

The Origin of the Bible

6. THE APOCRYPHA, THE SEPTUAGINT AND THE CANON OF THE BIBLE



Codex Sinaiticus was Septuagint manuscript discovered at St. Catherine's monastery at Mt. Sinai.

Introduction to the non-canonical books

What are the books of the Old Testament? Today, many critics of the Bible attack the Bible by pointing out the differences between the Catholic and Protestant Bibles, specifically the books in the Old Testament. Questions often brought up are,

- Why do the Catholics have seven additional books not contained in the Protestant Bible?
- What is the history and origin of these additional books?
- Are there other books excluded from the Old Testament?

For those not familiar with the history of the Bible, these questions can pose an obstacle.

A Closed or open Canon?

The history regarding this issue of additional books in the Old Testament is really an issue of canon. The word *canon*, means rule or standard. As applied to scripture the question, "was the Old Testament canon, open or closed after Malachi (425 B.C.), or were new books added?" is at the heart of the issue.

There are several strong arguments, which clearly show the Old Testament "Canon" was closed before the New Testament period, as dealt with previously. We will just review some of the main arguments here,

1. Jesus, in Luke 11:51 and Matthew 23:55 when he refers to the "*the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah*" affirms the first book of the Hebrew scripture as *Genesis*, and the last book as *II Chronicles*. This affirmation demonstrates the Hebrew "Canon" was closed by the time of Malachi in 425 B.C.

2. Jesus also referred to the 3-part division of Hebrew scripture in Luke 24:44, referring to the, "*Law of Moses.. the prophets ...the Psalms*". This reference confirms the current division of Hebrew canon, which excludes the books known as the *Apocrypha* or *Deuterocanonicals*.

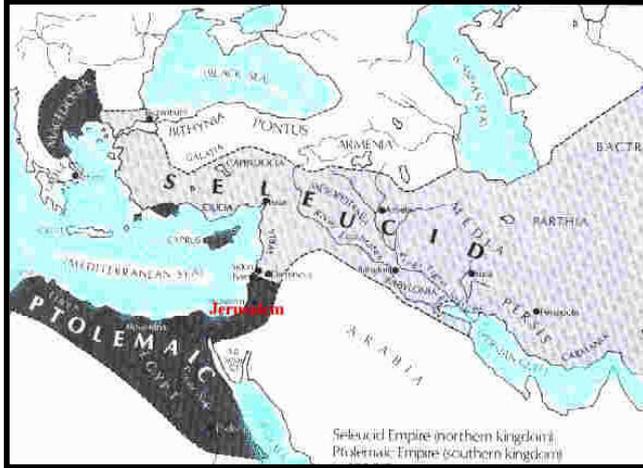
3. Josephus (37-100 A.D), the Jewish historian also affirmed in his arguments in *Contra Apion 1:7-8* the number of books in the Hebrew canon was numbered at 22, which according to Jewish numbering is the same as the 39 in the Protestant Old Testament. (See Chapter 5, Old Testament Canon).

Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but two and twenty and contain the record of all time. *Contra Apion 1:7-8*

4. Jewish tradition also taught in the *Babylonian Talmud*, the books in the Hebrew "Canon" are the identical 39 books, which are in both the Protestant and Catholic Bibles, to the exclusion of the Apocrypha. (See *Talmud Babylon Baba Batra 14b*)

5. Jerome (325-420 A.D.) The Biblical scholar of his day, and the translator of the Catholic Bible, the Latin Vulgate, clearly agreed with the Hebrew canon, being limited 39 books of the present Old Testament to the exclusion of the additional books of the Apocrypha.

The debate regarding the canon stems back to the early church and the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint. To understand this debate regarding the apocrypha, we first need to understand the history of the Septuagint.



What is the Septuagint?

In short, the Septuagint is the early Greek translation of the Old Testament dating to 250 B.C. The history behind a Greek translation dates back to the days of Alexander the Great. When the armies of Alexander defeated the Persians in 331 B.C., and established themselves in the lands of Israel, Greek became one of the common languages in the Mediterranean world. After Alexander died, his four generals divided his kingdom between themselves.

Two of his Generals established competing Greek kingdoms, the *Ptolemy* and the *Seleucids* kingdoms, each battling over the lands of Israel from the time of Alexander's death to the Maccabean war (165 B.C.),

which established an independent Jewish Kingdom for about 100-years. During this time, the Jewish Greek-speaking population of Alexandria Egypt continued to grow and flourish. The primary language of the Jews in Alexandria was Greek; Hebrew became more archaic over time, in Egypt.

Spoken and written Hebrew remained strong in the lands of Judea/Palestine, as opposed to Alexandria. This lack of familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures gave impetus for Greek speaking Jews, to translate the Hebrew scriptures.

At this time, during the reign of *Ptolemy II Philadelphus* (285–246 BC), the ruler of *Ptolemaic Kingdom*, sent a request to Eleazar, the chief priest in Jerusalem. He wanted him to send translators, to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, for his library at Alexandria. The letter known as the *Letter of Aristeas* describes how Ptolemy II requested translators and Eleazar sent 72 scribes, who translated the *Septuagint* in 72-days. Hence, the name Septuagint, means Seventy from the Latin *septuaginta*, "70", seventy-two translators translating the scriptures in seventy-two days. This account in the letter is not completely accepted by many because of



circumstances surrounding the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The translation began during this time, the details are not completely clear. Many scholars feel the Pentateuch; the Laws of Moses, were translated about 250 B.C., with the other books of the Bible, following a 100-year period, until the complete Old Testament was translated.

The translation had a profound influence on the Jewish Greek speaking community. Greeks could now read and comment on the Hebrew Scriptures without having to learn Hebrew.

Early Christianity and the Septuagint

The Septuagint became the Jewish Bible for the Jews of the Diaspora¹ who communicated in the Greek language. In 63 B.C., the Jewish Maccabean Kingdom fell to the Romans, and Judea became a Roman province. By this time, the Greek language well established in the Mediterranean world, allowed Christianity began to spread in the Roman world, the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament, for the Greek-speaking world was the Septuagint.

The basis of Christianity is Jesus, who is the Messiah of the Old Testament. Christians, those who believe Jesus Christ is Messiah presented Jesus to the Jews of Asia and Rome, they used the Septuagint as their proof text. Showing how Jesus fulfilled Jewish prophecy about the Messiah. In fact, at the writing of the Gospels and epistles, many of the quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures come from the Septuagint because they were widely accepted in the Roman and Greek worlds.

The Apocrypha

The word Apocrypha comes from the Greek word, meaning “hidden” or “concealed”. The term has several meanings, which are important to distinguish. The term generally refers to religious writings found in the Septuagint and Latin Vulgate, but not in the Hebrew Bible. The names for these writings can differ between Protestants and Catholics. The Catholics consider these writings as canonical, while Protestants do not, and Orthodox churches consider some as canon to a lesser extent than Catholics.

	Protestant Names	Roman Catholic Names
1	Tobit	Tobias
2	Judith	Judith
3	Wisdom of Solomon	Wisdom
4	Ecclesiasticus/Sirach	Ecclesiasticus
5	I Maccabees	I Maccabees
6	II Maccabees	II Maccabees
7	Baruch	Baruch 1-5
8	Epistle of Jeremiah	Baruch 6
9	Additions to Esther	Esther 10:4-16:24
10	Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young men	Daniel 3:24-90
11	Susanna	Daniel 13
12	Bel and the Dragon	Daniel 14
13	I Esdras	3 Esdras (sometimes called I Esdras)
14	2 Esdras	4 Esdras (sometimes called 2 Esdras)
15	Prayer of Manasseh	Prayer of Manasseh

Since Catholics consider these books canon, therefore they do not call them Apocrypha but *deuterocanonical*, meaning later canon. The *Council of Trent* in 1546, declared the Apocrypha as canon, except for 3 Esdras, 4 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh which they call apocryphal. In the Catholic Bible, these additional writings within the books themselves, for example, “Susana” becomes Daniel 13, and “Bel and the Dragon” becomes Daniel 14, while the Protestant Bible only has 12 chapters to the book of Daniel.

When referring to the Old Testament, there are four classes of literature.

- Books accepted by all- *Homologoumena*
- Books disputed by some- *Antilegomena*
- Books rejected by all- *Pseudepigrapha*
- Books accepted by some- *Apocrypha*

1. Books accepted by All- Homologoumena

¹ Diaspora, comes from the verb to disperse and means the Jews who have been dispersed from Israel and were living outside of the Biblical lands.

These are the books of the Old Testament, which were not disputed once they became part of the Hebrew canon. These books number 34 of the 39 books in the Hebrew canon, as numbered in the Protestant Old Testament.

2. Books disputed by some- Antilegomena

Following the fall of the Temple in A.D. 70, *Johanan ben Zakkai* set up rabbinical center in the city of Jamnia, with Roman permission. The rise of Christianity and their use of Jewish writings, including the Apocrypha alarmed the rabbis; they then held discussions regarding the Hebrew canon. These discussions became known as the *Council of Jamnia* (.A.D. 90). At this council, five of the books in the Hebrew canon were questioned, regarding their canon. These included *Ezekiel*, *Proverbs*, *Esther*, *Ecclesiastes* and the *Song of Songs*. In the end, each book was affirmed as part of the Hebrew canon. The books of the apocrypha were dismissed, as outside of the Hebrew canon. The following are quick summations of the reasons these books were questioned by the rabbis.

- Ezekiel's was questioned regarding the Mosaic Law in chapters 40-48.
- Proverbs was brought into question regarding some apparent contradictions.
- Esther did not mention God, so it was questioned.
- Ecclesiastes appeared to be pessimistic or skeptical.
- Song of Songs was questioned because of its explicitness regarding sexual love.

3. Books rejected by all- Pseudepigrapha

A third grouping of books, are those which claim to be written by biblical authors but are false (Pseudo) writings. They express religious fancy and magic, being written between the period of 200 B.C. and 200 A..D. Norman Geisler comments the actual number of the books are not known, but those worth noting are listed below. Regarding their contents, he makes the following remarks.

Most of these books are comprised of dreams, visions, and revelations in the apocalyptic style of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. A notable characteristic of these books is that they depict the bright future of the Messianic kingdom, as well as the questions of creation, angels, sin, suffering and rewards for faithful living.²

Type of work	Name
Legendary	1. The Book of Jubilee 2. The Letter of Aristeeas 3. The Book of Adam and Eve 4. The Martyrdom of Isaiah
Apocalyptic	1. 1 Enoch 2. The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs 3. The Sibylline Oracle 4. The Assumption of Moses 5. 2 Enoch, or the Book of the Secrets of Enoch 6. 2 Baruch, or the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch 7. 3 Baruch, or the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch
Didactical	1. 3 Maccabees 2. 4 Maccabees 3. Pirke Aboth 4. The Story of Ahikar
Poetical	1. The Psalms of Solomon 2. Psalm 151
Historical	1. The Fragment of a Zadokite Work

² Norman Geisler, William E. Nix, A General Introduction to the Bible, Moody Press 1986, Page 263.

These books are called “Apocrypha” in the Catholic Church; this is to be distinguished from the “Apocrypha” in the Protestant churches, which the Catholics accept as *deutero-canonical*. Copies of several of the pseudepigraphical works were found in Dead Sea caves in Qumran, including *Jubilees, I Enoch, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

4. Books accepted by some- Apocrypha

These books are what most people think of when we refer to the Apocrypha. In Judaism, they were classified as, “writings which do not defile the hands”. The term was applied because the books were not considered scripture, and therefore handling them did not cause ones hands to be defiled.

With the rise of Christianity in the first century, the Septuagint (LXX³) was the Bible (Old Testament) used by the early church. The early members of the church felt no urge to denounce the additional writings (the apocrypha) which came along with the Greek translation (LXX) of the Hebrew Scriptures. These same books (Apocrypha) were not found in the Hebrew canon, the writers of the New Testament; though they quote from the Septuagint, do not quote from the Apocrypha.

The period between Testaments, between B.C. 425 and the time of Christ, gave rise to additional writings, which included the history of the Maccabees among others. These writing became part of the LXX library; some in the early church viewed these additional works as scripture rather than “additional” works.

In the early church, there was debate as some used the Apocrypha to help with Christian instruction. Clement (d. A.D. 95) quoted from the *Wisdom of Solomon* and Polycarp of Smyrna (d. A.D. 156) quoted *Tobit*. Jerome (d. A.D.420) however, was clear to make a distinction between it and the Hebrew canon, which he considered scripture and the Apocrypha. Jerome with some reservations included the Apocrypha in his Vulgate translation upon the Catholic Church’s insistence. Others such as Augustine (d. A.D. 430), held the view the apocrypha was canon, but later admitted to a distinction between the Hebrew Canon and the “Outside books”. The distinction between the Hebrew Canon, and the Apocrypha would become an issue during the Reformation, as the grip of the Rome on the Bible lessened with the printing press, and churches broke from Rome’s authority.

In the *Reformation*, the Bible became the supreme authority for belief and conduct, causing a greater focus on the Apocrypha’s inclusion. In 1534, Martin Luther placed these writings at the end of his bible, under the label “Apocrypha”, calling them “outside books”. The Catholic Church responded in the *Council of Trent*, 1546 by declaring them as “Canon”, all except *1 and 2 Esdras* and the *Prayer of Mannaseh*. Calvin and those who followed him rejected the authority of the Apocrypha, stating that its words were not divinely inspired. Following Luther’s lead, translations of the Bible separated the Apocrypha from the rest of scripture placing it at the end, throughout Europe.

In the end the Catholic Church, elevated the status of the Apocrypha to the level of scripture, while Protestant churches placed it on par with non-inspired writings.

Is the Apocrypha Canon?

There are several arguments put forward to show the Apocrypha should be considered part of the Old Testament Canon.

Arguments for Inclusion	Replies to the Arguments
1. The New Testament reflects the thought of the Apocrypha and even refers to it “Hebrews 11:35, with 2 Macc 7, 12)	There may be allusions but there is no direct quote from any of the 15 books as authoritative or canonical.

³ LXX is the Roman numerals for “70”

2. The New Testament quotes mostly from the Greek Old Testament, the LXX, which contained the Apocrypha.	There is no evidence that the Septuagint of the first century contained the Apocrypha. The earliest Greek manuscripts, which contain them, date from the 4 th Century. (Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Vaticanus)
3. Some of the early church fathers used the Apocrypha as scripture in public worship.	Though respected and honored for their status in the early church, the early church fathers were not inspired, so their actions and writings must be compared to scripture as opposed to themselves.
4. Some of the early church fathers accepted all of the books of the Apocrypha as canonical, for example Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria.	Although some fathers accepted them, others vehemently opposed their use, including Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Origen and Jerome.
5. The Greek Manuscripts interpose the Apocrypha among the Old Testament Books.	The earliest Greek manuscripts date to the time of Augustine, whose influence is reflected in the codex manuscripts. In addition, none of the Greek Manuscripts contain all the Apocryphal books. No Greek manuscript has the exact list of Apocryphal books accepted by the Council of Trent (1545-63)
6. Some of the apocryphal books written in Hebrew have been found among other Old Testament canonical books in the Dead Sea community at Qumran.	The discoveries at Qumran included their libraries which would have included Bibles and other books. Canonical books at the Dead Sea site, were written on special parchment and in script which was not the case with the Apocryphal books.

Arguments against the Apocrypha

1. There is not sufficient evidence that they were reckoned as canonical by the Jews anywhere.
2. The LXX design was literary, to build the library of Ptolemy and the Alexandrians.
3. All LXX manuscripts are Christian and not Jewish origin. With a 500 years difference between translation and existing manuscripts. Enough time for Apocryphal books to slip in.
4. LXX manuscripts do not all have the same apocryphal books and names.
5. During the 2nd Century AD the Alexandrian Jews adopted Aquila's Greek version of the OT without apocryphal books.
6. The manuscripts at the Dead Sea make it clear no canonical book of the OT was written later than the Persian period.
7. Philo, Alexandrian Jewish philosopher (20 BC-40 AD), quoted the Old Testament prolifically, and even recognized the threefold classification, but he never quoted from the Apocrypha as inspired.
8. Josephus (30-100 AD.), Jewish historian, explicitly excludes the Apocrypha; numbering the books of the Old Testament as 22 neither does he quote the apocryphal books as Scripture.
9. Jesus and the New Testament writes never once quote the Apocrypha, although there are hundreds of quotes and references to almost the entire book of the Old Testament.
10. The Jewish scholars of Jamnia (90 AD) did not recognize the Apocrypha.
11. No canon or council of the Christian church recognized the Apocrypha as inspired for nearly four centuries.
12. Many of the great fathers of the early church spoke out against the Apocrypha--for example, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Athanasius.
13. Jerome (AD 340-420) The great scholar and translator of the Latin Vulgate rejected the Apocrypha as part of the canon.
14. Not until 1546 AD in a polemical action at the counter-Reformation Council of Trent (1545-63), did the apocryphal books receive full canonical status by the Roman Catholic Church.

Summary of Apocrypha Books⁴

Book	Date	Summary
Wisdom of Solomon	Later part of the first century B.C.	Describes the benefits of wisdom and the joys that accompany righteous living, as well as punishments for the wicked
Sirach	180 B.C.	Very similar to the biblical Book of Proverbs, it includes moral ethical maxims, proverbs, songs of praise, theological and philosophical reflections on life, and customs of the day.
Tobit	180 B.C.	Tobit a righteous Israelite living in Nineveh, is an example to the rest of the captives even in the midst of the great adversities. Tobit becomes blind and prays to God to restore his sight. At the same time in Media, Sarah, Tobit's niece, prays to God for deliverance from the demon Asmodeus. God sends an angel named Raphael to deliver them both.
Judith	150 B.C.	Nebuchadnezzar sends Holofernes to punish the people west of Babylon for their insubordination. The people of Judea pray to God for help; in answer Judith beguiles Holofernes, getting him thoroughly drunk, and then decapitates him.
I Esdras (3 Esdras)	Second to First Century B.C.	Begins abruptly by describing the reinstatement of Passover by King Josiah in Jerusalem about 622/621 B.C. and continues to Ezra's reforms about 458 B.C. but the majority of the book emphasizes Ezra's reforms.
I Maccabees	Latter part of the second century B.C.	Covers Judean history from the accession of Antiochus IV (Epiphanies) in about 175 B.C. to the reign of John Hyrcanus I (134-104 B.C.)
2 Maccabees	End of the second century to beginning of the first century B.C.	Covers Jewish history from the time of the high priest Onias III and the Syrian King Seleucus IV (c. 180 B.C.) to the defeat of Nicanor's army (c. 161 B.C.)
Baruch	Second to First Century B.C.	Claims to be a letter sent from Baruch to Jerusalem to be read on a feast day as a confession of their sin. (1:14)
Epistle of Jeremiah	Third to First Century B.C.	Letter from Jeremiah to Jewish captives, soon to be taken to Babylon, describing the folly of idolatry.
2 Esdras (4 Esdras)	First Century A.D.	Apocalyptic book dealing with the problem of why an all powerful, loving God allows great evils to befall mankind. The reason is man's sinfulness.
Additions to the book of Ester	latter part of second to first century B.C.	The six additions to the Greek text of Esther were apparently introduced to highlight the religious aspect of the story that the author thought was lacking.
Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Young Men	Second to first century B.C.	Before being thrown into the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:23). Abednego (Azariah in Hebrew) prayed, asking God to bring glory to his name through this ordeal. It was followed by the song of the three young men who sang praise and glory to God.
Susanna	Second to first century B.C.	Susanna is tried and found guilty because of the lies told by two elders of Israel. Daniel however, has a vision from God and comes to the rescue.
Bel and the Dragon	Second to first century B.C./	Daniel outwits the priests of Bel and shows that their great stature of Bel, the patron deity of Babylon, was a worthless idol. Next, Daniel kills a dragon that the Babylonians believed was a god. Daniel is thrown into the lion's den, but on the seventh day is removed and his enemies are thrown in.
Prayer of Manasseh	Second to first century B.C.	2 Chronicles 33:10-13 says Manasseh prayed to God while in captivity and asked forgiveness for his many sins. This work supposedly records this prayer.

⁴ Paul D. Wegner, The Journey from Text to Translations, Pgs. 122, 123, Baker Academic

