Bible, Traditions of The.

Related Articles

For more information on the development of the Old Testament canon, see this article: Canon, Old Testament.

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Excerpt from the article in the Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible:

III. The Apocrypha and Christianity. At the beginning of the Christian era, the LXX was the text of Scripture used by Greek-speaking Jews (see SEPTUAGINT). When the Christian church came into existence, its members felt no particular urge to repudiate those familiar compositions found in the LXX canon that were not represented in the Hebrew Scriptures. Although there may be instances where certain NT writers reflected the imagery or phraseology of some apocryphal compositions, they never cited them either as inspired or as sources of spiritual authority. One of the great values of the Apocrypha for the Christians was the fact that it bridged the gap between the end of prophecy and the writing of the NT books, furnishing valuable historical, political, and religious information that would otherwise have been difficult to obtain.

A. The early church. Quite aside from the possibility that apocryphal writings were reflected in the NT (cf. Heb. 1:1–3; Wisd. 7:25–27), it seems clear that they were used for instructing believers in the early Christian period. The epistle known as *1 Clement* (d. A.D. 95) included quotations from the Wisdom of Solomon, while POLYCARP of Smyrna (d. c. A.D. 156) quoted from Tobit. TERTULLIAN (d. c. A.D. 225) and IRENAEUS (d. c. A.D. 200) cited certain books of the LXX canon as scriptural and were followed in this by CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, ORIGEN, and Cyprian. JEROME (d. A.D. 420) regarded as apocryphal all those writings that stood outside the Hebrew canon, but in his Latin translation (the Vulgate) he included them according to church

practice, though not without some reservations. Jerome and Cyril of Jerusalem (d. c. A.D. 386) were the first to use the term Apocrypha for the excess of the LXX over the Hebrew canon. In his earlier writings AUGUSTINE (d. A.D. 430) accepted the traditional church view that the Apocrypha were canonical, but later he admitted to a difference between the Hebrew Canon and the "outside books." Thus in the early church the degree in which the Hebrew canon was esteemed determined the attitude adopted toward the Apocrypha.

B. The Reformation. For the Reformers the Bible was the sole and supreme authority in matters of belief and conduct, raising questions as to the status of the Apocrypha in this connection. Luther gathered the "outside books" from Greek and Latin MSS and placed them at the end of his 1534 German translation under the heading of "Apocrypha." The Roman Catholic Church responded quickly in the Council of Trent (1546) by acknowledging as canonical all of the Apocrypha except 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. In the 1592 edition of the Vulgate, these three works formed an appendix to the NT. Calvin and his followers explicitly rejected any authority that the Apocrypha might have claimed or received, holding that the contents were not divinely inspired. After Luther's day, translations of the Bible in various European languages segregated the Apocrypha, and after 1626 some editions of the KJV appeared without it.

C. Post-Reformation attitudes. The controversy regarding the canonicity of the Apocrypha ended in a stalemate, with the Roman Catholic Church holding that it was of equal inspiration and authority with the rest of Scripture, while Reformed tradition firmly rejected it as divinely inspired Scripture. The Church of England formularies (Article 6) recognized its use "for example of life and instruction of manners," but the *Westminster Confession* (1.3) forbade it to be "in any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings" (see P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* [1882], 3:490–91, 602). In modern times the value of the Apocrypha for both Judaism and primitive Christianity has been amply recognized, and the discoveries at Qumran have given new zest to studies of the intertestamental period and its massive literature (though interestingly enough, the Apocrypha are not represented significantly in MS discoveries at Qumran).