

Adult Catechism April 11, 2016

The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament

Part 1: Scripture Readings:

Sirach 7: 1-3 : After If you do no wrong, no wrong will ever come to you. Do not plow the ground to plant seeds of injustice; you may reap a bigger harvest than you expect.

Baruch 1:15-21: This is the confession you should make: The Lord our God is righteous, but we are still covered with shame. All of us—the people of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, our kings, our rulers, our priests, our prophets, and our ancestors have been put to shame, because we have sinned against the Lord our God and have disobeyed him. We did not listen to him or live according to his commandments. From the day the Lord brought our ancestors out of Egypt until the present day, we have continued to be unfaithful to him, and we have not hesitated to disobey him. Long ago, when the Lord led our ancestors out of Egypt, so that he could give us a rich and fertile land, he pronounced curses against us through his servant Moses. And today we are suffering because of those curses. We refused to obey the word of the Lord our God which he spoke to us through the prophets. Instead, we all did as we pleased and went on our own evil way. We turned to other gods and did things the Lord hates.

Part 2: What are the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old

Testament? The word “Apocrypha” means “hidden” and can refer to books meant only for the inner circle, or books not good enough to be read, or simply books outside of the canon. In most Bibles, the term refers to the Old Testament Apocrypha, printed in a separate section between the Old and New Testaments. These are books, with one or two exceptions, that were found in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint), but not in the Hebrew. The early church, which used the Greek Old Testament, took them over as part of their sacred writings. The early church read these books, used them in teaching, even quoted them as Scripture. There was also an awareness in the Church that these books were not in the Hebrew Scriptures and therefore there were questions about their authenticity.

The Protestant Reformation was based on the authority of the Scriptures. It was important, therefore, for the Reformers to say exactly what Scripture was. Martin Luther called the Apocrypha “useful and good for reading”, but did not consider them equal to Scripture. This was the first time these books had been brought together into a separate collection. Catholics continued to maintain, and still do, that twelve books of the Apocrypha (called the Deuterocanon or second canon) were a legitimate part of Scripture. The Eastern Orthodox churches also accept the Deuterocanon in a longer form. So even today, part of Christianity says the Apocrypha are Scriptural, part of Christianity say they are not, because they were not part of the original Hebrew Scriptures.

Most of the books of the Apocrypha were written between about 200 BC and AD 100, they literally belong between the testaments. They contain important teachings which, as Christians in all ages have recognized, are helpful to our growth as persons of faith. At the very least, these books help us understand Judaism in the time of Jesus, and therefore understand Jesus better.

Part 3: The Book of Tobit: The book of Tobit is about a righteous Jew, Tobit, who is in exile in Ninevah, and Sarah, who is tortured by a demon in Media. God sends the angel Raphael to help both Tobit and Sarah. Tobit’s son, Tobias, goes with Raphael to Media, binds the demon, and marries Sarah. The religious value of the book is in the emphasis on both the national and personal faith of Judaism as lived out by they central characters. The Book of Tobit, named after its principal character, combines

Jewish piety and morality with folklore in a fascinating story that has enjoyed wide popularity in both Jewish and Christian circles. Prayers, psalms, and words of wisdom, as well as the skillfully constructed story itself, provide valuable insights into the faith and the religious milieu of its unknown author. The book was probably written early in the second century B.C.; it is not known where.

Tobit, a devout and wealthy Israelite living among the captives deported to Nineveh from the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722/721 B.C., suffers severe reverses and is finally blinded. Because of his misfortunes he begs the Lord to let him die. But recalling the large sum he had formerly deposited in far-off Media, he sends his son Tobiah there to bring back the money. In Media, at this same time, a young woman, Sarah, also prays for death, because she has lost seven husbands, each killed in turn on his wedding night by the demon Asmodeus. God hears the prayers of Tobit and Sarah and sends the angel Raphael in human form to aid them both.

Raphael makes the trip to Media with Tobiah. When Tobiah is attacked by a large fish as he bathes in the Tigris River, Raphael orders him to seize it and to remove its gall, heart, and liver because they are useful for medicine. Later, at Raphael's urging, Tobiah marries Sarah, and uses the fish's heart and liver to drive Asmodeus from the bridal chamber. Returning to Nineveh with his wife and his father's money, Tobiah rubs the fish's gall into his father's eyes and cures him. Finally, Raphael reveals his true identity and returns to heaven. Tobit then utters his beautiful hymn of praise. Before dying, Tobit tells his son to leave Nineveh because God will destroy that wicked city. After Tobiah buries his father and mother, he and his family depart for Media, where he later learns that the destruction of Nineveh has taken place. Although the Book of Tobit is usually listed with the historical books, it more correctly stands midway between them and the wisdom literature. It contains numerous maxims like those found in the wisdom books (cf. 4:3–19, 21; 12:6–10; 14:7, 9) as well as standard wisdom themes: fidelity to the law, intercessory function of angels, piety toward parents, purity of marriage, reverence for the dead, and the value of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. The book makes Tobit a relative of Ahiqar, a noted hero of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature and folklore.

Part 4: The Book of Judith: Judith begins with a war against the Jews led by the Assyrian general Holofernes. Judith, a beautiful and pious widow, leaves her besieged village, goes to Holofernes and promises him victory. She then kills him, goes back to her village, and arranges an attack on the Assyrian camp. The Assyrians are defeated and driven out of the country. Judith ranks with Deborah, Esther, and Miriam as a heroine and instrument of God.

The Book of Judith relates the story of God's deliverance of the Jewish people. This was accomplished "by the hand of a female"—a constant motif (cf. 8:33; 9:9, 10; 12:4; 13:4, 14, 15; 15:10; 16:5) meant to recall the "hand" of God in the Exodus narrative (cf. Ex 15:6). The work may have been written around 100 B.C., but its historical range is extraordinary. Within the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (1:1; 2:1), it telescopes five centuries of historical and geographical information with imaginary details. There are references to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital destroyed in 612 B.C., to Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler not of Assyria but of Babylon (605/604–562), and to the second Temple, built around 515. The postexilic period is presumed (e.g., governance by the High Priest). The Persian period is represented by two characters, Holofernes and Bagoas, who appear together in the military campaigns of Artaxerxes III Ochus (358–338); there seem to be allusions to the second-century Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Several mysteries remain: Judith herself, Arphaxad, and others are otherwise unknown. The geographical details, such as the narrow defile into Bethulia (an unidentified town which gives access to the heart of the land), are fanciful. The simple conclusion from these and other details is that the work is historical fiction, written to exalt God as Israel's deliverer from foreign might, not by an army, but by means of a simple widow.

Inner-biblical references are noteworthy: as God acted through Moses' hand (Ex 10:21–22; 14:27–30), so God delivers "by the hand of a female," Judith. Like Jael, who drove a tent peg through the head of

Sisera (Jgs 4), Judith kills an enemy general. Like Deborah (Jgs 4–5), Judith “judges” Israel in the time of military crisis. Like Sarah, the mother of Israel’s future (Gn 17:6), Judith’s beauty deceives foreigners, with the result that blessings redound to Israel (Gn 12:11–20). Her Hebrew name means “Jewish woman.” Her exploits captured the imagination of liturgists, artists, and writers through the centuries. The book is filled with double entendres and ironic situations, e.g., Judith’s conversation with Holofernes in 11:5–8, 19, where “my lord” is ambiguous, and her declaration to Holofernes that she will lead him through Judea to Jerusalem (his head goes on such a journey).

Part 5: The Additions to Esther: These include a series of passages that add a more religious tone to the book of Esther. They include an episode in which Mordecai saves the life of the king, prayers of both Mordecai and Esther, and a repetition of the heroic acts by which Esther saved her people from persecution.

Part 6: The Wisdom of Solomon: This book teaches that the wicked may seem to prosper, but they face a future judgement. The righteous live forever. The book uses wisdom to help Jews face persecution and resist the temptations of a pagan culture. The Book of Wisdom was written about fifty years before the coming of Christ. Its author, whose name is not known to us, was probably a member of the Jewish community at Alexandria, in Egypt. He wrote in Greek, in a style patterned on that of Hebrew verse. At times he speaks in the person of Solomon, placing his teachings on the lips of the wise king of Hebrew tradition in order to emphasize their value. His profound knowledge of the earlier Old Testament writings is reflected in almost every line of the book, and marks him, like Ben Sira, as an outstanding representative of religious devotion and learning among the sages of postexilic Judaism. The primary purpose of the author was the edification of his co-religionists in a time when they had experienced suffering and oppression, in part at least at the hands of apostate fellow Jews. To convey his message he made use of the most popular religious themes of his time, namely the splendor and worth of divine wisdom (6:22–11:1), the glorious events of the exodus (11:2–16; 12:23–27; 15:18–19:22), God’s mercy (11:17–12:22), the folly of idolatry (13:1–15:17), and the manner in which God’s justice operates in rewarding or punishing the individual (1:1–6:21). The first ten chapters in particular provide background for the teaching of Jesus and for some New Testament theology about Jesus.

Part 7: The Book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus): This book was written about 180 BC in Jerusalem. It is a book about ethics in public life. The true measure of character is in virtue rather than money. It relates wisdom to the Torah and to worship. The Wisdom of Ben Sira derives its title from the author, “Yeshua [Jesus], son of Eleazar, son of Sira” (50:27). This seems to be the earliest title of the book. The designation “Liber Ecclesiasticus,” meaning “Church Book,” appended to some Greek and Latin manuscripts, is perhaps due to the extensive use the church made of this book in presenting moral teaching to catechumens and to the faithful. The title “Sirach” comes from the Greek form of the author’s name.

The author, a sage who lived in Jerusalem, was thoroughly imbued with love for the wisdom tradition, and also for the law, priesthood, Temple, and divine worship. As a wise and experienced observer of life he addressed himself to his contemporaries with the motive of helping them to maintain religious faith and integrity through study of the books sacred to the Jewish tradition.

The book contains numerous well-crafted maxims, grouped by affinity, and dealing with a variety of subjects such as the individual, the family, and the community in their relations with one another and with God. It treats of friendship, education, poverty and wealth, laws, religious worship, and many other matters that reflect the religious and social customs of the time.

Part 8: The Book of Baruch: This book contains three major sections. One has reflections on repentance after the fall of Jerusalem. Another is a poem on wisdom, and the third offers words of hope in a time of despair and persecution.

The opening verses ascribe the book to the well-known assistant to Jeremiah (Jer 32:12; 36:4, 32; 45:1). It is a collection of four very different compositions, ending with a work entitled “The Letter of Jeremiah,” which circulated separately in major manuscripts of the Greek tradition. The original language may have been Hebrew, but only the Greek and other versions have been preserved. The fictional setting is Babylon, where Baruch reads his scroll to King Jechoniah (Jehoiachin) and the exiles; they react by sending gifts and the scroll to Jerusalem (1:1–14), presumably by the hand of Baruch (1:7). No certain date can be given for the book, but it may have been edited in final form during the last two centuries B.C. The work attempts to explain the trauma of the exile in terms of a Deuteronomic cycle: sin (of Israel), punishment, repentance, and return (cf. Jgs 2; also Dt 28–33).

The prayer of the exiles (2:11–3:8) is a confession of sin and a request for mercy, and has remarkable similarities to Dn 9 and to parts of Jeremiah. The poem on personified Wisdom is concerned with three themes: the importance of Wisdom, the elusive character of Wisdom (cf. Jb 28), and the identification of Wisdom with Torah (cf. Sir 24:23). Baruch’s Poem of Consolation resembles parts of Is 40–66, and it offers encouragement to the exiles in view of their eventual return; there are two addresses by personified Zion. The Letter of Jeremiah, unlike the letter in Jer 29, is a polemic against idolatry, a well-known theme (cf. Jer 10:2–11; Ps 115:4–8; 135:15–18; Is 44:9–20; Wis 13:10–15:17). It contains ten warnings that end in a kind of refrain that the idols are not gods and are not to be feared (vv. 14, 22, 28, 39, 44, 51, 56, 64, 68).

Part 9: The Letter of Jeremiah: This book was written in Jeremiah’s name in the 4th century BC. The theme is that idols are not real. The book is designed to help Jews uphold the reality of the one God and the emptiness and unreality of idols as they argue with Gentiles.

Part 10: The Song of the Three Jews: This is one of the additions to the Book of Daniel. It is a collection of prayers and hymns based on the experiences of the three young men in the fiery furnace. The purpose is to strengthen faith and loyalty to God in times of persecution.

Part 11: The Book of Susanna: This book is another of the additions to Daniel. It tells of Daniel’s rescue of Susanna, a beautiful young woman who has been falsely accused of adultery, and is a victim of blackmail. The message is how God defends the righteous who call on him.

Part 12 The Book of Bel and the Dragon: This is the last of the additions to Daniel. It is a series of satires and humorous stories directed against idolatry. The point is that only God is God.

Part 13: The Books of 1 and 2 Maccabees: These are histories from the period of revolt against Syria beginning in 168 BC and culminating in the cleansing of the temple and the establishment of Judea as an independent kingdom under the Hasmonean (or Maccabee) rulers. First Maccabees is a history of the revolt from the accession of Antiochus IV in 175 to the death of Simon the High Priest in 132. It records the clash between Judaism and Hellenism and is the primary source for the history of the period. Second Maccabees focuses on the responsibility of the Hellenizers for profaning the temple. It dwells on the deaths of martyrs and develops the idea of the resurrection.

The name Maccabee, probably meaning “hammer,” is actually applied in the Books of Maccabees to only one man, Judas, third son of the priest Mattathias and first leader of the revolt against the Seleucid kings who persecuted the Jews (1 Mc 2:4, 66; 2 Mc 8:5, 16; 10:1, 16). Traditionally the name has come to be extended to the brothers of Judas, his supporters, and even to other Jewish heroes of the period,

such as the seven brothers (2 Mc 7).

The two Books of Maccabees contain independent accounts of events (in part identical) that accompanied the attempted suppression of Judaism in Palestine in the second century B.C. The vigorous reaction to this attempt established for a time the religious and political independence of the Jews.

First Maccabees was written about 100 B.C., in Hebrew, but the original has not come down to us. Instead, we have an early, pre-Christian, Greek translation full of Hebrew idioms. The author, probably a Palestinian Jew, is unknown. He was familiar with the traditions and sacred books of his people and had access to much reliable information on their recent history (from 175 to 134 B.C.). He may well have played some part in it himself in his youth. His purpose in writing is to record the deliverance of Israel that God worked through the family of Mattathias (5:62)—especially through his three sons, Judas, Jonathan, and Simon, and his grandson, John Hyrcanus. The writer compares their virtues and their exploits with those of Israel's ancient heroes, the Judges, Samuel, and David.

In true Deuteronomic tradition, the author insists on fidelity to the law as the expression of Israel's love for God. The contest which he describes is a struggle, not simply between Jew and Gentile, but between those who would uphold the law and those, Jews or Gentiles, who would destroy it. His severest condemnation goes, not to the Seleucid politicians, but to the lawless apostates among his own people, adversaries of Judas and his brothers, who are models of faith and loyalty.

2 Maccabees is unique among biblical books because it is actually a summary of another book. The author tells us that he is summarizing a 5-volume work by Jason of Cyrene (2:23). Unfortunately, Jason's book is not extant and we have no information about him. The author of 2 Macc chooses to remain anonymous, but he indicates his purpose at the beginning (2:19-32) and gives a brief conclusion at the end (2:37). Two letters appear at the beginning which apparently accompanied the book on its way from Jews in Palestine to Jews in Egypt at different times. The letters report on circumstances in the Holy Land and remind the Jews in Egypt to celebrate the new feast of Hanukkah. The second letter is older than the first.

2 Macc shows the power of God in the midst of the difficult circumstances of the Maccabean era. The author highlights miracles like the divine confrontation of Heliodorus (3:22-34) and the vision of ominous riders in the sky (5:2-3). Yet he is writing for Jews outside of Palestine so he emphasizes the desperate straits of the Palestinian Jews so that the Diaspora Jews will be moved to support and pray for them. The horrible martyrdoms are a powerful example of the evils of foreign oppression but they show the inner strength of the Jewish people and the glory of obedience to the Law. The martyrs of the Maccabean era illustrate that obedience to God is more important than obedience to man. In 2 Macc, we can see God's hand at work even in the times of his people's greatest suffering.

Part 14: The Books of 1 and 2 Esdras: First Esdras is a history of the Jews from the time of Josiah to the time of Ezra, focusing on the importance of the temple. The early Christians were drawn to First Esdras because it contains the story of the three bodyguards (3:1-5:6), a moral tale in praise of truth. Second Esdras is an apocalyptic book built around a series of visions dealing with the justice and love of God in a world where the righteous suffer. There are some historical problems with 1 and 2 Esdras. In the narrative of 1 Esdras, the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes incorrectly precedes those of Cyrus the Great (c. 559—529 BC) and Darius I (Darius the Great, 521—486 BC), although some believe this is simply a literary device called "prolepsis" in which a person or event is assigned to an earlier period or represented as if it had already occurred. First Esdras appears in the Septuagint as an expanded book of Ezra, containing four additional chapters. It is an account of King Josiah's reforms and history of the destruction of the temple in 586 BC and chronicles the Jews' return from Babylonian captivity under Zerubbabel. This book was said to be known by Josephus (born AD 38).

Second Esdras is also known by many other names, making it difficult to track fully. For example, 2 Esdras contains portions known in some circles as 3 Ezra, 4 Ezra, 5 Ezra, and 6 Ezra. The Ethiopian

Church considers 4 Ezra to be canonical, whereas the Eastern Armenian Church labels it as 3 Ezra. Further, some scholars believe these books were written by several authors, including some possibly as late as the second century AD. Second Esdras is often referred to as the Jewish Apocalypse of Ezra and contains seven visions of Ezra dealing with his angst over the pain and suffering inflicted upon Jews by Gentiles. Some scholars believe the book was written shortly after the AD 70 destruction of the temple in Jerusalem during the reign of Emperor Domitian (AD 81—96). While there is a definite tone of sadness in this work, there is consolation regarding ultimate retribution. There are six Messianic references within 2 Esdras.

Part 15: The Prayer of Manasseh: This is a penitential psalm. Its message is that God has given repentance to sinners like Manasseh (who was one of the most wicked kings of Judah). He has been saved by God’s mercy, so he will praise God as long as he lives. The Prayer of Manasseh is a short work of 15 verses of the penitential prayer of the Judean king Manasseh. Manasseh is recorded in the Bible as one of the most idolatrous); however, after having been taken captive by the Assyrians, he prays for mercy and turns from his idolatrous ways.

Part 16: Psalm 151: This is one of several psalms found in the Psalms scroll at Qumran. It is not in the canonical psalms. It is titled a “Psalm of David”, and describes David as a youth and offers praise to God for sending Samuel to anoint David as king. There are both long and short versions of this psalm and the shorter Septuagint version is used in most bibles.

Part 17: The Book of 3 Maccabees: This book contains three narratives about conflicts between King Ptolemy Philopator of Egypt and the Jews. The aims of the writing are to strengthen the Jews in their faith and practice and to warn persecutors that Jews will resist and their God will protect them from all enemies.

Part 18: The Book of 4 Maccabees: This book argues that the Torah is the true philosophy. The best examples of the supremacy of Torah are found in the martyrs who died under Antiochus Epiphanes. The martyrologies occupy some 14 chapters in this book.