

## In my Bible is a part called the Apocrypha. What is it?

"Apocrypha" comes from a Greek word which means "things that are hidden, secret." The Old Testament Apocrypha, often referred to simply as "the Apocrypha," is a collection of Jewish books that are included in the Old Testament canons of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians, but not of Protestants. It was Martin Luther in his translation of the Bible who affirmed the unique authority of the Hebrew canon, stating that the books of the Apocrypha were useful for reading but that was all they were not to be considered as part of the canon and were consigned to the back of the Bible. Over time, however, the Apocrypha has fallen into disuse amongst many Christians and in some Bibles they do not appear at all.

The Roman Catholic Apocrypha consists of Tobit, Judith, the Additions to Esther, the Additions to Daniel (the Prayer of Azariah and the Three Young Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon), the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (also called Sirach), Baruch (also called 1 Baruch), the Letter of Jeremiah, 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees. The Greek Orthodox Church adds 1 Esdras, Psalm 151, the Prayer of Manasseh, and 3 Maccabees, with 4 Maccabees in an appendix. The Russian Orthodox Church adds 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Psalm 151, and 3 Maccabees. The Roman Catholic canon places the Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Esdras, and 2 Esdras in an appendix without implying canonicity. So you can see not all Christian denominations even agree what should be in the Apocrypha.

Several of these writings are tied closely to Old Testament books. First Esdras, for example, is primarily a retelling of the material found in 2 Chronicles 35:1-36:23, Ezra, and Nehemiah 7:6-8:12; Psalm 151 purports to be an additional psalm of David. More interesting are the Additions to Esther. Inserted at strategic points, these clearly secondary additions, which include among other things prayers by Mordecai and Esther, serve to give a distinctively religious slant to the Book of Esther, otherwise noted for its failure to mention God or even prayer. The Additions to Daniel have a less unified purpose. Susanna (chapter 13 of the Greek Daniel) is a story affirming God's vindication of those who hope in him, and Bel and the Dragon (chapter 14 of the Greek Daniel) exposes the folly of idolatry. The Prayer of Azariah and the Three Young Men, placed after Daniel 3:23, is a prayer of trust in God offered up by Azariah

(i.e., Abednego — Dan 1:7) and his companions (Shadrach and Meshach) in the fiery furnace. It is noteworthy for its expression of confidence that God will accept the sacrifice of a contrite heart and a humble spirit. Another noteworthy (and secondary) prayer is the Prayer of Manasseh, apparently composed to give content to the prayer of repentance offered by Manasseh that is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 33:12-13. It includes a powerful expression of contrition for sin and trust in the grace of God. Two books are associated with Jeremiah: the Letter of Jeremiah is an attack on idolatry, and Baruch, attributed to Jeremiah's secretary (cf. Jer 36:4-8), extols the virtues of Wisdom, which is identified with the Law.

Two other Wisdom books are contained in the Apocrypha. The Wisdom of Solomon, ostensibly related to Solomon, deliberates on the future reward of the righteous and punishment of the ungodly, sings the praises of Wisdom, and, through a retelling of the exodus story, celebrates God's exaltation of Israel through the very things by which her enemies were punished. Affirmations, among other things, of the pre-existence and immortality of the soul indicate a considerable degree of Greek influence upon the author. Ecclesiasticus contains the teachings, in a form resembling that of the Book of Proverbs, of a second century b.c. Jewish teacher named Jesus ben Sira. The author praises and personifies (cf. Prov 8:22-31) Wisdom, whom he identifies with the Law, and provides practical precepts for everyday living. The book contains numerous parallels to the ethical sections of the New Testament, especially the Book of James.

Two of the most popular books in the Apocrypha tell the stories, undoubtedly legendary, of two otherwise unknown Jews. Set in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, Judith is a vivid and dramatic narrative of a beautiful Jewish widow, who, through a combination of extraordinary courage and trust in God, delivers her people in a time of crisis. Tobit, purportedly from the time of the Assyrian exile, combines the themes of quest, romance, and overcoming the demonic in a story of God's healing of his faithful servant Tobit and deliverance of the unfortunate widow Sarah. It testifies to a developing demonology and angelology within Judaism, and emphasizes the importance of charitable deeds, containing some striking parallels to the ethical teaching in the New Testament, including a negative form of the Golden Rule (cf. Matt 7:12).

Four books are associated, in name at least, with the Maccabees, those Jewish heroes who, led by Judas Maccabeus, waged the Maccabean Revolt in the second century b.c. against the Greek tyrant Antiochus IV, who attempted to ban the practice of Judaism. First Maccabees, the longest and most detailed account, is an especially important historical source for the revolt. Apart from his obvious support of the revolt and opposition to the hellenization of Judaism that preceded it, the author's primary religious perspective seems to be that God or, rather, heaven helps those who take initiative and trust in him. Second Maccabees is more openly theological and affirms such ideas as the glories of martyrdom, the sufferings of the martyr as being expiatory for the sins of the nation, the resurrection of the body, prayer for the dead, and the intercession of the saints. Both books are of first importance for understanding the historical setting for Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of rededication of the temple, which originates from the Maccabean Revolt.

Fourth Maccabees, an imaginative elaboration on the martyrdoms in 2 Maccabees, is a distinctive melding of Greek and Jewish ideas. Affirming the immortality of the righteous and the eternal punishment of the wicked, the author seeks to demonstrate that inspired reason, guided by the Law, is supreme ruler over the passions. Third Maccabees tells not of the Maccabees, but of the plight of Egyptian Jews near the end of the third century bc.; its focus is on God's faithfulness to his people.

Second Esdras, purportedly composed by Ezra, was written in response to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in a.d. 70. Second Esdras centers around the theme of God's justice in the light of the devastating defeat of his people Israel by a godless nation. It includes significant discussions on the nature of sin and its connection with Adam (cf. Rom. 5), the limitations of human understanding, the signs of the end, the final judgment, the intermediate state between death and the final judgment, the destruction of the Roman Empire, and the coming Messiah. Both in its overall orientation and in many of its details, 2 Esdras contains a number of striking parallels to the Book of Revelation, with which it is contemporary.

Apart from the issue of canonicity, the Old Testament Apocrypha has had a pronounced and pervasive influence on Western culture. The stories, themes, and language of these books (especially Judith, Tobit, Susanna, the Maccabees, Ecclesiasticus, and the Wisdom of Solomon) have been utilized by literary figures such as Shakespeare, Milton, and Longfellow,

composers such as Charles Wesley, Handel, and Rubinstein, and artists such as Michaelangelo, Rembrandt, and van Dyck. Did you ever wonder where some of those images came from? Well now you know! Take a look at just two of them:



### **Susanna Bathing Rembrandt**

This work is linked to Susanna 1:15

When Susanna is about to take a bath, she notices that she is being looked on. One of the voyeurs can be seen to the right of her, with some difficulty. With her hands she tries to cover her nakedness. She looks at us: after all, we're peeking at her just as the dirty old men are.

### **Judith with the head of Holofernes - Michelangelo**

Sistine Chapel, Vatican City This work is linked to Judith 13:9



Judith and her maid have put Holofernes' head on a dish and are covering it with a cloth. The dead army leader lies to the right, his arms still seemingly struggling. The arms are in harmony with the sleeves of his armour which is on the left.

If you are interested in biblical art themes etc a good place to start is:

<https://www.artbible.info/>