

Ersatz Books of the Bible

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. When considering what books are accepted into the Old Testament canon of scripture, we occasionally hear of writings known as the Apocrypha
1. Ersatz - “an artificial and inferior substitute or imitation for a genuine article” (Merriam-Webster)
 2. Apocrypha (sometimes called the Intertestamental Books) - “writings or statements of dubious authenticity; books included in the Septuagint and Vulgate but excluded from the Jewish and Protestant canons of the Old Testament; early Christian writings not included in the New Testament” (Ibid)
 3. Origin - “Medieval Latin, from Late Latin, neuter plural of apocryphus secret, not canonical; Greek apokryphos obscure, hidden away” (Ibid)

B. The Apocrypha consists of 15 books or writings:

1 Esdras (Vulgate 3 Esdras)
2 Esdras (Vulgate 4 Esdras)
Tobit
Judith
Rest of Esther (Vulgate Esther 10:4 – 16:24)
Wisdom
Ecclesiasticus (also known as Sirach)
Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremy
Song of the Three Children (Vulgate Daniel 3:24–90)
Story of Susanna (Vulgate Daniel 13)
The Idol Bel and the Dragon (Vulgate Daniel 14)
Prayer of Manasses (follows 2 Chronicles)
1 Maccabees
2 Maccabees
Psalm 151 and the Book of Odes

C. Accepted books

1. Ecclesiasticus - written about 180 B.C., contains proverbs and practical observations of life two centuries before the birth of Christ. The work closely resembles the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. It is a record of early Rabbinical thought.
2. Wisdom - considered one of the most valuable books of the Apocrypha. It was written by a Jew of the Dispersion about 65 B.C. It is similar to the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament. It was written especially to combat the materialistic tendencies of the book of Ecclesiastes. Sometimes referred to as the Wisdom of Solomon
3. First Maccabees - written by a Jew in Palestine during the latter part of the 2nd century B.C., is a historical source on the period from 175 to 135 B.C. Represents insight into the root causes of the Maccabean rebellion and details the rebellion itself down to the death of Simon in 135 B.C. It gives detailed information on Antiochus Epiphanes and his

desecration of the Jerusalem Temple, and outlines the origin of the Jewish feast of Hanukkah.

4. Second Maccabees - this work is a combination of history and fiction, and is an abridgment of a longer fictional writing. It was written in the latter part of the 2nd century B.C.
5. Tobit - a work of fiction very popular among Jews and early Christians. It is a story of romance and legend from the Jewish Dispersion in Egypt. It was written in the 3rd century B.C., and was based on two well-known Egyptian stories. The purpose of this book was to teach moral lessons, and correct some superstitions. It features an angel Raphael.
6. Bel and the Dragon - written about 100 B.C., story reveals Daniel's wisdom in exposing idolatry and those who promote it. It also promotes the existence of a dragon-god in Babylon.
7. Judith - is a legendary tale of a Jewish widow reminiscent of Joan of Arc who succeeds in outwitting and slaying a great Assyrian general, thus bringing deliverance to her oppressed people. It was written in Palestine during the 2nd century B.C. by an early Pharisee
8. The Rest of Esther - written about 100 B.C., consists of a number of additions to the Biblical book of Esther, added for detail and to make up for apparent spiritual deficiencies of the canonical book. It is filled with dragons, and other images that supported later false prophecies regarding the last days.
9. Baruch - written in the first century A.D. The 6th chapter is known as the Epistle of Jeremias, sometimes considered a separate book

D. Books Not Accepted

1. The Prayer of Manasses - dates from the first century B.C. It was intended to be used in connection with the story of Manasseh's Babylonian captivity.
2. The Song of the Three Holy Children - an addition to the Book of Daniel written about 100 B.C. and in the third chapter after the 23rd verse.
3. The History of Susanna - written in the first century B.C., an addition to the book of Daniel, generally found prefixed to the book. The purpose of the story is to magnify Daniel's powers and the judgment.
4. First Esdras - an abbreviated Greek version and reconstruction of the Ezra. It was written about 100 B.C. Some of the subject matter added is from the book of Nehemiah.
5. Second Esdras - is an apocalypse, especially chapters 3-14. It is composite in origin, dating from 65 B.C. to 120 A.D. It focuses on Jewish thought regarding the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
6. Psalm 151 and the Book of Odes - Psalm 151 is the name given to a short psalm found in most copies of the Septuagint but not in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible. This Psalm is ascribed to David when he slew Goliath in single combat. Odes is a book found only in Eastern Orthodox Bibles and included after Psalms in some editions of the Septuagint. The chapters are prayers and songs from the Old and

New Testament times. The first nine of them form the basis for the songs sung during Catholic matins and other services.

- E. The Catholic church accepts 12 of the books and calls them “deutero-canonical” books.
 - 1. The books rejected by the Catholic church are I and II Esdras and the Prayer of Manassah, giving the Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible a total of seven extra books plus additions to five canonical books.

II. HOW DID THOSE BOOKS COME TO US?

- A. Some later translations of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) contained some of these books in an appendix. They were considered useful reading, but not inspired.
- B. Augustine influenced the councils of Hippo (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397 A.D.) to accept these extra books. He made sure that any opposition to these books was suppressed. However, these writings continued to hold a secondary position to the rest of the Bible.
- C. The Council of Trent (1546 A.D.), in reaction to the growing Protestant movement, resolved “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!”
- D. The reason for the Catholic’s interest in these books is that some of their unusual beliefs and practices are justified by these writings.
 - 1. 2Maccabees 12:39-45 talks of praying for the dead which leads to the Catholic teaching of purgatory.
 - 2. Ecclesiasticus 3:30 speaks of gaining salvation by almsgiving.
- E. The reason all 15 writings were not included was because some contradicted Catholic teachings
 - 1. 2Esdras 7:105 speaks against praying for the dead.
- F. It should be noted that all of these books only exist in Greek copies; none of them in Hebrew or Aramaic.
 - 1. They were never written down by the inspired writing prophets of the post exile who copied, compiled, and preserved the writings of other inspired Old Testament writers in Hebrew and Aramaic.
 - 2. That they only exist in Greek implies that they were written after Old Testament inspiration ceased.
- G. None of these writings have been accepted by the Jews as inspired.
 - 1. They failed the tests of authenticity and inspiration.
 - a. They were not written by recognized, inspired prophets, who:
 - b. Did not lead the people away from truth - Deut. 13:1-5; his words do not conflict with God’s known teachings
 - c. Made predictions about the future that always came true - Deut. 18:20-22
 - 2. Ecclesiasticus, sometimes called Sirach, written by Jesus, the son of Sirach; nowhere in the book is there a claim of prophecy, such as “The Lord said”

- a. His grandson who copied and wrote the book for him said that his grandfather got it by reading the law and prophets until he became proficient and then wrote the book.
 - b. "So my grandfather Jesus, who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors, and had acquired considerable proficiency in them, was himself also led to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom, so that by becoming familiar also with his book those who love learning might make even greater progress in living according to the law."
 - c. This is not a statement of inspiration, but of good reading and helpful instruction.
 - d. Note the claim that the teachings came from Israel and not God and they were based on personal wisdom developed by study.
3. Baruch is supposed to have been written by Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch, yet it contains several errors.
 - a. Baruch is in the wrong place. Baruch 1:1 says he wrote it in Babylon. Jeremiah 43:6-7 says it was written in Egypt
 - b. Conflicts with Ezra and Nehemiah about the return of the temple items. Baruch 1:8 says he brought back the temple vessels. Ezra 5:14-15 says Sheshbazzar the governor was sent by Cyrus to bring them to Jerusalem
 4. The Letter of Jeremiah: Baruch 6:3 says that Judah will be in captivity for seven generations (210 years); Jeremiah 25:11 says 70 years
 5. 1 & 2 Maccabees states that there were no prophets in the land, thus voiding its own inspiration - 1Maccabees 4:46, 9:27, 14:41
 6. Tobit contains many historical and geographical errors; most telling is the claim that Tobit's was a youth when the ten tribes revolted (B.C. 925) and lived to see the Assyrian conquest (B.C. 725) – a period of 200 years, yet it says Tobit died at the age of 158.
 7. Judith contains many historical and geographical errors. Judith 1:1 says Nebuchadnezzar was king of the Assyrians and ruled in Nineveh. Daniel says Nebuchadnezzar was the King of Babylon - Dan. 1:1

III. APOCRYPHA AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

- A. The New Testament recognizes the Law, Psalms, and writings of the prophets as inspired of God.
 1. Jesus refers to the Law and the Prophets on several occasions
 - a. Matt. 26:56; Luke 24:44-45
 2. The apostles concurred - 2Peter 1:20-21
 3. We don't know who wrote the books of Esther and Chronicles, but they are always listed with the prophets. The authorship of the rest is well known
- B. The New Testament quotes from every book of the Old Testament as inspired scripture, except for Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

1. This does not mean these five books were not inspired, just that it was not necessary to use them in the New Testament
- C. Unlike the books of the Old Testament, none of the apocryphal books are quoted or referred to in the New Testament, and their content often contradicts it
 1. Jesus and the Apostles never quoted from these books, even though they existed in some later Septuagint versions.
 2. These books were never accepted by the Jews as inspired writings
 3. The early church apostolic fathers and writers never referred to these writings as inspired, though they obviously knew of their existence.

Conclusion:

- A. We have all of the books of the Old and New Testaments that God wants us to have, read, and follow
 1. They have passed all of the tests of inspired, canonical scripture
 2. God in His wisdom and providence has seen to it that it is available to all men in all places
- B. Any other book or writing is not to be trusted, believed, and followed without risk to one's eternal salvation
 1. Trust what you have - 2Tim. 3:14-17