How We Got the Bible – Lesson 4: OT Non-Canonical Books

Three Categories of Uninspired Books to Consider:

1. **Noncanonical books mentioned in the Old Testament**
    a. At least 15 non-inspired writings are mentioned in the Old Testament… all are considered lost, but we know of their existence because the Bible mentions them.
    b. Examples: "The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel" [1 Ki. 14:19; 15:31; 16:5, 14, 20, 27], the "Book of Jashar" [Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18], the "Story of the Prophet Iddo" [2 Chron. 13:22], etc.

2. **Old Testament Pseudepigrapha**
    a. "Pseudepigrapha" = lit. "false writing" – a collection of about 63 books written between 200 BC and AD 200 with titles such as "The Apocalypse of Abraham," "The Testament of Job," and, "Treatise of Shem."
    b. These books have never seriously been considered canonical. Their chief importance is that they provide insight into the thoughts and ideas circulating in Judaism during the time of the Roman Empire.

3. **Old Testament Apocrypha**
    a. A collection of around 15 books and / or additions to Bible books that have been included in some versions of the Old Testament.
    b. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches include the Apocrypha in their Old Testaments. The Roman Catholic OT contains 46 books, and the Eastern Orthodox OT contains between 50-53 books.

<u>Books Generally Included among the OT Apocrypha</u>

1 Esdras (aka 3 Esdras)
2 Esdras (aka 4 Esdras)
Tobit
Judith
Additions to Esther
Wisdom of Solomon
Ecclesiasticus
Baruch
Epistle of Jeremiah
Additions to Daniel (three parts)
Prayer of Manasseh
1 Maccabees
2 Maccabees

Old Testament Apocrypha: Common Arguments for Their Inclusion

1. Roman Catholic Council of Trent (1546) proclaimed the Apocrypha canonical, although these books are held by the Catholic church to be "deuterocanonical" in contrast to the "protocanonical" Old Testament books.
2. Some argue that certain NT passages allude to Apocryphal books
3. Many (though not all) manuscripts / scroll collections of the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) include the Apocrypha
4. Several OT Apocryphal books were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls
5. Early Christian art reflects some knowledge of the Apocrypha
6. Certain early church fathers accepted the Apocrypha as canonical

Old Testament Apocrypha: Why Should These Books Be Excluded?

1. They were written during the 400 years of prophetic silence
    a. 1 Maccabees 9:27 (written around 100 BC)– "So there was great distress in Israel, the worst since the time when prophets ceased to appear among them" (see also 1 Macc. 14:41)
2. These documents contain clear historical, geographical, chronological, or doctrinal inaccuracies. For example:
    a. Tobit 6:7-9 states that smoke from the burning heart and liver of a fish will drive away demons, and the gall of the fish can cure blindness.
    b. 2 Maccabees 12:43-45 describes offering money and praying to make atonement for the dead, to deliver them from their sin.
    c. Judith 1:1-5 states that Nebuchadnezzar was king of Assyria
3. None of the Apocryphal books claim to be the Word of the LORD, in distinction to most OT books (Num. 35:1; Josh. 1:1; Joel 1:1, etc.)
4. Jesus acknowledged only the Law, Prophets, and Writings/Psalms as the Old Testament (Luke 11:50-51; 24:44)
5. New Testament authors quote from nearly every Old Testament book, but never quote Apocryphal works as "*graphe*" = Scripture
6. The Jews never accepted the Apocrypha as Scripture
    a. Josephus *Against Apion 1:8* – "they do not deserve equal credit"
    b. Mishnah (200 BC-AD 200) – writings of Jewish rabbis do NOT comment on Apocrypha. The Mishnah refers to them as "External Books"
7. Cyril of Jerusalem and Jerome (4th Century AD) – could read Hebrew
    a. Jerome (who translated the Latin Vulgate used by Roman Catholicism) recognized these documents did not carry the same authority as Scripture: "They are not for the establishing of the authority of the doctrines of the church"

Books of the Apocrypha
Summary

First Esdras – generally, a retelling of the last two chapters of Second Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah 7:73-8:13. Includes a story of King Darius asking three young guardsmen what the strongest thing in the world is. One says wine, while another says the king, or possibly women. The third (identified as Zerubbabel) says that truth is stronger than all things (4:35) and is rewarded by being authorized to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

Second Esdras – Written in apocalyptic language sometime after A.D. 70. The angel Uriel reveals the "seven mysteries" of the world. This book reflects Jewish despair and bewilderment following the destruction of Jerusalem. It denounces Rome as wicked and wrestles with the concept of God's justice in the face of so much evil.

Tobit – c. 200 B.C. - Tobit was of the tribe of Napthali and was exiled by Assyria to Nineveh where he continued to practice the Law of Moses. He was blinded and was so depressed that he prayed to God to take his life. At the same time, Tobit's kinswoman Sarah was praying the same thing as result of having seen seven husbands killed. God sends an angel named Raphael to deliver them both.

Judith – Written about 150 B.C. Describes at length (with historical inaccuracies) the war of the Assyrians against the Jews (1-7). The second half of the book (8-16) introduces Judith, a pious widow who goes to the enemy camp, gains favor from Holofernes, the commander-in-chief, and cuts off his head one night while he is drunk. The enemy flees in panic.

Additions to the Book of Esther – 114 or 78 B.C. Six sections totaling 114 verses were added to the inspired book to include references to God, prayer, and Judaism.

Wisdom of Solomon – First century B.C. Alexandrian Jew impersonates Solomon and writes 19 chapters of "wisdom." The author believes the body is a "weight and clog to the soul" (9:15)

Ecclesiasticus / Sirach – 180 B.C. Very similar to Proverbs. Treatment of subjects like marriage, poverty, the law, and other customs of the time.

Baruch – Date uncertain, but possibly after A.D. 70. Supposedly written by Baruch, scribe of Jeremiah, this book claims to be a letter sent from Baruch to Jerusalem to be read on a feast day as a confession of their sin (1:14).

Letter of Jeremiah – Second century B.C. Purports to be a letter from Jeremiah to the captives warning them about the dangers and futility of idolatry.

Additions to the Book of Daniel – There are three Apocryphal additions to Daniel:

- **Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men** – Introduced after Daniel 3:23, Abednego (a.k.a. Azariah) prays to God for national deliverance, with extra details about stoking the fiery furnace and the descent of the angel of the Lord. The three young men sing praises to God before being cast in the furnace.
- **Susanna** – Susanna, a virtuous woman, lives in Babylon with her husband. Two Jewish elders burn in lust for her and threaten to accuse her of adultery if she does not submit to their unlawful desires. She refuses and is accused of adultery. Daniel

comes forward and interrogates the two elders, proving Susanna's innocence by the elders' disagreement about which tree the supposed adultery took place under. The elders are executed according to Deut. 19:18-19.

Bel and the Dragon – Two stories. In the first, food is placed in front of the idol Bel, and Daniel proves through a clever trick that the priests of Bel, and not the idol, are consuming the food. The idol is destroyed and the priests are executed. In the second, Daniel is commanded to worship a dragon, which he will not. He is granted permission to kill the dragon, "without sword or club." Daniel feeds the dragon pitch, fat, and hair so that the beast bursts open and dies. The people are angered and cast Daniel into a den of hungry lions. An angel transports the prophet Habakkuk from Judea with food for Daniel. He is released after 7 days.

Prayer of Manasseh – First century B.C. or A.D. Someone read in 2 Chr. 33:11-19 that Manasseh composed a prayer beseeching forgiveness for sins, and tried to pass this short penitential psalm off as that prayer.

First Maccabees – 100 B.C. – generally reliable history of the Jewish revolt from 175-134

Second Maccabees – First century B.C. – Broad overview of history contained in First Maccabees with a theological interpretation of the history of the period. Contains accounts of miraculous interventions and angelic apparitions. Also contains teaching that the living may offer prayers and sacrifices for the dead (12:39-45), and that saints in heaven intercede for people living on earth (15:11-16).

- In **1546 the Council of Trent** issued the following decree: that the Roman Catholic Church holds that not only are the 39 books of the Old Testament canonical, but also **Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees,** and the supplementary parts of Esther and Daniel.

- The Eastern Orthodox Church accepts the Roman Catholic canon and adds the **151st Psalm**, **3 Maccabees,** and separates books like the **Epistle of Jeremiah** from **Baruch.**

- The Church of England accepts the OT Apocrypha as "semi-canonical."