

Biblical Apocrypha

Subjects: Religion

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The biblical apocrypha (from the Greek ἀπόκρυφος, *apókryphos*, meaning "hidden") denotes the collection of apocryphal ancient books found in some editions of Christian Bibles in a separate section between the Old and New Testaments or as an appendix after the New Testament. Some Christian Churches include some or all of the same texts within the body of their version of the Old Testament. Although the term apocrypha had been in use since the 5th century, it was in Luther's Bible of 1534 that the Apocrypha was first published as a separate intertestamental section. To this date, the Apocrypha is "included in the lectionaries of Anglican and Lutheran Churches." Moreover, the Revised Common Lectionary, in use by most mainline Protestants including Methodists and Moravians, lists readings from the Apocrypha in the liturgical kalendar, although alternate Old Testament scripture lessons are provided.

The preface to the Apocrypha in the Geneva Bible explained that while these books "were not received by a common consent to be read and expounded publicly in the Church," and did not serve "to prove any point of Christian religion save in so much as they had the consent of the other scriptures called canonical to confirm the same," nonetheless, "as books proceeding from godly men they were received to be read for the advancement and furtherance of the knowledge of history and for the instruction of godly manners." Later, during the English Civil War, the Westminster Confession of 1647 excluded the Apocrypha from the canon and made no recommendation of the Apocrypha above "other human writings", and this attitude towards the Apocrypha is represented by the decision of the British and Foreign Bible Society in the early 19th century not to print it (see below). Today, "English Bibles with the Apocrypha are becoming more popular again" and they are often printed as intertestamental books. Most of the books of the Protestant Apocrypha are called deuterocanonical by Catholics per the Council of Trent and all of them are called anagignoskomena by the Eastern Orthodox per the Synod of Jerusalem. The Anglican Communion accepts "the Apocrypha for instruction in life and manners, but not for the establishment of doctrine (Article VI in the Thirty-Nine Articles)", and many "lectionary readings in The Book of Common Prayer are taken from the Apocrypha", with these lessons being "read in the same ways as those from the Old Testament". The first Methodist liturgical book, The Sunday Service of the Methodists, employs verses from the Apocrypha, such as in the Eucharistic liturgy. The Protestant Apocrypha contains three books (3 Esdras, 4 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh) that are accepted by many Eastern Orthodox Churches and Oriental Orthodox Churches as canonical, but are regarded as non-canonical by the Catholic Church and are therefore not included in modern Catholic Bibles.

Keywords: apocryphal ; religion ; deuterocanonical

1. Biblical Canon

2. Vulgate Prologues

Jerome completed his version of the Bible, the Latin Vulgate, in 405. In the Middle Ages the Vulgate became the de facto standard version of the Bible in the West. The Vulgate manuscripts included prologues^[1] that Jerome clearly identified certain books of the older Old Latin Old Testament version as apocryphal or non-canonical - even though they might be read as scripture.

In the prologue to the books of Samuel and Kings, which is often called the *Prologus Galeatus*, he says:^[2]

This preface to the Scriptures may serve as a "helmeted" introduction to all the books which we turn from Hebrew into Latin, so that we may be assured that what is not found in our list must be placed amongst the Apocryphal writings. Wisdom, therefore, which generally bears the name of Solomon, and the book of Jesus, the Son of Sirach, and Judith, and Tobias, and the Shepherd are not in the canon. The first book of Maccabees I have found to be Hebrew, the second is Greek, as can be proved from the very style.

In the prologue to Ezra Jerome states that that the third book and fourth book of Ezra are apocryphal; while the two books of Ezra in the *Vetus Latina* version, translating Ezra A and Ezra B of the Septuagint, are 'variant examples' of the same Hebrew original.^[3]

In his prologue to the books of Solomon, he says:^[4]

Also included is the book of the model of virtue (πανάρετος) Jesus son of Sirach, and another falsely ascribed work (ψευδεπιγραφος) which is titled Wisdom of Solomon. The former of these I have also found in Hebrew, titled not Ecclesiasticus as among the Latins, but Parables, to which were joined Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, as though it made of equal worth the likeness not only of the number of the books of Solomon, but also the kind of subjects. The second was never among the Hebrews, the very style of which reeks of Greek eloquence. And none of the ancient scribes affirm this one is of Philo Judaeus. Therefore, just as the Church also reads the books of Judith, Tobias, and the Maccabees, but does not receive them among the canonical Scriptures, so also one may read these two scrolls for the strengthening of the people, (but) not for confirming the authority of ecclesiastical dogmas.

He mentions the book of Baruch in his prologue to the Jeremias but does not include it as 'apocrypha'; stating that "it is neither read nor held among the Hebrews" and should be omitted altogether from scripture.^[5]

In his prologue to the Judith he mentions that "among the Hebrews, the authority [of Judith] came into contention", but that it was "counted in the number of Sacred Scriptures" by the First Council of Nicaea.^[6] In his reply to Rufinus, he affirmed that he was consistent with the choice of the church regarding which version of the deuterocanonical portions of Daniel to use, which the Jews of his day did not include:

What sin have I committed in following the judgment of the churches? But when I repeat what the Jews say against the Story of Susanna and the Hymn of the Three Children, and the fables of Bel and the Dragon, which are not contained in the Hebrew Bible, the man who makes this a charge against me proves himself to be a fool and a slanderer; for I explained not what I thought but what they commonly say against us. (*Against Rufinus*, II:33 (AD 402)).^[7]

According to Michael Barber, although Jerome was once suspicious of the apocrypha, he later viewed them as Scripture as shown in his epistles. Barber cites Jerome's letter to Eustochium, in which Jerome quotes Sirach 13:2;^[8] elsewhere Jerome also refers to Baruch, the Story of Susannah and Wisdom as scripture.^{[9][10][11]}

3. Apocrypha in Editions of the Bible

Apocrypha are well attested in surviving manuscripts of the Christian Bible. (See, for example, Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Alexandrinus, Vulgate, and Peshitta.) After the Lutheran and Catholic canons were defined by Luther (c. 1534) and Trent^[12] (8 April 1546) respectively, early Protestant editions of the Bible (notably the Luther Bible in German and 1611 King James Version in English) did not omit these books, but placed them in a separate *Apocrypha* section apart from the Old and New Testaments to indicate their status.

3.1. Gutenberg Bible

This famous edition of the Vulgate was published in 1455. Like the manuscripts it was based on, the Gutenberg Bible lacked a specific Apocrypha section;^[13] its Old Testament included the books that Jerome considered apocryphal, and those Clement VIII later moved to the appendix. The Prayer of Manasses was located after the Books of Chronicles, and 3 and 4 Esdras followed 2 Esdras (Nehemiah), and Prayer of Solomon followed Ecclesiasticus.

3.2. Luther Bible

Martin Luther translated the Bible into German during the early part of the 16th century, first releasing a complete Bible in 1534. His Bible was the first major edition to have a separate section called *Apocrypha*. Books and portions of books not found in the Masoretic Text of Judaism were moved out of the body of the Old Testament to this section.^[14] Luther placed these books between the Old and New Testaments. For this reason, these works are sometimes known as *inter-testamental books*. The books 1 and 2 Esdras were omitted entirely.^[15] Luther was making a polemical point about the canonicity of these books. As an authority for this division, he cited St. Jerome, who in the early 5th century distinguished the Hebrew and Greek Old Testaments,^[16] stating that books not found in the Hebrew were not received as canonical. Although his statement was controversial in his day,^[17] Jerome was later titled a Doctor of the Church and his authority was also cited in the Anglican statement in 1571 of the Thirty-Nine Articles.^[18]

Luther also expressed some doubts about the canonicity of four New Testament books, although he never called them apocrypha: the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistles of James and Jude, and the Revelation to John. He did not put them in a separate named section, but he did move them to the end of his New Testament.^[19]

3.3. Clementine Vulgate

In 1592, Pope Clement VIII published his revised edition of the Vulgate, referred to as the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate. He moved three books not found in the canon of the Council of Trent from the Old Testament into an appendix "lest they utterly perish" (*ne prorsus interirent*).^[20]

- Prayer of Manasses

- 3 Esdras (1 Esdras in the King James Bible)
- 4 Esdras (2 Esdras in the King James Bible)

The protocanonical and deuterocanonical books he placed in their traditional positions in the Old Testament.

3.4. King James Version

The English-language King James Version (KJV) of 1611 followed the lead of the Luther Bible in using an inter-testamental section labelled "Books called Apocrypha", or just "Apocrypha" at the running page header.^[21] The KJV followed the Geneva Bible of 1560 almost exactly (variations are marked below). The section contains the following:^[22]

- 1 Esdras (Vulgate 3 Esdras)
- 2 Esdras (Vulgate 4 Esdras)
- Tobit
- Judith ("*Judeth*" in Geneva)
- Rest of Esther (Vulgate Esther 10:4 – 16:24)
- Wisdom
- Ecclesiasticus (also known as Sirach)
- Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremy ("*Jeremiah*" in Geneva) (all part of Vulgate Baruch)
- Song of the Three Children (Vulgate Daniel 3:24–90)
- Story of Susanna (Vulgate Daniel 13)
- The Idol Bel and the Dragon (Vulgate Daniel 14)
- Prayer of Manasses (Daniel)
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees

(Included in this list are those books of the Clementine Vulgate that were not in Luther's canon).

These are the books most frequently referred to by the casual appellation "*the Apocrypha*". These same books are also listed in *Article VI* of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England.^[23] Despite being placed in the Apocrypha, in the table of lessons at the front of some printings of the King James Bible, these books are included under the Old Testament.

3.5. The Bible and the Puritan Revolution

The British Puritan revolution of the 1600s brought a change in the way many British publishers handled the apocryphal material associated with the Bible. The Puritans used the standard of Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone) to determine which books would be included in the canon. The Westminster Confession of Faith, composed during the British Civil Wars (1642–1651), excluded the *Apocrypha* from the canon. The Confession provided the rationale for the exclusion: 'The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings' (1.3).^[24] Thus, Bibles printed by English Protestants who separated from the Church of England began to exclude these books.

3.6. Other Early Bible Editions

All English translations of the Bible printed in the sixteenth century included a section or appendix for Apocryphal books. Matthew's Bible, published in 1537, contains all the Apocrypha of the later King James Version in an inter-testamental section. The 1538 Myles Coverdale Bible contained an Apocrypha that excluded Baruch and the Prayer of Manasseh. The 1560 Geneva Bible placed the Prayer of Manasseh after 2 Chronicles; the rest of the Apocrypha were placed in an inter-testamental section. The Douay-Rheims Bible (1582–1609) placed the Prayer of Manasseh and 3 and 4 Esdras into an Appendix of the second volume of the Old Testament.

In the Zürich Bible (1529–30) they are placed in an Appendix. They include 3 Maccabees, along with 1 Esdras & 2 Esdras. The 1st edition omitted the Prayer of Manasseh and the Rest of Esther, although these were included in the 2nd edition. The French Bible (1535) of Pierre Robert Olivétan placed them between the Testaments, with the subtitle, "The volume of the apocryphal books contained in the Vulgate translation, which we have not found in the Hebrew or Chaldee".

In 1569 the Spanish Reina Bible, following the example of the pre-Clementine Latin Vulgate, contained the deuterocanonical books in its Old Testament. Following the other Protestant translations of its day, Valera's 1602 revision of the Reina Bible moved these books into an inter-testamental section.

3.7. Modern Editions

All King James Bibles published before 1666 included the Apocrypha,^[25] though separately to denote them as not equal to Scripture proper, as noted by Jerome in the Vulgate, to which he gave the name, "The Apocrypha."^[26] In 1826,^[27] the National Bible Society of Scotland petitioned the British and Foreign Bible Society not to print the Apocrypha,^[28] resulting in a decision that no BFBS funds were to pay for printing any Apocryphal books anywhere. They reasoned that not printing the Apocrypha within the Bible would prove to be less costly to produce.^{[29][30]} Since that time most modern

editions of the Bible and reprintings of the King James Bible omit the Apocrypha section. Modern non-Catholic reprintings of the Clementine Vulgate commonly omit the Apocrypha section. Many reprintings of older versions of the Bible now omit the apocrypha and many newer translations and revisions have never included them at all.

There are some exceptions to this trend, however. Some editions of the Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible include not only the Apocrypha listed above, but also the third and fourth books of Maccabees, and Psalm 151.

The American Bible Society lifted restrictions on the publication of Bibles with the Apocrypha in 1964. The British and Foreign Bible Society followed in 1966.^[31] The Stuttgart edition of the Vulgate (the printed edition, not most of the on-line editions), which is published by the UBS, contains the Clementine Apocrypha as well as the Epistle to the Laodiceans and Psalm 151.

Brenton's edition of the Septuagint includes all of the Apocrypha found in the King James Bible with the exception of 2 Esdras, which was not in the Septuagint and is no longer extant in Greek.^[32] He places them in a separate section at the end of his Old Testament, following English tradition.

In Greek circles, however, these books are not traditionally called *Apocrypha*, but *Anagignoskomena* (ἀναγινωσκόμενα), and are integrated into the Old Testament. The Orthodox Study Bible, published by Thomas Nelson Publishers, includes the Anagignoskomena in its Old Testament, with the exception of 4 Maccabees. This was translated by the Saint Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, from the Rahlfs Edition of the Septuagint using Brenton's English translation and the RSV Expanded Apocrypha as boilerplate. As such, they are included in the Old Testament with no distinction between these books and the rest of the Old Testament. This follows the tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church where the Septuagint is the received version of Old Testament scripture, considered itself inspired in agreement with some of the Fathers, such as St Augustine, rather than the Hebrew Masoretic text followed by all other modern translations.^[33]

3.8. Anagignoskomena

The Septuagint, the ancient and best known Greek version of the Old Testament, contains books and additions that are not present in the Hebrew Bible. These texts are not traditionally segregated into a separate section, nor are they usually called apocrypha. Rather, they are referred to as the Anagignoskomena (ἀναγινωσκόμενα, "things that are read" or "profitable reading"). The anagignoskomena are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira (Sirach), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah (in the Vulgate this is chapter 6 of Baruch), additions to Daniel (The Prayer of Azarias, Susanna and Bel and the Dragon), additions to Esther, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees, 1 Esdras, i.e. all of the Deuterocanonical books plus 3 Maccabees and 1 Esdras.^[34]

Some editions add additional books, such as Psalm 151 or the Odes (including the Prayer of Manasses). 2 Esdras is added as an appendix in the Slavonic Bibles and 4 Maccabees as an appendix in Greek editions.^[34]

4. Pseudepigrapha

Technically, a pseudepigraphon is a book written in a biblical style and ascribed to an author who did not write it. In common usage, however, the term pseudepigrapha is often used by way of distinction to refer to apocryphal writings that do not appear in printed editions of the Bible, as opposed to the texts listed above. Examples^[35] include:

- *Apocalypse of Abraham*
- *Apocalypse of Moses*
- *Letter of Aristeas*
- *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*
- *Joseph and Aseneth*
- *Life of Adam and Eve*
- *Lives of the Prophets*
- *Ladder of Jacob*
- *Jannes and Jambres*
- *History of the Captivity in Babylon*
- *History of the Rechabites*
- *Eldad and Modad*
- *History of Joseph*
- *Odes of Solomon*
- *Prayer of Joseph*
- *Prayer of Jacob*
- *Vision of Ezra*

Often included among the pseudepigrapha are 3 and 4 Maccabees because they are not traditionally found in western Bibles, although they are in the Septuagint. Similarly, the Book of Enoch, Book of Jubilees and 4 Baruch are often listed with the pseudepigrapha although they are commonly included in Ethiopian Bibles. The Psalms of Solomon are found in

5. Classification

The Apocrypha of the King James Bible constitutes the books of the Vulgate that are present neither in the Hebrew Old Testament nor the Greek New Testament. Since these are derived from the Septuagint, from which the old Latin version was translated, it follows that the difference between the KJV and the Roman Catholic Old Testaments is traceable to the difference between the Palestinian and the Alexandrian canons of the Old Testament. This is only true with certain reservations, as the Latin Vulgate was revised by Jerome according to the Hebrew, and, where Hebrew originals were not found, according to the Septuagint. Furthermore, the Vulgate omits 3 and 4 Maccabees, which generally appear in the Septuagint, while the Septuagint and Luther's Bible omit 2 Esdras, which is found in the Apocrypha of the Vulgate and the King James Bible. Luther's Bible, moreover, also omits 1 Esdras. It should further be observed that the Clementine Vulgate places the Prayer of Manasses and 3 Esdras and 4 Esdras in an appendix after the New Testament as apocryphal.

It is hardly possible to form any classification not open to some objection. Scholars are still divided as to the original language, date, and place of composition of some of the books that come under this provisional attempt at order. (Thus some of the additions to Daniel and the Prayer of Manasseh are most probably derived from a Semitic original written in Palestine, yet in compliance with the prevailing opinion they are classed under Hellenistic Jewish literature. Again, the Slavonic Enoch goes back undoubtedly in parts to a Semitic original, though most of it may have been written by a Greek Jew in Egypt.)

A distinction can be made between the Palestinian and the Hellenistic literature of the Old Testament, though even this is open to serious objections. The former literature was written in Hebrew or Aramaic, and seldom in Greek; the latter in Greek.

Next, within these literatures there are three or four classes of subject material.

- Historical,
- Legendary (Haggadic),
- Apocalyptic,
- Didactic or Sapiential.

The Apocrypha proper then would be classified as follows:

- Palestinian Jewish Literature
 - Historical
 - 1 Esdras (i.e. Greek Ezra).
 - 1 Maccabees.
 - Legendary
 - Book of Baruch
 - Book of Judith
 - Apocalyptic
 - 2 Esdras (see also Apocalyptic literature)
 - Didactic
 - Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus)
 - Tobit
- Hellenistic Jewish Literature:
 - Historical and Legendary
 - Additions to Daniel
 - Additions to Esther
 - Epistle of Jeremiah
 - 2 Maccabees
 - Prayer of Manasseh
 - Didactic
 - Book of Wisdom

6. Cultural Impact

- The *introitus*, "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them", of the traditional Requiem in the Catholic Church is loosely based on 4 Esdras 2:34–35.
- The alternative *introitus* for Quasimodo Sunday in the Roman rite of the Catholic Church is loosely based on 4 Esdras 2:36–37.
- The Story of Susanna is perhaps the earliest example of a courtroom drama, and perhaps the first example of an effective forensic cross-examination (there are no others in the Bible: except perhaps Solomon's judgement at 1 Kings 3:25).

- Bel and the Dragon is perhaps the earliest example of a locked room mystery.
- Shylock's reference in *The Merchant of Venice* to "A Daniel come to judgment; yea, a Daniel!" refers to the story of Susanna and the elders.
- The theme of the elders surprising Susanna in her bath is a common one in art, such as in paintings by Tintoretto and Artemisia Gentileschi, and in Wallace Stevens' poem *Peter Quince at the Clavier*.
- *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the title of James Agee's 1941 chronicle of Alabama sharecroppers, was taken from Ecclesiasticus 44:1: "Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us."
- In his spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, John Bunyan recounts how God strengthened him against the temptation to despair of his salvation by inspiring him with the words, "Look at the generations of old and see: did any ever trust in God, and were confounded?"
- "At which I was greatly encouraged in my soul. ... So coming home, I presently went to my Bible, to see if I could find that saying, not doubting but to find it presently. ... Thus I continued above a year, and could not find the place; but at last, casting my eye upon the Apocrypha books, I found it in Ecclesiasticus, chap. ii. 10. This, at the first, did somewhat daunt me; because it was not in those texts that we call holy and canonical; yet, as this sentence was the sum and substance of many of the promises, it was my duty to take the comfort of it; and I bless God for that word, for it was of good to me. That word doth still oftentimes shine before my face.^[36]"

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9. Jerome, To Paulinus, Epistle 58 (AD 395), in NPNF2, VI:119.: "Do not, my dearest brother, estimate my worth by the number of my years. Gray hairs are not wisdom; it is wisdom which is as good as gray hairs At least that is what Solomon says: 'wisdom is the gray hair unto men.' [Wisdom 4:9]" Moses too in choosing the seventy elders is told to take those whom he knows to be elders indeed, and to select them not for their years but for their discretion [Num. 11:16]? And, as a boy, Daniel judges old men and in the flower of youth condemns the incontinence of age [Daniel 13:55–59 aka Story of Susannah 55–59]"
10. Jerome, To Oceanus, Epistle 77:4 (AD 399), in NPNF2, VI:159.: "I would cite the words of the psalmist: 'the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,' [Ps 51:17] and those of Ezekiel 'I prefer the repentance of a sinner rather than his death,' [Ez 18:23] and those of Baruch, 'Arise, arise, O Jerusalem,' [Baruch 5:5] and many other proclamations made by the trumpets of the Prophets."
11. Jerome, Letter 51, 6, 7, NPNF2, VI:87–8: "For in the book of Wisdom, which is inscribed with his name, Solomon says: "God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity." [Wisdom 2:23]...Instead of the three proofs from Holy Scripture which you said would satisfy you if I could produce them, behold I have given you seven"
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16. See the Theological Glossary of the Jerusalem Bible Reader's Edition: "One tradition within the Church excluded the Greek books, and this tradition was taken up by the 15th century {sic} Reformers, who relegated these books to the Apocrypha. 1 Maccabees 12:9." Note that the JB is explicitly approved by the CBCEW (the Bishop's Conference of England and Wales) <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Scripture/Versions.shtml>

17. Catholic Encyclopaedia, "St. Jerome evidently applied the term to all quasi-scriptural books which in his estimation lay outside the canon of the Bible, and the Protestant Reformers, following Jerome's catalogue of Old Testament Scriptures—one which was at once erroneous and singular among the Fathers of the Church—applied the title Apocrypha to the excess of the Catholic canon of the Old Testament over that of the Jews. Naturally, Catholics refuse to admit such a denomination, and we employ "deuterocanonical" to designate this literature, which non-Catholics conventionally and improperly known as the Apocrypha". <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01601a.htm>
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