

The Apocrypha

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The Apocrypha are a collection of intertestamental Jewish writings about the Bible. They were mostly written between 200BC and 100AD. **The Jews believed they were approaching the “end-time”** and they were hungry for information on the “end-time” (Dn12:4). **The authors drew on imagery from the Bible** such as Ezekiel’s vision of the portable throne (Ez10:9-13). **The Jews believed in the imminence of a “political Messiah”** to establish Israel over the nations – Jesus would have no part of this concept (Mk8:27-30). These themes are dominant in the intertestamental writings.

The Legend of the Secret Books: **The Jews maintained many legends of “secret knowledge”** supposedly given to Moses and passed down only for the “wise”. One legend asserts that Moses was given knowledge of the “end-time” which was miraculously passed on to Ezra. **According to the legend, Ezra recorded 94 books** – the 24 books of the Old Testament, to be “published openly”. The other **70 books were kept secret, only for “the wise”** (2 Esdras 14:1-3,5-6,24-26,37-48). The intertestamental authors were obsessed with supplying these 70 books.

The Term “Apocrypha”: The Greek word from which “apocrypha” derives is ἀπόκρυφος - apokryphos, an adjective meaning “hidden”, “secret”. **The books in the “Apocrypha” are just literary productions:** “devout” persons trying to understand the Bible and writing about it. **They are NOT inspired by God and are NOT authoritative.** The intertestamental authors studied the Bible with the assumption that God would soon deliver Israel from slavery to the Gentiles (Neh9:36-37, Ezra 9:8-9a). **They studied the prophetic books of the Bible intensely:** they found all the prophesies of the “restoration of Israel” and the “Messianic kingdom”. **They interpreted all the prophecies in terms of a political Messiah freeing the nation from slavery to the Gentiles and establishing a physical kingdom of Israel to rule the world.** Based largely on the “intertestamental literature”, they believed it was about to happen when the First Advent occurred.

History of the Use of Apocrypha: The intertestamental literature was at first used enthusiastically by the Jews: **it was the popular literature on the streets of Jerusalem when Jesus walked those streets:** comparable to Star Wars or the Lord of the Rings today. Most of the books we include as “Apocrypha” were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic. **The Greek translations of Old Testament books**, which we call the **“Septuagint”**, were being created at this same time: the books of the “Apocrypha” were included in the translation:

- **The Council of Jamnia 90AD:** After the Temple was destroyed in 70AD, the surviving “Rabbis” assembled in Jamnia. One of their primary concerns was the text and cannon of the Old Testament. They recognized “Christian” interpolations in many of the intertestamental books, so they banned them all from use by Jews – **the books of the “Apocrypha” were officially excluded from the Old Testament cannon.**
- **The “Christian” Church:** The “Septuagint” became the Bible of the Christian Church. A Latin version of the Bible was prepared – a direct translation from the “Septuagint”; we call it the **“Old Latin”**. The books of the “Apocrypha” were integral to these versions. Around 400AD Pope Damasus commissioned **Jerome** to prepare a new Latin Bible directly translated **from original language manuscripts – the Vulgate**. The books of the “Apocrypha” were NOT part of the Hebrew text – so, Jerome included them in the Vulgate with special notations indicating their “non-canonical” status.
- **The Council of Trent 1546AD:** During the Middle Ages, the Vulgate became the standard Bible of the Western Church, but Jerome’s “notations” were largely ignored, and **the books of the “Apocrypha” assumed “canonical” status. This was formalized by the Council of Trent:** the “Apocrypha” were officially included in the cannon.
- **English Translations of the Bible:** Due to the influence of the Vulgate, **the Apocrypha were included in the translations** of John Wycliff, William Tyndale (the Great Bible), the Geneva Bible, the Bishops’ Bible, and the King James Bible of 1611. **Modern “Protestant” translations do NOT include the Apocrypha**, but there are many independent translations.

The Value of the Apocrypha: The extant modern literature on the study of the intertestamental writings is exploding today – many new manuscripts have been discovered, published, and studied. **The value of the intertestamental writings is as a record of intellectual history for the Jews in the period 200BC to 100AD and the early “Christian” Church.** As with all scholarly activity, extreme positions arise: some scholars make the error of using these uninspired works to interpret the Bible. Much can be learned from the intertestamental literature, but it must always be kept in perspective: **it cannot be used for doctrine or to control understanding of the Bible. There is no need to ever read any of the intertestamental writings.** However, if one has an interest, **there is no reason not to read them: they are not evil or dangerous.** They are “uninspired” writings of men trying to understand religious concepts – like Sumerian myths, early patristic writings, or modern “self helps”. **They are NOT authoritative because they are NOT inspired. They cannot be used to establish “doctrine”: they are NOT scripture.**