



How the Apocryphal Books Contradict Scripture And May Impact Our Witnessing

By Karen Sue Nyquist

1. **Why Are There Different Books in the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Churches' Bibles?** To find out, we'll look at the history of the books in the Bibles.
 - A. **The Old Testament** - The Jewish Bible contains only the books of the Protestant Old Testament. They were all written during the Old Testament years.
 - B. **The New Testament** - After the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, the books of the New Testament were written. These were divinely inspired and written from eye-witness accounts of Jesus' life and teachings. Two were written by Jesus' brothers, James and Jude. Some were written by the Apostles who followed Jesus, Peter, Matthew, and John. Most were written by Paul, who was called to be an apostle by the ascended Jesus (Acts 9:15-17; Romans 1:1). Two were written by one of Paul's companions, Luke.
 - C. **Years Between the Old Testament and the New Testament** - During the Greek Empire period, books were written in Greek that were not accepted by the Jewish community as scripture, but were preserved. These are often called the Apocrypha. Originally, some in the church read them for historical and cultural information but considered them *sub-canon, not having the authority of inspired scripture. These books even contradict some truths in the books of the Bible (1), (4). *Canon - "the books accepted as genuine and inspired" - Dictionary.com.
 - D. **The New Testament Apocrypha Books** - "The NT apocryphal books, with one exception, were never contenders for inclusion in the Christian canon. This is because they were all written in the second or even third century. Many of them also include systems of doctrine that are *antithetical to the doctrine included in canonical Scripture"(6). Antithetical - "directly opposed" - Dictionary.com.
2. **Why Were the Apocrypha Books Originally Not Accepted as Holy Scripture?**
 - A. Jesus and the New Testament authors never quoted from these books, though they quoted the Old Testament more than 250 times (4), (1).
 - B. The Apostolic Fathers (the generation of leaders who knew the apostles) did not consider them as scriptural (1).
 - C. The Jews did not consider the Apocrypha texts as scriptural nor were they part of the original Hebrew Bible (1).
 - D. Jerome of Stridon, who compiled and translated the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible from the Hebrew (405 AD), warned that they were sub-canon (1).
 - E. They have teachings that are contradictory to the rest of Scripture (1).
 - F. They were written during the 400 silent years, between the Old and New Testaments, when no divinely inspired scripture was written (4).
3. **How Then Did These Books Become Accepted by Some Churches?** - To find the answer, we will review the history of the churches.
 - A. **Jerome's Latin Version of the Bible** - "Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, ... rejected the Apocrypha as Holy Scripture in the strongest of terms. He refused to place it in his translation of the Old Testament. It was only after the death of Jerome that the Apocrypha was placed in the Vulgate - the official translation of the Roman Catholic Church. His expert testimony was rejected" (4). Jerome added a warning that they were sub-canon (1). They were not to be used for developing church doctrine.
 - B. **Mistakes During the Dark Ages and Later** - During the Dark Ages (500 - 1000 AD), **the Apocryphal books started being accepted and used for developing doctrine and traditions in the church.** Education, literacy, culture, and economies had fallen. Later, the Black Death (bubonic pandemics) brought with it a great doubt in the infallibility of the pope and church, which seemed powerless against the plague. Only the clergy had copies of the Bible and often the priests were not trained. Church financial abuses were apparent (5). One of the obvious abuses was the selling of indulgences to absolve yourself of your sins. Supposedly, indulgences could also shorten the time for a dead loved one to spend in fiery purgatory, so they could get out sooner and go enter heaven.

- C. **The Great Schism of the Church** - The Great Schism, in which the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches separated, was in 1054 AD. Both had already started accepting some, but different, books of the Apocrypha (1),(2). They also had some disagreements in doctrine. Today, the Orthodox Churches still accept some of the Apocrypha and refer to them as the “Longer Canon” (2).

WHO ACCEPTS THE APOCRYPHA? CRAIG EVANS, NONCANONICAL WRITINGS AND NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION (PEABODY, MA: HENDRICKSON PUBLISHERS, 1992), 189.			
ROMAN CATHOLICISM	GREEK ORTHODOX	RUSSIAN ORTHODOX	COPTIC
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- D. **The Protestant Reformation** - During the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648 AD), many believers protested, rejecting the Apocrypha and church traditions (such as the infallibility of the pope) and left the Catholic Church. Protestant churches were formed that turned back to relying only on divinely inspired scripture for doctrine, or “sola scriptura.” “‘And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men” (Mark 7:7-8).

- E. **The Counter-Reformation or The Catholic Reformation** - In response to the Protestant Reformation, and concerns within, the Catholic Church had a reformation of their own (1545-1648 AD) in which they clarified some of their doctrines, including keeping church traditions on an equal level to the books of the Bible. They also required the education of their priests and eliminated some of the financial abuses, such as stopping the sale of indulgences. In addition, at the Council of Trent (1543 -1563 AD), they decided to elevate the Apocrypha to official canon (1). In 1566 AD, the Catholic church designated those books that they had recognized from the beginning of the church as protocanonical and the books accepted later as deuterocanonical (the Apocryphal books) (3).

4. What Are Erroneous Doctrines and Inaccuracies Derived from the Apocrypha?

- A. **Justification by Works, Not by Faith Alone** - Tobit 12:9; 14:1 both indicate good works can atone for evil deeds (4), (1). **But the Bible says:** “He (*Jesus*) is the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 2:2 NIV) “... you have been saved through faith ... not of works” (Ephesians 2:8). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”(1 John 1:9).
- B. **The Doctrine of Purgatory** - 2 Maccabees 12:40-45 teaches about a place of purging (*cleansing*) between heaven and hell (4), (1). **But Jesus said:** “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Paul says that when we die we will be with Christ (Philippians 1:22-24) not in purgatory.
- C. **God Answers the Prayers of the Dead** - Baruch 3:4 and 2 Maccabees 15:13-14 teach that the dead can pray for the living (4). **But the Bible says:** “But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward” (Ecclesiastes 9:5).
- D. **Souls Existed Before They Unite with the Body** - Wisdom 8:19-20 teaches this. **But the Bible says:** “the Lord ... forms the spirit of man within him” (Zec.12:1).
- E. **Historical Inaccuracies** - Tobit 1:3-5;14:1-2; and Judith 1:1 all mention inaccurate historical dates and names. **But the Bible says:** “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). It also says, “... it is impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18) or to be mistaken about history!

5. **Do Any Churches Have Indulgences Today?** - Orthodox doesn't, but Catholic does. They are back as of 2009. "According to church teaching, even after sinners are absolved in the confessional and say their Our Fathers or Hail Marys as penance, they still face punishment after death, in Purgatory, before they can enter heaven. In exchange for certain prayers, devotions or pilgrimages in special years, a Catholic can receive an indulgence, which reduces or erases that punishment instantly, with no formal ceremony or sacrament. There are partial indulgences, which reduce purgatorial time by a certain number of days or years, and plenary indulgences, which eliminate all of it, until another sin is committed. You can get one for yourself, or for someone who is dead. You cannot buy one, the church outlawed the sale of indulgences in 1567, but charitable contributions, combined with other acts, can help you earn one. There is a limit of one plenary indulgence per sinner per day." - "For Catholics, A Door to Absolution is Reopened," The New York Times, 2/9/2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/10/nyreligion>.
6. **Does the Apocrypha Effect Our Witnessing?** - Catholic and Orthodox Christians are the two largest churches in the world. When witnessing to others from different church backgrounds such as the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, or Ukrainian Orthodox churches, we should realize that their Bibles include different collections of the Apocrypha. When we say that the Bible doesn't say something, in fact, their Bible just might! Also, notice the previous four erroneous doctrines and understand how they could confuse their understanding of salvation. They may fear death unnecessarily, expecting to go to purgatory.
7. **Prayer for Guidance** - "Dear Lord, please help us as we witness to people who have different Bibles and different teachings in their churches. Help us to show respect to them, their Bibles, and their churches. Help us know which doctrines are necessary to address, because they are salvation issues. Show us which doctrines we should ignore for the present, knowing that many churches and Christians disagree on some doctrines. Use us evangelists as we are "endeavoring to **keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**" (Ephesians 4:3) with other Christians and are equipping other "saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, **till we all come to the unity of the faith**" (Ephesians 4:12). Thank You, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen!"

Resources:

- (1) "What is the Apocrypha (those extra books in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles)?" 12/31/2020, <https://www.markdalebaptist.org/what-is-the-apocrypha>.
- (2) "Canon of Scripture - Orthodox Church in America", <https://www.oca.org/questions/canon-of-scripture>.
- (3) "The Apocryphal and Deuterocanonical Books," <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/sola-scripture>.
- (4) "THE BLUE BIBLE - Don Stewart :: Why Were the Books of the Old Testament Apocrypha Rejected as Holy Scripture by the Protestants?" https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart_395.
- (5) "The Counter-Reformation," Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Counter-Reformation>.
- (6) "The Apocrypha - The Gospel Coalition", <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-apocrypha>.

Appendix - List of Books in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) - <https://torah.org/learning/basics-primer-torah-bible/>.

The Five Books of Moses (Chumash)

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy

The Eight Books of the Prophets (Neviim)

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| 6. Joshua | 13. Jeremiah |
| 7. Judges | 14. Ezekiel |
| 8/9. Samuel | |
| 10/11. Kings | |
| 12. Isaiah | |

The Twelve (Minor Prophets) Trei-Assar

15. Hosea
16. Joel
17. Amos
18. Obadiah
19. Jonah
20. Micah
21. Nahum
22. Habakkuk
23. Zephaniah
24. Haggai
25. Zechariah
26. Malachi

The Eleven Books of the Writings (Kesuvim)

27. Psalms – Tehilim
28. Proverbs – Mishlei
29. Job – Iyov
30. Song of Songs – Shir HaShirim
31. Ruth – Rus
32. Lamentations – Eicha
33. Ecclesiastes – Koheles
34. Esther
35. Daniel – Doniel
- 36/37. Ezra/Nehemiah
- 38/39. Chronicles – Divrei Hayamim



The Jewish Bible and the Protestant Old Testament contain the same books!