

THE HEBREW BIBLE

APOCRYPHA

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INTRODUCTION

The Biblical "*Apocrypha*" represents a collection of ancient writings that are controversial in relation to their biblical status among Christians. They are found in some editions of the Bible within the Christian world in a separate section between the Old and the New Testaments. In some cases the *Apocrypha* is also added as an appendix after the New Testament to demonstrate its lesser status. Some Christian Churches include some or all of the same texts of the *Apocrypha* within the body of their version of the Old Testament, whereas all of the Protestant denominations exclude them from the Bible.

The English term *Apocrypha* is derived from the Greek word *ἀπόκρυφος*, which means "hidden." The word *Apocrypha* is a specific term used to refer to those particular books that are considered 'Scripture' by the Roman Catholic Church while the Protestants dispute that. The Roman Catholic Church does not term this set of books as the *Apocrypha* but rather calls them the "Deuterocanonical" (second canon) books. This represents the fact that they were added later on in history to the canon of the Scriptures.¹ It also determines that the Catholic Church acknowledges their belated inclusion into the Bible and the resulting secondary status.

It is not historically established how the phrase *apocryphal books* came to be practiced in the Church; however, Zahn, Schurer, Porter, and Schmidt agree that it took birth in the Late

¹ Stewart, Don, "*What is the Old Testament Apocrypha?*", Blue Letter Bible (Retrieved on 3-12-2018 - https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_391.cfm)

Hebrew.² Hebrew word *ganaz* is the derivative of the term *ganaz'im*, "hidden," which represents the hidden books of the Bible. It is, however, worthy of attention that the Talmud does not make any reference to this category of sacred books.³ Such a lack of reference to these books in the Talmud can, in fact, defy any connection between the Hebrew language and the term *Apocrypha*.

Another school of thought claims that the term *Apocrypha* was coined by Jerome, the father of the *Vulgate* version of the Bible in Latin.⁴ Since he discovered those books being read in the Church as the second canon, as they were commonly referred to, he declared that they were the hidden books of the Bible, which were neither part of the Old Testament nor that of the New Testament. The Protestant denominations, therefore, have always referred to this controversial set of books as the *Apocrypha*.⁵ It is also important to note that the term in question does not carry any significance in the Catholic and Orthodox circles, where the worshippers in the pews hardly understand it when the word is spoken around them. They, *prima facie*, regard the *Apocrypha* as a normal part of the Scriptures.

The Jewish Council of Jamnia, CE 90, was the touchstone used for recognizing the Old Testament canon among the founders of the Protestant movement. Apart from the fact that the early Church recognized those Old Testament books as canonical and Christendom broadly configured the canon by assigning conscientious credibility to those book, the main tangible verdict of history still came from the first Jewish Council of Jamnia.⁶

On the other hand, the Greek *Septuagint* cast a confounding shadow on the exact number of the Hebrew Bible books. It had at least three additional books in it—Maccabees I and II being

² R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, (Berkley, CA: The Apocryphile Press, 2004), p.vii

³ Charles, *Apocrypha*, pp.vii-viii

⁴ E.E. W., *Outlines of the Old Testament Study, Historical and Critical*, (London, UK: Oxford, 1883), p.42

⁵ E. W., *Outlines*, p.42

⁶ More discussion will unfold in the pages to follow under the heading "*the Apocrypha Books*."

treated as one book—that were quoted and read among the Jews as well as Christians of early centuries as Scripture. The problem of *Apocrypha* originally emerged in this particular version of the Hebrew Bible, which handed down the fallacy as the Scriptural heritage to coming generations.

Another crucial subject is the numerical difference of *apocryphal* books that exists between the *Septuagint* and the Catholic Bible. Unlike the *Septuagint* that includes only 4, the Roman Catholic Bible accepts 7 additional books as part of the Old Testament. The main riddle has to do with the question how those additional three books made into the Catholic Bible, which could not find a place in the *Septuagint*. The Jews originally found this problem prevailing in the Rabbinic Judaism by the first century of Common Era and therefore effectively dealt with it in the Jamnia Councils. The Roman Catholic Church, however, did not follow the historical Jewish edict on the subject.

The Apocrypha Books

The canonical Old Testament is, by and large, the same for the major Christian sects, such as the Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox. There is no compromise or controversy around the canonicity of the original 39 books of the Old Testament. It is, however, interesting to note that the Jewish Bible contains only 24 books, whereas the same Bible is called the "Old Testament" by Christians and it houses, at least, 39 books. It is important to understand that this apparent dichotomy is, in fact, no contradiction or digression. The reason why there is a difference in numbers is that the Christian Old Testament follows a different organizational structure of the same books. The Book of Samuel, for instance, is not divided into two in the Hebrew Canon, whereas the Christian Old Testament divides the same book into Samuel 1 and Samuel 2 due to its extraordinary length. Similarly, the 12 books of the category of "Minor Prophets" are all bound together under one title in a single volume in the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, they all appear under their own individual titles in the Christian Old Testament.⁷ The Hebrews refer to the books of the twelve Minor Prophets as the "Book of the Twelve" and count them as one book.⁸

The Jewish canonization of the Bible came about in CE 90 in the Council of Jamnia, which was a major feat in the history of the Bible. The Jewish position reached in the first Jamnia Council was confirmed in the second Jamnia Council in CE 118. It was this Jewish canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures that served as a course for the future Church Fathers and the founders of the Reformation Movement in choosing their set of books for the Bible.

⁷ The Old Testament "Minor Prophets" are: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

⁸ Steven L. McKenzie and Matt Patrick Graham (edit.), *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p.95

The Old Testament *Apocrypha* books in the broadest sense are twelve with a few additions and exceptions. All of those Controversial Old Testament books are listed below here:

1. Tobit
2. Judith
3. The additions to Esther
4. The Wisdom of Solomon
5. Ecclesiasticus (also called Sirach and the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach)
6. Baruch
7. The Letter of Jeremiah
8. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men
9. Susanna
10. Bel and the Dragon
11. First Maccabees
12. Second Maccabees
13. First Esdras (Third Esdras)
14. Second Esdras (Fourth Esdras)
15. The Prayer of Manasseh⁹

Jerome, the most well known character in the story of biblical translation, is again very significant in the dissemination of the *Apocrypha* in the Christian world. Jerome's *Vulgate* contains the *Apocrypha* and is the main source of preserving the *apocryphal* literature for the subsequently emerging biblical versions in the times to follow. *Vulgate* was *the* Bible of Europe during the Dark Ages and was held so until the rise of the revolutionary spirits of Reformation

⁹ Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to Second Temple Judaism*, (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010), p.33

and Humanism. Martin Luther's Bible was the first such edition of the Bible in centuries that included a separate section on the *Apocrypha*.¹⁰ What Luther did was historically game-changing in that he put the books and texts not originally found in the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible between the two Testaments and removed them altogether from the original Old Testament.¹¹

Ever since the time of Martin Luther, the Christian world subscribing to the Protestant religious thought have treated those books as non-canonical and thus not part of the Bible. There is no flexibility on this subject among the Protestants because their approach to recognizing the Scriptures reflects absolute conservatism. On the other hand, the institution of Papacy and the Councils of Catholic religion are those key players that can crucially factor into the reformation and transformation of the religious thought among the Roman Catholics. Since it is believed among the Catholics that the Papacy and the Church Council have divine will inherent in them, they can make certain modifications into the faith system for the well-being of the believers. It is, therefore, plausible to assume that their approach to the Scriptural canonicity is not quite as conservative.

¹⁰ H.H. Kramm, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), p.112

¹¹ 1545 Edition of the Luther Bible (<http://liederschatz.net/biblia/biblia2/>)

Why is the Apocrypha not the Bible?

The Question, "Why is the Apocrypha not the Bible?", is very crucial for any study that attempts to address the question of the *Apocrypha*. Apparently, it is a theological question. However, it has more to do with the *history* and *historicity* of the biblical literature than mere theology and metaphysics of the Christian religion. Any textual references, whether religious, literary or linguistic, all fall into the category of historical research when confronted with the posing question of *Apocrypha*'s very presence in the Bible.

While defending the position that the *Apocrypha* is not a part of the Bible, the Christian scholars often cite an internal evidence from the Bible itself.¹² This internal evidence is very "doctrinal" in nature, as Kramm maintains, that in fact serves as a testimony prior to the testimony of the early Church.¹³ They also cite some external pieces of evidence, whereof one particular reference comes from the Babylonian Talmud. It is interesting that the Talmud—neither the Jerusalem nor the Babylonian Talmud—directly mentions the *Apocrypha* as a section of the Bible or any of its books. What the Babylonian Talmud does is, nevertheless, something to the contrary. It issues a verdict stating that the Holy Spirit of God, the agency responsible for the process of revelation and inspiration in the Jewish religion, departed from Israel after the "latter prophets" and there was a void in terms of inspiration. In *Sot* 13:2, for instance, the Babylonian Talmud states the Rabbinic stance on the inspiration accorded to Israel via the agency of the Holy Spirit:

¹² I will strictly and objectively follow the general line of argumentation in the Church while addressing the *Apocrypha* question instead of trying to make a case for or against the *Apocrypha*.

¹³ Kramm, *Theology*, pp.112-113

When Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the latter prophets, died, then the Holy Spirit departed from Israel. But even so, they made them hear [Heavenly messages] through an echo.¹⁴

The above citation is one of those many references from the Babylonian Talmud that make the same assertion maintaining that the Holy Spirit departed from Israel after the disappearance of the last prophet, Malachi. In their point of view, therefore, the period of four hundred years between the last prophet and John the Baptist was that of silence on the part of God. Such a thing indeed carries a great theological weight because it is established on the historical view of a religious community, the Rabbinic Judaism, that is engaged in dialogue with the circumstances at a given time—the time between the two Testaments—within a historical framework.

Another major external evidence that supports the thesis that the *Apocrypha* is not inspired and therefore not a part of the Scriptures is the absence of apocryphal books from the Jewish canon. Historians from both Jewish and Christian camps have cited the same 24 (Jewish organization) and 39 (Christian organization) books of the Old Testament for the most part. Josephus, for instance, is probably the most important historian in this regard to cite in order to seek external evidence for the non-canonicity of the *Apocrypha*. Josephus, in fact, relies on the apocryphal books for his own writings and does not render them as the "*Apocrypha*"; instead, he uses the phrase "the books of our own country" to speak of them as his extra-biblical source.¹⁵

Moreover, it is also important to note that the apocryphal writings survived from getting lost to time primarily due to the Christian preservation of them rather than because of some serious Jewish activity to that end. The Jews were not interested in those books as "sacred

¹⁴ Robert Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts*, (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2004), p.85

¹⁵ Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p.51

writings," as it can be inferred from Josephus' treatment of them being a 'secular source.' Christians, on the other hand, treated those books with respect and added them into the Bible to be read and recited as 'Scripture' in the Church.

The internal evidence from the Bible is manifold and multifaceted. One major assertion in this regard, for instance, is that the New Testament writers do not quote Jesus and/or the Apostles referencing the so-called *Apocrypha* books. Since the Christ and his Apostles prolifically cited the Old Testament, it was very natural of them to draw from the *Apocrypha* if it had been held among them as part of the Scriptures. Such an absence of the *Apocrypha* from the epiphany of the New Testament leads to a logical conclusion that it was not conceived of as related to the Scriptures in any possible way.

To the contrary, some early Church Fathers did cite the *Apocrypha* in their writings. The first and second books of Maccabees, and additions to Daniel and Esther were included in the historic Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, *the Septuagint*. Those Church Fathers from Alexandria and other Greek speaking Christian communities who did not know Hebrew language were mainly responsible for citing from the *apocryphal* books that were part of the *Septuagint*.¹⁶

Another important argument, though more hypothetical and arbitrary in nature, is that the Old Testament books reflect God intervening Israel's national history every now and then, whereas the apocryphal books lack such a technique in the writing style that can make a case for their scriptural status. This is not, however, a strong argument to support the conclusion because the Book of Esther also remains indifferent to the mention of the "Lord."

¹⁶ Elesha Coffman, "Why are Protestant and Catholic Bibles different?", *Christianity Today*, 8 August, 2008, Carol Stream, Illinois: Christianity Today International

In the broadest sense, the Christian scholars believe that the apocryphal books yield more secular goals than spiritual and were only personal endeavors of certain individuals rather than an act of the Holy Spirit, which is, therefore, the reason why they cannot be included into the canon of the Scriptures.¹⁷ This particular mindset also reflects in the "Westminster Confession," where it reads as follows:

The Apocrypha are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved or made use of than other human writings.¹⁸

This confessional statement clearly establishes that the Church bases its findings primarily on the belief that the Holy Spirit has no role in the writing of the *Apocrypha*. And since the Holy Spirit is the key-player in the writing process of the Bible, no other books than those inspired by the Holy Spirit can make into the canon of the Bible.

¹⁷ E. W., *Outlines*, pp.45-46

¹⁸ E. W., *Outlines*, p.45

The Bible of the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches

The versions of the Bible of both the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches carry the apocryphal books as part of the canon. Their versions of the Bible do not mutually agree on the number of the books. The New Testament canon, however, is the same for both the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. The Greek Orthodox Church, for instance, accepts the books erased by the Jews from the Hebrew Bible and reads them as Scripture. They recognize those books, nevertheless, as the "proto-canonical" books. This increases the number of books in the Greek Orthodox canon of the Old Testament to 51.

With the dispensation of this inquiry into further east within the Orthodox Church, the numerical difference does not remain strictly limited to the Old Testament, but it extends to the New Testament also. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, for instance, recognizes a higher number of books in the canon of the New Testament. Interestingly, the number of books in the New Testament canon rises up to 35 in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The highest number of books in a version of the Bible belongs to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The total number of books in their Bible is 81—46 belonging to the Old Testament and 35 to the New Testament. The books that are additional to the 39 canonical books of the Old Testament are called the "narrow canon" in the Bible of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.¹⁹ The Catholic Bible, on the other hand, houses 73 books in total—27 books of the canonical New Testament and 46 books of the Old Testament. The extra books it contains within the Old

¹⁹ James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, "Introduction,"* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1983), p. xxiv

Testament are *Tobit*, *Judith*, *2 Maccabees*, *2 Maccabees* , *Wisdom of Solomon*, *Baruch* (*Letters of Jeremiah*), *Ecclesiasticus* (*Sirach*), and additions to *Daniel* and *Esther*.²⁰

The Protestants are the only group within the Christian religion who reject the *Apocrypha* on the grounds above discussed. The Roman Catholic Church holds a doctrinal position between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Protestants. The criterion for the canonicity of the Scriptures is not quite as strict in the Eastern Churches, *per se*, whereas, on the other hand, it becomes extremely strict in the eyes of the Protestants. The Eastern Orthodox Church does not grant authority to the Jewish erasing of 7 books from the Hebrew Bible and treat them as part of the historical evolution of biblical literature. Thus, they get along with the Roman Catholic Church on this subject.

²⁰ Elesha, "Why?", *Christianity Today*

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