

APOCRYPHA

The ancient writings commonly call the Apocrypha is a group of books written between 100 B.C. and 300 A.D. None of these books were included in reliable versions of the Bible because they were judged, based on their content and writing style, to have been written by mere men without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Because of this they were deemed unworthy and not authoritative by Bible scholars and translation committees. They are, however, found in some translations.

Following are brief descriptions of some of the more popular books in this collection.

Baruch - 150 BC to 60 BC: The theme is: Jerusalem had fallen into the hands of the enemy, but God will not forget His people.

Bel and the Dragon - In this book the Old Testament prophet Daniel is supposed to have killed a dragon by making balls of pitch, fat and hair which he fed to the Dragon and the Dragon choked to death!

Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach - A book of wisdom teachings, similar to the Proverbs.

The First Book of Esdras - is a historical narrative copied from 2 Chron 35:1; 36:23; Ezra 1:1; 2:1-3:13; 4:1-10:44; and Neh 7:73-8:12 of the Old Testament.

The Second Book of Esdras - was written around A.D. 96. It laments the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Additions to the Book of Esther, - Since the Book of Esther does not mention the name of God or any worship rituals, this book was written to connect Esther to the

traditions of Israel's faith in a more explicit way.

The Epistle of Jeremiah, - This letter is a sermon against idolatry. It warns the readers to beware of false gods. It was not written by the Prophet Jeremiah but much later.

Judith - The book of Judith appealed to Jews living during a time of discouragement and defeat (142 BC - 63 BC).

The First Book of Maccabees - is a history of the struggle of the Jews in Judea from about 175 to 135 B.C. The theme of the book is that faithful obedience to the law brings success by God's standards.

The Second Book of Maccabees - is a two-part work that describes the events in Judea from 191-162 B.C.

Prayer of Azariah & the Song of the Three Young Men - It was written about 150 BC by one who felt the need to expand the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

Prayer of Manasseh - Is supposed to be a prayer of repentance by Manasseh, one of the most wicked kings in Israel's history (2 Chronicles 33:3-13).

Susanna - Written about 110 BC - 60 BC about a woman who was brought to court by two elders on a charge of adultery until Daniel raised an objection and proved that the two elders had lied.

Tobit - Teaches the common idea that God breaks into human history, using His angels to rescue people.

Wisdom of Solomon - This book, is similar to the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament, but written much later.

The New Testament Apocrypha - This is a collection of apocryphal works that claims to give additional details on many N.T. themes.

The list includes: The Gospels of: Peter, the Twelve, Philip,

Judas, Bartholomew, Mary, Nicodemus, & Thomas, The Questions of Bartholomew, The Acts of: John, Peter, Paul, Andrew and Thomas. The Apocalypses of: Peter, Paul, and Thomas.

To show how ridiculous some of these books are, following are a few of the themes of the so-called "Gospel of Thomas."

- a) A child bumps into Jesus--angers him---and drops dead.
The complaining parents are blinded;
- b) Playing with children on housetop one falls off and dies.
Jesus makes him come alive;
- c) Young man cuts foot with axe. Jesus restores foot;
- d) Joseph cuts a beam too short & Jesus lengthens it;
- e) Changes children into pigs;
- f) Children enter a furnace---come out goats--Jesus changes them back into children.

NOTE: While these apocryphal books are interesting and informative, none are considered authoritative as are the books of the New Testament. For various reasons, these books were not accepted as being inspired when the Bible took its final form in the third century A.D. Thus, God has worked throughout history not only to inspire the Bible but also to preserve its authenticity and integrity so it can serve as a standard and guide for all believers.