

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

The Apocrypha is a set of books (scrolls) that are included in some Bible translations, including Bibles used by Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Ethiopian churches, but since the Reformation (1517 AD) have been rejected by most Protestant churches. The word “apocrypha,” which means *hidden*.

The official list of the **15 books of the Apocrypha** included in some Christian Bibles (Old Testament):

7 books placed within the Old Testament:

(1). **Tobit** and (2). **Judith** are placed after Nehemiah. (3). **I Maccabees** and (4). **II Maccabees** are placed after Esther. (5). **Wisdom of Solomon** and (6). **Ecclesiasticus** (also called **Sirach**) is placed after the Song of Solomon. (7). **Baruch** is placed after Lamentations.

8 books included as an appendix to the Old Testament:

(8). **I Esdras** and (9). **II Esdras**, (10). **The Additions to the Book of Esther**, (11). **The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men**, (12). **Suzanna**, (13). **Bel and the Dragon**, (14). **The Prayer of Manasseh**, and (15). **The Letter to Jeremiah** (sometimes chapter 6 of Baruch).

There is an expanded appendix for Eastern Orthodox Bibles adding three books:

III and IV Maccabees and **Psalms 151**.

There are also other “apocryphal” writings that are outside of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox canons entirely, and these writings are often called “apocryphal” (small a).

From Where Did the Apocrypha Come?

After the Exile of the Jews in Babylon (from **608 BC to 538 BC** – 1st group taken to Babylon to 1st group returning to Jerusalem, or from **586 BC to 516 BC** – From 1st Temple destroyed to 2nd Temple dedicated), the Persian Empire under King Cyrus ruled the known world until the Greeks, led by Alexander the Great, defeated the Persians in 333 BC, and then went on to conquer the rest of the known world.

Alexander founded a city in 331 BC on the northern coast of Africa which he named after himself (Alexandria, Egypt). When Alexander died in 323 BC, his kingdom was divided among four of his generals. The time period from 323 BC to 146 BC is called the Hellenistic (Greek) Empire because Grecian customs spread. General **Ptolemy** took over the southern portion of the Hellenistic Empire (Egypt and the African Coast), including what had already become the great port city of Alexandria.

General Ptolemy’s son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus ruled in Alexandria from 308-246 BC and oversaw the **Alexandrian Library**, one of the great wonders of the ancient world. To do trade with the Ptolemies in Egypt, **you had to bring your countries most precious scrolls**. The Greeks would make two copies of your scrolls in the GREEK LANGUAGE, keep the originals, and hand you back Greek copies. This was your tax, and it was by this method Greek became the *koine* (common) language of the world (Hellenism).

It was in Alexandria that **70 Hebrew and Greek scholars**, working on behalf of the Alexandria library, translated the Hebrew scrolls of Scripture into Greek during the 3rd century BC. This Greek translation is called **The Septuagint** (which means 70). The Septuagint began with just a translation of the Torah (the

first five scrolls), but over the decades, scholars at Alexandria translated other Hebrew scrolls, eventually including the 15 scrolls now called the Apocrypha. Though the Hebrew Scriptures were “canonized” in the by the 4th century BC, the Hebrews didn’t stop writing.

The Apocrypha - The Writings from “Between the Testaments” (400 BC to the Birth of Christ)

For centuries scholars have argued about what to do with the 15 extra books that the LXX translated and included in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible. The questions arose because, unlike the rest of the Old Testament, *we don’t have any copies of these writings in Hebrew. The canon of the Hebrew Bible* (the Jewish scriptures) which are basically was set before the texts in the Apocrypha were translated into Greek, so we can’t rely on the acceptance of Judaism to validate them. *They are not Scripture for the Jews, who don’t consider them divinely inspired.*

When St. Jerome translated the Bible into Latin (a fourth-century AD translation called the Vulgate), he wasn’t sure what to do with these books. They were widely used in the church, so he didn’t want to exclude them, but since the Old Testament was basically the Hebrew Bible and the Hebrew Bible didn’t include them, he was unsure what to do. *So, Jerome included them but put them in a separate section.*

In time, the Catholic and Orthodox traditions fully embraced them, so their Bibles include the writings where they would belong—as opposed to being set apart in a separate section. They call them the **Deuterocanonical books**—a second canon, basically. Protestants have done different things with them.

When Martin Luther translated the Bible into German, he adopted Jerome’s solution of a separate section for them and when you find the Apocrypha in Bibles used by Protestants today, that’s still where they sit...in the middle in-between the Old and New Testaments. Some Protestant traditions don’t think they should be in there and so you also have lots of Bibles that don’t include them at all.

I have read them all and encourage Christians to do the same. For starters, there’s a whole bunch of history in the four books of the Maccabees that give some great context for what was happening in the period right before Jesus was born. It’s much easier to understand what Jesus’ world was like politically when you have that history. Did you know Judas was named for a war hero (Judas Maccabeus)? The history of the Hanukkah holiday in I and II Maccabees.

There is also some evidence that Paul was familiar with these writings and perhaps references them in places in the New Testament, although those references are disputed.

The Pseudepigrapha

The term *pseudepigrapha* typically refers to an assorted collection of Jewish religious works thought to be written c. 300 BC to 300 AD. **They are books to be distinguished from the Apocrypha.** The word *pseudepigrapha* (from the Greek: ψευδής, *pseudēs*, "false" and ἐπιγραφή, *epigraphē*, "name" or "inscription" or "ascription"; thus when taken together it means "false superscription or title." In short, these are books claimed to be from a well-known person or patriarch of the faith but are clearly not written by the person whose name is in the title. Some examples are **The Assumption of Moses, The Book of Enoch, the Second Book of Enoch, 3 Baruch, the Psalms of Solomon, Sibylline Oracles, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.** To write under another person’s name is not necessarily a “lie,” as it is a method of writing that has been in use since the earliest days of published literature. All Christian denominations, including Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox consider the Pseudepigrapha books to be non-canonical.