

## *Those Other Books in the Bible*

**Phil Sanders, Ph.D.**

While rummaging through a bookstore many years ago, I ran across a Jerusalem Bible, which contained some books I had never seen. I asked myself, “What are these books and what are they doing in the Bible?”

Later I learned these books were known as the Apocrypha. The word *apocrypha* means “hidden or secret,” and earlier in its history referred to esoteric books hidden from the common people and only given to the “initiated.” Other authors in later ages regarded the word *apocrypha* as synonymous with “spurious.” Most today think of the Apocrypha as that collection of books found in Catholic or Orthodox Bibles but not in Protestant ones. Even the King James Version carried the Apocrypha in 1611 but ceased to include it after 1644 A.D.

While lists differ, these books are regarded to be in the Apocrypha of the Old Testament: 1 and 2 Esdras, The Rest of Esther, Song of the Three Holy Children, History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasses, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees.

While nearly all scholars regard these books as valuable for historical and devotional insights, the primary question is whether they are inspired and authoritative. Why do some Bibles include and others exclude them?

### ***A Look at History***

Since the Apocrypha placed in the Old Testament, Jews would know whether or not it belonged in the Hebrew Bible. My copy of the Tanakh, an English translation of the traditional Hebrew text of the Old Testament, excludes the apocryphal books.

Philo (20 B.C.-A.D. 50) and Josephus (A.D. 37-ca.100) rejected the Apocrypha. In fact, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus speaks of the preservation of the Hebrew Scriptures in the second temple during the days of Antiochus Epiphanes (2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.). He explicitly speaks of the extent and the format of the 22 books of the Hebrew Bible. These 22 books correspond

with our 39 books. Josephus insists that all the inspired books were completed between the time of Moses and Artaxerxes, the successor to Esther's husband Xerxes. Josephus said,

From Artaxerxes until our time everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophet ceased. But what faith we have placed in our own writings is evident by our conduct; for though so long a time has now passed, no one has dared to add anything to them, or to take anything from them, or to alter anything in them (*Against Apion* 1.8).

Josephus said that the Hebrew Scripture canon was limited in time and number. He held these twenty-two books as sacred; to every Jew they were decrees of God. At a discussion of Jewish rabbis held at Jamnia in 90 A.D., the group proclaimed the common sentiment of the time that the Hebrew Scriptures were limited to twenty-two books, a list identical to the Christian list of 39 books of the Old Testament.

While the New Testament contains more than 700 quotes and allusions to the Old Testament, the New Testament at no time directly quotes any apocryphal book.<sup>1</sup> Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever gave authoritative status to these books with statements like "it is written" or "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet." Jesus and his disciples basically ignored these books, something they never would have done had these books been inspired.

In Luke 24:44 Jesus speaks of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. These three divisions of the Hebrew Bible correspond with the books recognized by the rabbinical Jews in the early Christian centuries.

Though a few of the Church fathers spoke approvingly of the Apocrypha, others (Origen, Jerome, Athanasius, and Cyril of Jerusalem) denied their inspiration and canonicity. It is clear there was no consensus in the early Church that these books were authoritative. Athanasius, who died in 365 A.D, clearly stated in his 39<sup>th</sup> Festal Letter that the Old Testament had twenty-two books in number.

Following Augustine's opinion, the Council of Trent in 1546 admitted seven books of the Apocrypha into the canon recognized by the Roman Catholic Church. Later, other books were admitted to the Orthodox Apocrypha.

Neil Lightfoot observed, “The question is not why reject the Apocrypha. The fact is that the Jews never accepted these books. The books originated after the time of Ezra, when the voice of prophecy had died out. To accept the Apocrypha as canonical, therefore, would be unthinkable for the student of history.”<sup>2</sup>

The apocryphal books, unlike the canonical books of the Hebrew Bible, make no claim of being inspired of God. One cannot find a “thus says the Lord,” or a comment like, “the word of the Lord came unto me, saying.” There are even statements denying inspiration. For instance, in the Prologue of Sirach, the author says, “You are invited therefore to read it with goodwill and attention, and to be indulgent in cases where, despite our diligent labor in translating, we may seem to have rendered some phrases imperfectly.”<sup>3</sup> This is not the language of authoritative, inspired Scripture. One can see the same kind of humanity in the epilogue to 2 Maccabees:

If it is well told and to the point, that is what I myself desired; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do. For just as it is harmful to drink wine alone, or, again, to drink water alone, while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one’s enjoyment, so also the style of the story delights the ears of those who read the work. And here will be the end (2 Maccabees 15:38-39).

### *Mistakes in the Apocrypha*

In Scripture one expects to find the truth presented in an utterly trustworthy manner. Since the Scripture has such a trustworthy record and the Apocrypha has provable falsehoods and mistakes, the Apocrypha cannot be God’s inerrant Word.

Tobias used magic, the heart, liver, and gall of a fish, to drive away a demon; but the Bible forbids the use of magic. An angel of God lies and claims to be Azarius son of Ananias.

Tobit 1:4-5, 11-13; and 14:1-3 say Tobit saw the revolt of the northern tribes (997 B.C.) and was deported to Nineveh with Naphtali (740 B.C.); yet he only lived 102 years. Also, Sennacherib was not the son of Shalmaneser, but Sargon II (Tobit 1:15).

Bel and the Dragon (added to Daniel) mentions the contemporaneous prophet Habakkuk in Judea. However, Habakkuk lived centuries before.

There are several errors in the book of Judith covering falsehoods of the people and geography of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and even gross errors on the geography of Israel. For instance, Nebuchadnezzar was the King of Babylon, not Nineveh. He never sacked the cities of

Ecbatana or Ragae. Assyrians and Babylonians did not rely predominately on their cavalry. The Moabites and Ammonites were descendents of Lot; they were not Canaanites. Nobody has ever found a city with towers called Bethulia, on the plain of Esdraelon near Dothan, able to resist 132,000 soldiers. Neither Balbaim nor Cyamon has ever been found.

The Apocrypha sometimes contradicts itself. For instance, in Sirach one is not to remember the dead (Sirach 38:21-23), while in another book one is to pray for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:44)

Baruch says he wrote his book in Babylon (Baruch 1:1, 2), while Jeremiah clearly says that Baruch went with him from Jerusalem to Egypt (Jeremiah 43:5-7).

Baruch 6:2 says the Jews would serve Babylon for seven generations, while Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:11 says 70 years.

There are two contradictory accounts of the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, that dreaded enemy of the Jews. One narrative records that Antiochus and his company were “cut to pieces in the temple of Nanaea by the treachery of Nanaea’s priests” (2 Maccabees 1:13-16), while another version in the same book states that Antiochus was “taken with a noisome sickness” and so “ended his life among the mountains by a most piteous fate in a strange land” (2 Maccabees 9:19-29).

In 2 Maccabees 8:10, Nicanor wanted to pay 2,000 talents to the Romans; the Seleucids, however, were not under the Romans. In 2 Maccabees 8:20, 8,000 Seleucids and 4,000 Macedonians were said to have destroyed 120,000 Galatians in Babylonia; but this never happened.

One can only conclude those other books really don’t belong to the Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> Milton C. Fisher, “The Canon of the Old Testament,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, I: 391.

<sup>2</sup> Neil R. Lightfoot, “The Canon and Text of the Old Testament,” *The Living Word Commentary*, I: 60.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989 (Sir).