

**The Old Testament Apocrypha**  
**A Series on the Development of the Bible's Canon: Part 2**

The Greek term “apocrypha” refers to books that are “hidden away.” There are three interpretations of this term:

1. Certain books were withdrawn or “hidden,” because they were mysterious or esoteric and required only the profound to understand.
2. Certain books deserved to be “hidden,” because they were questionable or heretical.
3. Certain books that some consider authoritative but outside of the Hebrew canon.

Jerome (347-420 A.D.), who did most of the translation for the Latin Vulgate, was credited for being the first to translate the Old Testament into Latin directly from the Hebrew Old Testament (Tanakh) rather than the Greek Septuagint, and he viewed the Apocrypha, those certain books that some considered authoritative, as outside of the Hebrew canon.

The designation Apocrypha applies to a collection of fourteen or fifteen books (or parts of) that were written originally in either Hebrew or Greek during the period of 200 B.C. – 100 A.D.

The basis for the confusion whether the Apocrypha was part of the Hebrew Old Testament canon or not began when the Septuagint was translated for the Greek speaking Jews in Egypt. Of these two traditions of the Hebrew Tanakh, the Palestinian Canon and the Alexandrian Canon, many theories are debated on how and why the Apocrypha was included in the Septuagint / Alexandrian Canon. Some questions include whether findings in the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate the possibility of some apocryphal works in earlier Hebrew versions.

**Palestinian Canon** – this represents Rabbinic Judaism’s recognition of the twenty-two books of the Hebrew Bible with Ruth within the book of Judges and Lamentations within the book of Jeremiah. This is equivalent to the current modern form of the Hebrew Bible of 24 books with the recognition of Ruth and Lamentations as separate books. In this canon, the Apocrypha is not included, because the works are not considered inspired.

**Alexandrian Canon** – this represents the Greek collection of Old Testament books that was allegedly developed during the translation of the Septuagint in Alexandria, Egypt. This canon includes the Apocrypha as separate books or interwoven within the twenty-two original canonical Hebrew books.

Listing the Apocrypha and which works are accepted by either Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches, this table shows the order of Old Testament books and how the Apocrypha is integrated within it.

Roman Catholic Bible - To see how the Apocrypha was integrated into the Old Testament, the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition is shown.

Eastern / Greek Orthodox Bible – The Eastern / Greek Orthodox church uses the Septuagint for their Old Testament.

<b>Apocrypha</b>	<b>Roman Catholic Church (Revised Standard Version)</b>	<b>Greek Orthodox Church (Septuagint)</b>
	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth
	1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings	Kings I, Kings II, Kings III, Kings IV
	1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra	Chronicles I, Chronicles II, Ezra

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Apocrypha	Roman Catholic Church (Revised Standard Version)	Greek Orthodox Church (Septuagint)
<b>1. The First Book of Esdras</b> <b>2. The Second Book of Esdras*</b>	The Roman Catholic Bible does not consider these to be canonical.	1 Esdras
	Nehemiah	Nehemiah
<b>3. Tobit</b>	Tobit	Tobit
<b>4. Judith</b>	Judith	Judith
<b>5. The Additions to the Book of Esther</b>	<p>Esther 11:2 – 12:6 (apocrypha) is inserted before Esther 1:1.</p> <p>Esther 13:1-7 (apocrypha) is inserted between Esther 3:13 and Esther 3:14.</p> <p>Esther 13:8 – 14:19 (apocrypha) is appended at the end of Esther 4:17.</p> <p>Esther 15:1-10 (apocrypha) replaces Esther 5:1.</p> <p>Esther 15:11-16 (apocrypha) replaces Esther 5:2.</p> <p>Esther 16 (apocrypha) is inserted between Esther 8:12 and Esther 8:13.</p> <p>Esther 11:1 (apocrypha) and Addition F are appended at the end of Esther 10:3.</p>	<p>Esther 11:2 – 12:6 (apocrypha) is inserted before Esther 1:1.</p> <p>Esther 13:1-7 (apocrypha) is inserted between Esther 3:13 and Esther 3:14.</p> <p>Esther 13:8 – 14:19 (apocrypha) is appended at the end of Esther 4:17.</p> <p>Esther 15:1-10 (apocrypha) replaces Esther 5:1.</p> <p>Esther 15:11-16 (apocrypha) replaces Esther 5:2.</p> <p>Esther 16 (apocrypha) is inserted between Esther 8:13 and Esther 8:14.</p> <p>Esther 11:1 (apocrypha) and Addition F are appended at the end of Esther 10:13.</p>
<b>6. The First Book of Maccabees</b> <b>7. The Second Book of Maccabees</b>	1 Maccabees / 2 Maccabees	I Maccabees / II Maccabees / III Maccabees / IV Maccabees**
	Job	Job
<b>8. The Prayer of Manasseh</b>	<p>Psalms</p> <p>Roman Catholic Bibles may have The Prayer of Manasseh in the appendix.</p>	<p>Psalms (includes Psalm 151)</p> <p>The Prayer of Manasseh (apocrypha) is Psalm 152</p>
	Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs	Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
<b>9. The Wisdom of Solomon</b>	Wisdom	Wisdom

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Apocrapha	Roman Catholic Church (Revised Standard Version)	Greek Orthodox Church (Septuagint)
<b>10. Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach</b>	Sirach	Sirach
	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations	Esaias, Jeremias, Lamentations
<b>11. Baruch</b>	Baruch chapters 1-5	Baruch chapters 1-5
<b>12. The Letter of Jeremiah</b>	Baruch chapter 6	Baruch chapter 6
	Ezekiel	Jezekiel
<b>13. The Prayer of Azariah (the Song of the Three Young Men)</b>	Inserted between Daniel 3:23 and Dan 3:24	Inserted between Daniel 3:23 and Dan 3:24
<b>14. Susanna</b>	Daniel 13	Daniel 13
<b>15. Bel and the Dragon</b>	Daniel 14	Daniel 14
	Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi	Osee, Joel, Amos, Obdias, Jonas, Michaeas, Naum, Ambacum, Sophonias, Aggaeus, Zacharias, Malachias
<p>* Due to translation approaches, the two books of Esdras may be divided further into four books, which can be confusing without a common naming standard.</p> <p>** The Third and Fourth Book of Maccabees are considered "Pseudepigrapha," which are writings attributed to fictional authors. Only the Eastern / Greek Orthodox church consider these works authoritative.</p>		

With the acceptance of the Apocrypha as Scripture by both western and eastern Catholic churches, there has been considerable debate about their canonicity over a thousand years. The arguments for and against the authority of these writings are summarized in the following table.

Arguments For Canonicity	Arguments Against Canonicity
<b>1.</b> The New Testament refers to it (i.e. Heb 11:35 with 2 Macc 7, 12)	While there may be allusions to the Apocrypha, the New Testament does not make any explicit quotations from it, and no apocryphal work is referred to as authoritative.
<b>2.</b> The New Testament quotes the Septuagint (LXX), which contains the Apocrypha.	The earliest version of the LXX that contains the Apocrypha dates to the fourth century A.D.; it cannot be presumed that it was included in the LXX's original form. Jesus and His disciples never quoted from them.
<b>3.</b> Some early church Fathers publicly used the Apocrypha as Scripture.	Many of these citations were additions, appendices, or alternative manuscripts of canonical works. Of those references to the Apocrypha, there was no indication that they were regarded as Scripture.

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<b>Arguments For Canonicity</b>	<b>Arguments Against Canonicity</b>
<b>4.</b> Some early church Fathers, like Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, accepted all of the Apocrypha as canon.	No church council during the first four centuries agreed that the Apocryphal was canonical, and many were vehemently opposed such as Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Origen, and Jerome.
<b>5.</b> Catacomb scenes depict episodes from the Apocrypha demonstrating it was part of early Christian life.	This is not proof of the Apocrypha's authority as Scripture. Scenes from the catacombs do not prove the canonicity of the writings they depict.
<b>6.</b> The great Greek manuscripts (Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus) contain the Apocrypha as part of the Old Testament.	Only four Apocryphal books (Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus) are found in the great Greek manuscripts. No Greek manuscript has the exact list of Apocryphal books accepted by the Council of Trent.
<b>7.</b> The Syriac church accepted the authority of the Apocrypha in the fourth century.	The second century A.D. Peshitta, the Syrian Bible, did not include the Apocrypha; it was only later in the fourth century that the Syrian church accepted them as Scripture.
<b>8.</b> Augustine and the councils at Hippo (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397) accepted them.	Augustine is the only significant Church Father that recognized the Apocrypha despite their rejection by His contemporary Jerome who had greater biblical authority and Rabbinic Jews. Augustine's reason for accepting the Apocrypha is their mention "of extreme and wonderful suffering of certain martyrs."
<b>9.</b> The Eastern Orthodox church accepts the Apocrypha as Scripture.	This was not universally accepted for the Eastern Orthodox church. While the synods of Constantinople (1638), Jaffa (1642), and Jerusalem (1672) declared the Apocrypha canonical, as late as 1839, their Larger Catechism explicitly omitted the Apocrypha, because they did not exist in the Hebrew Bible.
<b>10.</b> The Roman Catholic church proclaimed the Apocrypha as authoritative Scripture at the Council of Trent (1546).	This determination came 1500 years after the Apocrypha was written. This is in contrast to the fact that the Apocrypha was not accepted as authoritative by those whom it was written to – the Jews of the time.
<b>11.</b> As late as the nineteenth century, the Apocrypha was in Protestant Bibles.	Apocryphal books did appear in Protestant Bibles, but were generally separated, because they were deemed not as authoritative. Roman Catholic scholars through the Reformation also made a distinction between the Apocrypha and the Hebrew canon, and Luther placed the books in the back of his Bible.
<b>12.</b> Some apocryphal books, written in Hebrew, have been found in the Old Testament in the Dead Sea community of Qumran.	Of Qumran's discoveries, Old Testament Bibles, fragments of a library of extrabiblical works including some apocryphal books, none of their commentaries on the Hebrew canon included any apocryphal book. Lacking the special parchment and script accorded to God's word indicated that the Apocrypha was not considered authoritative nor canonical.

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Like all ancient extrabiblical works, the Apocrypha has historical value and provides a better understanding of the people of that time. Many who read the Apocrypha find enjoyment and edification through their study, which enhances their devotional experience.

However, as an authoritative rule for doctrine and faith, the Apocrypha is disqualified. As an example, the principle proof text used for the doctrine of purgatory, prayer for the dead, and making an offering to God for the purpose of delivering the dead from the punishment of their sin is 2 Maccabees 12:42-45.

References:

1. Gaeblein FE ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol 1, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House (1992).
2. Geisler NL, Nix WE, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Chicago: Moody Press, (1986).