

The Apocrypha—Part One

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Apocrypha most commonly refers to disputed books that Protestants reject and Roman Catholics and Orthodox communions accept into the Old Testament. The word *apocrypha* means “hidden” or “doubtful.” So those who accept these documents prefer to call them “deuterocanonical,” or books of “the second canon.”

The Roman Catholic View. Catholics and Protestants agree about the inspiration of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. They differ over eleven pieces of literature in the Old Testament (seven books and four parts of books). These disputed works became an issue in the Reformation and, in reaction to their rejection by Protestants, were “infallibly” declared to be part of the inspired canon of Scripture in 1546 at the Council of Trent.

The Roman Catholic Council of Trent stated:

The Synod... receives and venerates... all the books [including the *Apocrypha*] both of the Old and the New Testaments—seeing that one God is the Author of both... as having been dictated, either by Christ’s own word of mouth or by the Holy Ghost... if anyone receives not as sacred and canonical the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church... let him be anathema (Schaff, 2:81).

Another Trent document read:

If anyone, however, should not accept the said books as sacred and canonical, entire with all their parts,... and if both knowingly and deliberately he should condemn the aforesaid tradition let him be anathema (Denzinger, *Sources*, no. 784).

The same language affirming the *Apocrypha* is repeated by Vatican Council II.

The *Apocrypha* Rome accepts includes eleven books or twelve, depending on whether Baruch 1-6 is split into two pieces, Baruch 1-5 and The Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch 6). The Deuterocanon includes all the fourteen (or fifteen) books in the Protestant *Apocrypha* except the Prayer of Manasseh and 1 and 2 Esdras (called 3 and 4 Esdras by Roman Catholics. Ezra and Nehemiah are called 1 and 2 Esdras by Catholics).

Although the Roman Catholic canon has eleven more pieces of literature than does the Protestant Bible, only seven extra books, or a total forty-six, appear in the table of contents (the Protestant and Jewish Old Testament has thirty-nine). As noted in the accompanying table, four other pieces of literature are incorporated within Esther and Daniel.

The Apocrypha as Scripture. The larger canon is sometimes referred to as the “Alexandrian Canon,” as opposed to the “Palestinian Canon” which does not contain the *Apocrypha*, because it is alleged to have been part of the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the *Septuagint*, or LXX) prepared at Alexandria, Egypt. Reasons generally advanced in favor of this broader Alexandrian list are:

1. The New Testament reflects the thought of the *Apocrypha*, and even refers to events described in it (cf. Heb. 11:35 with 2 Maccabees 7,12).
2. The New Testament quotes mostly from the Greek Old Testament, the LXX, which

contained the *Apocrypha*. This gives tacit approval to the whole text.

3. Some early church fathers quoted and used the *Apocrypha* as Scripture in public worship.
4. Such early fathers as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria accepted all of the *Apocrypha* as canonical.
5. Early Christian catacomb scenes depict episodes from the *Apocrypha*, showing it was part of early Christian religious life. This at least reveals a great regard for the *Apocrypha*.
6. Important early manuscripts (*Aleph*, *A*, and *B*) interpose the *Apocrypha* among the Old Testament books as part of the Jewish-Greek Old Testament.
7. Early church councils accepted the *Apocrypha*: Rome (382), Hippo (393), and Carthage (397).
8. The Eastern Orthodox church accepts the *Apocrypha*. Their acceptance shows it to be a common Christian belief, not one unique to Catholics.
9. The Roman Catholic church proclaimed the *Apocrypha* canonical at the Council of Trent (1546) in accord with the early councils noted and the Council of Florence not long before the Reformation (1442).
10. The apocryphal books continued to be included in the Protestant Bible as late as the nineteenth century This indicates that even Protestants accepted the *Apocrypha* until very recently
11. Apocryphal books in Hebrew were among Old Testament canonical books in the Dead Sea community at Qumran, so they were part of the Hebrew Canon.

(Next time in Part Two: Answers to the Catholic Arguments)

The Literature in Dispute	
Apocryphal Books	Deuterocanonical Books
The Wisdom of Solomon	Book of Wisdom (ca. 30 B.C.)
Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)	Sirach (132 B.C.)
Tobit (ca. 200 B.C.)	Tobit
Judith (ca. 150 B.C.)	Judith
1 Esdras (ca. 150-100 B.C.)	3 Esdras
1 Maccabees (ca. 110 B.C.)	1 Maccabees
2 Maccabees (ca. 110-70 B.C.)	2 Maccabees
Baruch (ca. 150-50 B.C.)	Baruch chaps. 1-5
Letter of Jeremiah	Baruch 6 (ca. 300-100 B.C.)
2 Esdras (ca. A.D. 100)	4 Esdras
Additions to Esther	Esther 10:4-16:24 (140-130 B.C.)
Prayer of Azariah (ca. 200-0 B.C.)	Daniel 3:24-90—"Song of Three Young Men"
Susanna (ca. 200-0 B.C.)	Daniel 13
Bel and the Dragon	Daniel 14 (ca. 100 B.C.)
Prayer of Manasseh (or second Prayer of Manasseh, ca. 100-0 B.C.)	

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