
The Apocrypha and other non-Canonical Writings

Introduction

This article is a description of the writings which evangelical Christians have ruled are *not canonical*, that is, they don't belong in the inspired Bible.

The word **canon** refers to any standard or convention, and the word is widely used in a variety of applications. The word comes from the Greek **kanon** meaning "rule" or "measuring stick". For example, a **musical canon** follows a certain pattern, such as using a melody with one or more imitations (cf. Pachelbel's Canon). The **Canon of Dutch Literature** is a listing of the most important Dutch literary works, based on a standard adopted for what books belong in the list.

A **biblical canon** or **canon of scripture** is a list of books considered to be authoritative scripture by a particular religious community. And there is a huge variety of canonical lists, which have been developed from ancient times down to the present, such as:

- The Jewish Canon
- Samaritan Canon
- Latter Day Saints Canon
- Endless varieties of Christian Canons

See also the following Grace Notes topics, found in the Topical Library at:

http://www.gracenotes.info/GN_TopicsLibrary.shtml

- Jewish Theological Writings
- Jewish Literature

Christian Canons

The early church used the Old Testament Canon which was adopted by the Septuagint translators.

Writings attributed to the apostles circulated amongst the earliest Christian communities. The Pauline epistles were circulating in collected forms by the end of the 1st century AD. Justin Martyr, in the early 2nd century, mentions the

"memoirs of the Apostles," which Christians called "gospels," and which were considered to be authoritatively equal to the Old Testament.

Gradually, as New Testament writings began to be assembled and examined, a very large variety of "rules" were adopted, by many different divisions of Christianity, aimed at deciding on which writings were authoritative. And so we have:

- Marcion's canon, thought to have been the first attempt at a Christian canon.
- The various canons of the Apostolic Fathers
- Various canons developed by synods and committees of Christian bishops and elders.
- The canon of the Eastern Orthodox Church (Alexandrian fathers)
- The canon(s) of the Roman Catholic church
- Luther's Canon
- The Protestant Canon

See Wikipedia for a thorough review of biblical canonical literature.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_canon#Christian_biblical_cansons

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canon>

"Our" Canon

In evangelical Christianity, the term **canon of scripture** refers to those Christian writings which are judged to have been inspired by God. That is to say, these books have been subjected to examination to determine that they are **inspired** literature, thus having ultimate authority. Here is the definition of **inspiration**.

Inspiration: God the Holy Spirit so supernaturally directed the human writers of Scripture, that without waiving their human intelligence, individuality, literary style, personal feelings or any other human factor, His own complete and coherent message to

man was recorded in perfect accuracy in the original languages of Scripture, the very words bearing the authority of divine authorship.

The task of determining that some writings are inspired, and the rules (canons) to be applied, is the subject of Bible seminary courses on Biblical Introduction. You can imagine that there is much controversy, doubt, and discussion about whether it is even possible to make such a determination, let alone how to go about it.

Christian Bible teaching is based on the acceptance of the present organization of the Old Testament and New Testament canons, as found in the Protestant Bibles (King James, New American Standard, etc.).

The Apocrypha

The word **Apocrypha** means “hidden,” or “secret.” The term “Apocrypha” is usually applied to a collection of books, from eleven to sixteen in number, which appeared during the interim between the Old and New Testaments. These books have come down to us in more or less close connection with the canonical books of the Bible.

These books have a strange history. Ecclesiastical opinion in different periods has differed widely as to the value of this literature, and as to whether any of these books are divinely inspired. The Jews of the Dispersion in Egypt placed a high estimate upon these books and included them in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint; but there were rejected from the Hebrew canon by the Jews of Palestine.

The Roman Catholic Church, in the Council of Trent, 1546 AD, declared eleven of the books to be canonical, and they appear in the modern Catholic editions of the Scriptures.

The View of the Protestant Church

It is commonly agreed that some of these books contain material of literary merit and historical value. But the canonicity of all of the books of the Apocrypha has been rejected, and they have been

gradually omitted from the modern editions of the Protestant Bibles, for the following reasons:

1. They are never quoted by Jesus, and it is doubtful if they were ever alluded to by the apostles.
2. Most of the early Church Fathers regarded them as non inspired.
3. The books did not appear in the Ancient Hebrew canon.
4. The inferior quality of most of the writings, as compared with the canonical books, stamps them as unworthy of a place in the sacred Scriptures.

The Old Testament Apocrypha

Character of the Books

Authorities differ as to the classification of these books. The Epistle of Jeremiah is often incorporated in the Book of Baruch, and III and IV Maccabees are often omitted.

Historic – I and II Maccabees; I Esdras

Traditional – Additions to Esther; Susanna; Song of the Three Holy Children; Bel and the Dragon; Judith; Tobit

Prophetic – Baruch; Prayer of Manasses

Apocalyptic – II Esdras; IV Esdras in the Latin Vulgate

Instructive – Ecclesiasticus; The Wisdom of Solomon (in style like the Proverbs)

HISTORICAL APOCRYPHA

- 1 and 2 Esdras
- 1 and 2 Maccabees
- Additions to Daniel
- Additions to Esther
- The Epistle of Jeremy is a deutero-canonical (not part of the Hebrew Bible) book of the Old Testament; supposedly written by Jeremiah to the Jews who were about to be carried away as captives to Babylon

by Nebuchadnezzar. It is included in Catholic Bibles as the final chapter of the Book of Baruch. It is also included in Orthodox Bibles as a standalone book. The title of this work is misleading, for it is neither a letter nor was it written by the prophet Jeremiah.

- The Prayer of Manasses

THE LEGENDARY APOCRYPHA

- Book of Baruch
- Tobit
- Judith

APOCALYPTIC APOCRYPHA

- 4th Esdras as 2 Esdras

DIDACTIC APOCRYPHA

- The Wisdom of Solomon
- Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)

During the early Christianity centuries, most Greek and Latin church fathers, such as Iranaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyprian, none of whom knew the Hebrew language, quoted passages from the Apocryphal books as “scripture”, “divine scripture”, and “inspired”.

Only occasionally did a Father make an effort to learn the limits of the Hebrew Old Testament canon.

In the 4th Century many Greek fathers came to recognize the difference between the books in the Hebrew canon and the rest of the books which some held to be scripture (Eusebius, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus, Amphilochius, Epiphanius).

The Latin (Roman) church, at the council of Hippo (393 AD), and the council of Carthage (419 AD), authorized the use of apocryphal books as scripture.

In the 14th century, John Wycliffe produced the first English version of the Bible. This included all the Apocrypha except II Esdras. However, he

stated that these books were not authoritative for doctrine.

The first edition of the Swiss-German Bible, or the church of Zurich, 1527-1529, is written in six volumes, the fifth volume being the Apocrypha. They were described as “books which are not reckoned as Biblical by the ancients nor found among the Hebrews.”

The Council of Trent, in 1546, from the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic church, gave the first “infallible” approval of the Apocrypha. The Council also pronounced a decree of anathema on any who refused to acknowledge these writings as canonical (inspired). The list did not include, however, the Prayer of Manasses or the books of I and II Esdras

At the synod of Jerusalem in 1672, the books of Wisdom, Judith, Tobit, Bel and the Dragon, Susanna, Maccabees, and Ecclesiasticus were designated as canonical.

In England, the Protestants were united in rejecting the Apocryphal books as canonical, but there were various differences as to how the books could be used. Some thought they would be valuable as sermons, others are resources for research.

The Puritans published a Bible that did not contain the Apocrypha, their having an aversion to any human book that was not in the Hebrew or Greek canon.

The earliest version of the English Bible which excluded the Apocrypha were some Geneva Bibles printed in 1599 in Belgium.

George Abbot, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and one of the translators of the King James Bible, in 1615 gave public notice that no copy of the Bible was to be bound or sold which *did not* contain the Apocrypha. However, there was a growing demand for non-Apocrypha Bibles, and copies began showing up without it in the years from 1616 to 1633.

Reasons for Rejecting the Old Testament Apocrypha

1. It is universally admitted that the Old Testament apocryphal books never had a place in the Hebrew canon.
2. They were never quoted in the New Testament, either by Christ or His apostles.
3. Josephus excludes them, he limits the number of books to 22, which he lists.
4. Philo of Alexandria quote frequently from the Old Testament, but never mentioned the Apocryphal books, and never quoted them.
5. They are not found in any catalog of canonical books made during the first four centuries.
6. Jerome declared for the strict Hebrew canon and rejected the authority of the entire Apocrypha.
7. None of the writers of the Apocrypha claim divine inspiration; some of them even deny they were inspired.
8. The books contain many historical, chronological, and geographical errors, distortions of Old Testament narratives, and contradict the Bible, secular history, and themselves.
9. No prophets were connected with the Apocrypha.
10. They teach doctrines and practices which are directly opposed to the canon of Scripture.
11. The books were written much later than the Old Testament and after the Hebrew canon was closed in about 425 BC.
12. The Apocrypha was not permitted to be read for instruction by any organization or group, until the Roman Catholic Council of Trent did so in 1546, and then by a small majority.
13. While there are Targums for the Hebrew canon, there are no Targums for the Apocrypha.

The New Testament Apocrypha**Reasons for the Origin of the New Testament Apocrypha**

1. A desire for more details and knowledge about Christ than were communicated by the apostles and evangelists.
2. Desire for more details in the Gospels, especially with regard to Christ's birth, childhood, life of Mary and Joseph, etc.
3. Publication of opinions about doctrine issues, such as humanity and deity of Christ, were prompted by authors' desires to publish their views.
4. Originated to fill up the supposed lacks and gaps in the canonical writings.

Categories of the New Testament Apocrypha

- The **apocryphal gospels** – non-canonical but not necessarily spurious.
- The **apocryphal epistles** – non-canonical and pseudepigraphical (see below on the Pseudepigrapha)
- The **apocryphal apocalypses** – non-canonical and pseudepigraphical

Listing of New Testament Apocryphal books

- Teachings of the Twelve Apostles
- Epistle of Barnabas
- First and Second Epistles of Clement
- Shepherd of Hermas
- Apocalypse of Peter
- Acts of Paul, including Paul and Thecla
- Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians
- Seven Epistles of Ignatius
- Gospel of the pseudo-Matthew
- Protevangelium of James
- Gospel of the Nativity of Mary
- Gospel of Nicodemus
- Gospel of the Savior's Infancy

- History of Joseph the Carpenter
- The Clementine Homilies – work of fiction attributed to Clement of Rome, dated approximately at the end of the 2nd century or beginning of the 3rd.
- The Epistle from Laodicea – possible reference to it in Colossians 4:16, apparently a forgery
- The Lost Epistles to the Corinthians – from 1 Corinthians 5:9, date from about 200 AD.
- The Epistle to the Alexandrians, lost today, mentioned in the Muratorian Fragment
- Letters of Paul to Seneca – in Latin, six letters of Paul and eight of Seneca.

The Pseudepigraphical Writings

Pseudepigrapha are falsely attributed works, texts whose claimed authorship is represented by a separate author; or a work, "whose real author attributed it to a figure of the past." The word "pseudepigrapha" is from the Greek: ψευδής, *pseudes*, "false" and ἐπιγραφή, *epigraphē*, "name" or "inscription" or "ascription"; thus when taken together it means "false superscription or title". (Wikipedia)

In the Bible context, the Pseudepigrapha are writings which claim Biblical authorship but have never been accepted as either canonical or apocryphal. There are pseudepigraphical writings for both the Old and New Testaments.

The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

APOCALYPTIC BOOKS

- Books of Enoch
- Secrets of Enoch
- The Apocalypse of Baruch
- The Rest of the Words of Baruch
- The Assumption of Moses
- A Revelation of Moses
- The Prophecy of Isaiah

- The Apocalypse of Elijah
- The Apocalypse of Zephaniah
- The apocalypse of Esdras
- The Sibylline Oracles

LEGENDARY BOOKS

- The Testament of Adam
- The Book of the Jubilees
- The Testaments of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
- The Apocalypse of Abraham
- The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs
- Life of Asenath, Joseph's wife
- Testament of Job
- Testament of Solomon
- The Book of Noah
- Penitence of Jannes and Jambres

POETICAL BOOKS

- Psalms of Solomon
- Eighteen psalms in Greek
- Additions to the Psalter

DIDACTIC (TEACHING) BOOKS

- Magical Books of Moses
- The Story of Achiacharus

The New Testament Pseudepigrapha

THE PSEUDO-GOSPELS

- Gospel of Andrew
- Gospel of Bartholomew
- Gospel of Barnabas
- Gospel of Matthias
- Gospel of Thomas
- Gospel of Peter
- Gospel of Philip

THE PSEUDO-ACTS

- The Acts of John
- The Acts of Paul
- The Acts of Peter
- The Acts of Andrew
- The Acts of Thomas
- The Acts of Matthias
- The Acts of Philip
- The Acts of Thaddaeus

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE LAODICEANS

This stands in a category by itself

THE PSEUDO-APOCALYPTIC BOOKS

- The Apocalypse of Peter
 - The Apocalypse of Paul
 - The Apocalypse of Thomas
 - The Apocalypse of John the Theologian
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