How We Got the Bible

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# The Apocrypha Books

## Introduction

Today there is very little discussion concerning which books rightfully belong in the Bible. The canon of the Holy Scriptures in settled. Catholicism and Protestantism are united in their acceptance of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament but concerning the books of the Old Testament this not the case. The Roman Catholic Bible contains several additional books in its Old Testament section that are not found in most Protestant Bibles. The extra books are generally referred to as the “Apocrypha.”

The word *apocrypha* has come into the English language from the Greek and basically means “hidden.” It was used very early in the sense of “secretive” or “concealed” but was also used in reference to a book whose origin was doubtful or unknown. Eventually the word took on the meaning of “non-canonical” and thus for centuries the non-canonical books have been known as apocryphal books. In the Protestant circles “the Apocrypha” is the normal designation for those extra books which are found in the Catholic Old Testament. The Roman Catholic term for the books of the “Apocrypha” is “deuterocanonical,” acknowledging that these questioned books were not originally a part of the canon but were accepted later.

## Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament

First, we must understand that there are both New Testament and Old Testament apocryphal writings. We will be covering the Old Testament Apocrypha. The Old Testament Apocrypha includes either fourteen or fifteen books, depending on the methods of counting, which were written in the period of 300 B.C. to A.D. 100.

Below is a list of books that traditionally included in the Apocrypha:

1. The First Book of Esdras (also known as Third Esdras)
2. The Second Book of Esdras (also known as Fourth Esdras)
3. Tobit
4. Judith
5. The Additions to the Book of Esther
6. The Wisdom of Solomon
7. Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Sone of Sirach
8. Baruch
9. The Letter of Jeramiah (This letter is sometimes incorporated as the last chapter of Baruch. When this is done, the number of books is fourteen instead of fifteen.)
10. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men
11. Susanna
12. Bel and the Dragon
13. The Prayer of Manasseh
14. The First Book of Maccabees
15. The Second Book of Maccabees

Three of the fifteen books (1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh) are not considered canonical by the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Bible has 46 books in the Old Testament whereas the Protestant Bible has only 39.

## Contents of These Books

The Old Testament Apocrypha covers a broad range of subjects and represents different varieties of literary form.

1. Historical – 1 Esdras, 1 and 2 Maccabees
   1. First Esdras is an ill-arranged collection of much of the material found in the canonical Ezra.
      1. Includes legendary account which are not supported by the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.
   2. First Maccabees is an important source of Jewish history during the second century B.C.
   3. Second Maccabees concerns the same general period but is not as historically reliable as 1 Maccabees.
2. Legendary – Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Additions to Daniel (Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon.)
   1. Tobit is a story about a fictitious character named Tobit who was a religious Israelite who as captured by the Assyrians and taken to Nineveh.
      1. The purpose of the story is to encourage keeping the Law.
   2. The Book of Judith is likewise classified as a fiction.
      1. The story is about a widow named to Judith who delivers her city and people from impeding destruction.
      2. The purpose of this story is to incite a patriotic spirit against Jewish foes.
   3. The Additions to Esther are expansion of the canonical Esther which were probably handed down through the centuries by oral tradition.
   4. The Additions to Daniel contain tales and legends which originated probably not much earlier than 100 B.C. and form not part of the genuine text of Daniel.
3. Prophetic – Baruch, Letters of Jeremiah, 2 Esdras
   1. Baruch claims to be from the hand of Jeremiah’s friend with that name, but this impossible because it only goes back to the Christian era.
   2. The Letters of Jeremiah were appended to Baruch is a tract of the vanities of idolatry. It could not have been written by Jeremiah because it only dates to 300 B.C.
   3. Second Esdras is an apocalyptic work (Greek *apocalyptic* meaning “*revelation*”)
4. Ethical/Devotional – Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom of Solomon, Prayer of Manasseh
   1. Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach was written by a Palestinian Jew about 200 B.C.
      1. It is one of the chief works of the Apocrypha written in a style like the Book of Proverbs.
   2. The Wisdom of Solomon is a book of ancient Jewish philosophy. It is traced back to the city of Alexandria and to the first century A.D.
   3. The Prayer of Manasseh is a prayer put in the mouth of King Manasseh after he was taken captive in Babylon.
      1. Though not from Manasseh, it is a beautiful prayer.

## Why These Books Are Rejected

1. They were never included in the Hebrew Old Testament
2. They were never accepted as canonical by Jesus and his apostles.
3. They were not accepted by early Jewish and Christian writers.
4. They do not evidence intrinsic qualities of inspiration.
5. They have been shrouded with continual uncertainty.
6. They cannot be maintained on a compromise basis.
7. Objections to them cannot be overruled by dictatorial authority.

The apocryphal books, whether associated with the Old or New Testament, are rightfully rejected from our Bible.

## A Frequent Question

If the Apocrypha is to be rejected, then why is reference made in the Book of Jude 9, 14-15, to non-canonical literature?

* Jude 9 supposedly alludes to a work called the Assumption of Moses. This survives only in fragments, but the extant fragments do not have the incident referred to in Jude.
* Jude 14-15 is from an apocalyptic book known as 1 Enoch.

There is nothing unusual about this because Paul did the same in 2 Tim. 3:8 and even call one of the Greek poets a “prophet” in Titus 1:12. Paul and Jude may have be speaking to their audience illustratively by using the writings that were so familiar to their readers and to their opponents.

## The Apocryphal Books of the New Testament

The New Testament Apocrypha superficially tries to imitate the kinds of books in the New Testament and thus includes a variety of literary types:

The New Testament Apocrypha superficially tries to imitate the kinds of books in the New Testament and thus includes a variety of literary types: Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses. Dating from the second century and later, these books were written under assumed names: Gospel of Peter, the Protevangelium(meaning “first gospel”) of James, the Gospel of Bartholomew, the Infancy Story of Thomas, The Acts of Peter, the Acts of John, the Acts of Paul – and on an on it goes.

Here are the ancient New Testament Apocrypha with translations and commentary. The Apocrypha are documents that were not accepted into the canon of the New Testament by the orthodox church. The New Testament Apocrypha are those writings that were written by ancient Christians that were not accepted into the New Testament

1. [The Gospel of Thomas](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas.html)
2. [Oxyrhynchus 1224 Gospel](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/oxyrhynchus1224.html)
3. [The Egerton Gospel](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/egerton.html)
4. [The Gospel of Peter](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/gospelpeter.html)
5. [Secret Mark](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/secretmark.html)
6. [The Gospel of the Egyptians](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/gospelegyptians.html)
7. [The Gospel of the Hebrews](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/gospelhebrews.html)
8. [The Apocalypse of Peter](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/apocalypsepeter.html)
9. [The Secret Book of James](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/secretjames.html)
10. [The Preaching of Peter](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/preachingpeter.html)
11. [The Gospel of the Ebionites](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/gospelebionites.html)
12. [The Gospel of the Nazoreans](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/gospelnazoreans.html)
13. [The Oxyrhynchus 840 Gospel](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/oxyrhynchus840.html)
14. [The Traditions of Matthias](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/traditionsmatthias.html)
15. [The Gospel of Mary](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/gospelmary.html)
16. [The Dialogue of the Savior](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/dialoguesavior.html)
17. [The Gospel of the Savior](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/gospelsavior.html)
18. [The Epistula Apostolorum](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/apostolorum.html)
19. [The Infancy Gospel of James](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/infancyjames.html)
20. [The Infancy Gospel of Thomas](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/infancythomas.html)
21. [The Acts of Peter](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/actspeter.html)
22. [The Acts of John](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/actsjohn.html)
23. [The Acts of Paul](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/actspaul.html)
24. [The Acts of Andrew](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/actsandrew.html)
25. [The Acts of Peter and the Twelve](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/actspetertwelve.html)
26. [The Book of Thomas the Contender](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/contender.html)
27. [The Acts of Thomas](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/actsthomas.html)

Anyone who has doubts about the New Testament canon should take the time to read some of the New Testament Apocrypha. Below are examples of what you will find:

1. In the Infancy Story of Thomas – a child bumps his should and Jesus strike him dead.
2. Gospel of Peter – Three men come out of Jesus’ tomb with a cross following them; the head of two of them reaches to heaven, the head of the other overpasses the heavens.
3. Protevangelium of James – Mary is brought up in the temple dedicated as a virgin from the age of 3.
4. Acts of John – Finding bedbugs in his bed at an inn, John commands the bugs to leave and behave themselves.
5. Acts of Paul – Paul baptizes a lion, who later spares him from death in the amphitheater at Ephesus.

The writings of the Apostolic Fathers (A.D. 95-155) are not to be classified as New Testament Apocrypha as they are simply letters of edification and encouragement written by ordinary Christian and do not profess apostolic wisdom and authority.

## Note

There are in all 283 direct quotations from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) in the New Testament. In about 90 instances, the Septuagint is literally quoted. In around 80 further instances, the quote is altered in some way. This list has all the Old Testament books that are never explicitly quoted in the New Testament.

1. Judges
2. Ruth
3. Ezra
4. Esther
5. Ecclesiastes
6. Song of Solomon
7. Lamentations
8. Obadiah
9. Jonah
10. Zephaniah