

The Deuterocanonical Books

1. What are the Deuterocanonical Books?

- It was not until 1519 that there arose a huge uncalled-for controversy about how many books the Bible contains. Is it 73, as Orthodox and Catholics claim, or 66, as Protestants hold?
- In other words, do the following:
 - Tobit
 - Judith
 - 1 and 2 Maccabees
 - Wisdom
 - Sirach
 - Baruch
 - Additions to the book of Esther
 - Additions to the book of Daniel
 - Psalm 151

indeed, belong to the Bible, or are they not inspired by the holy spirit and should not be contained therefore in the Sacred Scriptures?

- These disputed books are referred to as the "deuterocanonical books" by Orthodox and Catholic Christians, and as the "apocryphal books" (meaning of doubtful authenticity) by Protestants.
- The question is a relevant one, one that divides Orthodox and Catholics from Protestants still to a great extent. Since Protestantism is based on *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), the issue about the deuterocanonical books is extremely significant since it puts into question the very essence of Scripture.
- The Old Testament Books are categorized into two main sections:
 - The first section is the first Canonical Books "Protocanonical", which translates "proto: first - canonical":
 - These books were collated by Ezra the Priest
 - Nehemiah established a library in which he collated the books of Kings and Prophets, the writings of David and the letters of Kings.
 - The second section is the Second Canonical Books "Deuterocanonical" which translates "deutero: second - canonical":
 - Neither Ezra nor Nehemiah made mention of this second group of books as part of the first group because the books only appeared after Ezra's death who collated the first group.
 - Nonetheless, for many reasons which will be discussed in more detail, the early Christian church considered them as **authentic** — **second canonical books** as previously stated — and the traditional Christian church recognized them throughout the ages.

2. Summary of the Deuterocanonical Books

Tobit

- **Author:** Unknown
 - **Location of writing:** Unknown
 - **Time of writing:** Estimated to be early in the second century B.C.
 - **Summary:**
 - Tobit, a devout and wealthy Israelite living among the captives deported to Nineveh from the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C., suffers severe reverses and is finally blinded.
 - Because of his misfortunes he begs the Lord to let him die. But recalling the large sum he had formerly deposited in far-off Media; he sends his son Tobiah there to bring back the money.
- ☞ The father is called Tobit in the Greek Septuagint (the earliest extant Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew). The son is called Tobiah in Aramaic and Hebrew, and Tobias in Greek and Latin. In current translations both father and son are known as Tobias.
- In Media, at this same time, a young woman, Sarah, also prays for death, because she has lost seven husbands, each killed in turn on his wedding night by the demon Asmodeus.
 - God hears the prayers of Tobit and Sarah and sends the angel Raphael in disguise to aid them both. Raphael makes the trip to Media with Tobiah. When Tobiah is attacked by a large fish as he bathes, Raphael orders him to seize it and to remove its gall, heart, and liver because they make “useful medicines.”
 - Later, at Raphael's urging, Tobiah marries Sarah, and uses the fish's heart and liver to drive Asmodeus (king of the demons) away from the bridal chamber.
 - Returning to Nineveh with his wife and his father's money, Tobiah rubs the fish's gall into his father's eyes and cures them.
 - Finally, Raphael reveals his true identity and returns to heaven. Tobit then utters his beautiful hymn of praise. Before dying, Tobit tells his son to leave Nineveh because God will destroy that wicked city.
 - After Tobiah buries his father and mother, he and his family depart for Media, where he later learns that the destruction of Nineveh has taken place.
- **Key Verse:**
 - ❖ Tobit 4:19
 - “¹⁹ Always seek the counsel of a wise man.”

Judith

- **Author:** Unknown
- **Location of writing:** Unknown
- **Time of writing:** Estimated to be end of the second or beginning of the first century B.C
- **Summary:**
 - Holofernes, commander-in-chief of the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, leads an overwhelming Assyrian force in a punishing campaign against the vassals (one in a subordinate position) who refused to help in the Assyrian war against the Medes.
 - The Jewish people stubbornly resist the enemy at Bethulia, guarding the route of access to Jerusalem.
 - Despite the warning of Achior that the Jews cannot be conquered unless they sin against God, the proud general lays siege to the town and cuts off its water supply.
 - After a siege of thirty-four days, the exhausted defenders are desperate and ready to surrender.
 - At this point, the climax of the story, Judith (whose name means “Jewess”) appears and promises to defeat the Assyrians.
 - Having fasted and prayed, Judith dresses in her finest garments and proceeds to the Assyrian camp, where she succeeds in killing Holofernes while he lies in a drunken stupor.
 - The Assyrians panic when they discover this, and the Jews can flight and slaughter them. The beautiful hymn of the people honoring Judith (chapter 15:9-11) is often applied to St. Mary.

- **Key Verse:**

- ◆ Judith 15:9-11

“⁹ But Joachim, the high priest, came from Jerusalem to Bethulia with all his elders to see Judith. ¹⁰ And when she had gone out to him, they all blessed her with one voice, saying: “You are the glory of Jerusalem, you are the joy of Israel, you are the honor of our people. ¹¹ For you have acted manfully, and your heart has been strengthened. For you loved chastity, and, after your husband, you have not known any other. Therefore, also the hand of the Lord has strengthened you, and, therefore, you will be blessed for all eternity.””

1 Maccabees

- **Author:** Unknown – likely a Palestinian Jew
- **Location of writing:** Unknown
- **Time of writing:** Estimated to be around 100 B.C.
- **Summary:**
 - The book receives its title from its protagonist, Judas Maccabee (or Maccabeus).
 - The two Books of Maccabees contain independent accounts of events in part identical which accompanied the attempted suppression of Judaism in Palestine in the second century B.C.
The vigorous reaction to this attempt established for a time the religious and political independence of the Jews.
 - The author's purpose in writing is to record the salvation of Israel which God worked through the family of Mattathias-especially through his three sons, Judas, Jonathan, and Simon, and his grandson, John Hyrcanus.
 - The people of Israel have been specially chosen by the one true God as his covenant-partner, and they alone are privileged to know him and worship him.
He is their eternal benefactor and their unfailing source of help. The people, in turn, must be loyal to his exclusive worship and must observe exactly the precepts of the law he has given them.

- **Key Verse:**

- ❖ 1 Maccabees 4:8-9

“⁸ And Judas said to the men who were with him: ‘Do not be afraid of their multitude, and do not dread their attack. ⁹ Remember in what way salvation came to our fathers in the Red Sea, when Pharaoh pursued them with a great army.’”

2 Maccabees

- **Author:** Unknown – likely a Palestinian Jew
- **Location of writing:** Unknown
- **Time of writing:** Estimated to be after 124 B.C..
- **Summary:**
 - This book is not a sequel to 1 Maccabees.
 - The two books differ in many respects:
 - The first book covers the period from the beginning of the reign of Antiochus IV (175 B.C.) to the accession of John Hyrcanus I (134 B.C.)
 - The second book treats of the events in Jewish history from the time of the high priest Onias III and King Seleucus IV (c. 180 B.C.) to the defeat of Nicanor's army (161 B.C.).
 - The beginning of 2 Maccabees consists of two letters sent by the Jews of Jerusalem to their coreligionists in Egypt.
 - The letters deal with the observance of the feast commemorating the central event of the book, the purification of the temple.

- **Key Verse:**

❖ 2 Maccabees 1:24-26

“²⁴ And the prayer of Nehemiah was held in this way: “O Lord God, Creator of all, terrible and strong, just and merciful, you alone are the good King. ²⁵ You alone are excellent, you alone are just, and all-powerful, and eternal, who frees Israel from all evil, who created the chosen fathers and sanctified them. ²⁶ Receive the sacrifice on behalf of all your people Israel, and preserve and sanctify your portion.””

Wisdom

- **Author:** Unknown – likely member of the Jewish community in Alexandria
- **Location of writing:** Unknown
- **Time of writing:** Estimated to be around 100 years before the coming of Christ
- **Summary:**
 - The primary purpose of the author was the edification of his co-religionists in a time when they had experienced suffering and oppression, in part at least at the hands of apostate fellow Jews.
 - At times, the author speaks in the person of Solomon, placing his teachings on the lips of the wise king of Hebrew tradition to emphasize their value.
 - To convey his message, he made use of the most popular religious themes of his time, namely the splendor and worth of divine wisdom, the glorious events of the Exodus, God's mercy, the folly of idolatry, and the way God's justice is vindicated in rewarding or punishing the individual soul.
 - The first ten chapters especially form a preparation for the fuller teachings of Christ and his Church.

- **Key Verse:**

❖ Wisdom 1:4

“⁴ For wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subdued by sin.”

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)

- **Author:** Jesus [Yeshua], son of Eleazar, son of Sirach
- **Location of writing:** Unknown
- **Time of writing:** Estimated to be Between 200 and 175 B.C.
- **Summary:**
 - The book contains numerous maxims formulated with care, grouped by affinity, and dealing with a variety of subjects such as:
 - the individual
 - the family
 - the community in their relations with one another and with God
 - friendship
 - education
 - poverty and wealth
 - the law
 - religious worship, and many other matters which reflect the religious and social customs of the time.
 - The contents of Sirach are of a discursive nature, not easily divided into separate parts.
 - Chapters 1–43 deal largely with moral instruction
 - Chapter 44 to Chapter 50, Verse 24 contain a eulogy (tribute) of the heroes of Israel and some of the patriarchs.
 - There are two appendixes in which:
 - the author expresses his gratitude to God (Chapter 51, Verse 1 to12),
 - and invites the unschooled to acquire true wisdom (Chapter 51, Verse 13 to 30).
- **Key Verse:**
 - ❖ *Sirach 34:31*
“³¹ Similarly, a man who fasts for his sins, and then does the same again, what was the benefit of humbling himself? Who will heed his prayer?”

Baruch

- **Author:** Baruch, the secretary of the prophet Jeremiah
- **Location of writing:** Unknown
- **Time of writing:** Estimated to be Between 200 and 175 B.C.
- **Summary:**
 - The book contains five very different compositions:
 - the first and the last in prose,
 - the others in poetic form.
 - Thus, the principal divisions of the book are seen to be:
 - I. Prayer of the Exiles (Chapter 1 to Chapter 3, Verse 8)
 - II. Praise of Wisdom in the Law of Moses (Chapter 3, Verse 9 to Chapter 4, Verse 4)
 - III. Jerusalem Bemoans and Comforts Her Captive Children (Chapter 4, Verse 5 to 29)
 - IV. Jerusalem Comforted: The Captivity about To End (Chapter 4, Verse 30 to Chapter 5, Verse 9)
 - V. The Letter of Jeremiah against Idolatry (Chapter 6, Verse 1 to 72)
- **Key Verse:**

❖ Baruch 2:16

“¹⁶ Gaze upon us O Lord, from Your holy home, and incline your ear, and heed us.”

3. Summary of the Additions to the Protocanonical Books

Esther

- The additions to the book of Esther contain:
 - 107 additional verses in 6 chapters (chapters 11-16)
 - Two letters from the king:
 - in one of them he orders the destruction of Jerusalem
 - in the other he cancels his order
 - The prayer of Mordecai
 - The prayer of Esther
 - The dream of Mordecai and its fulfillment

Daniel

- The additions to the book of Daniel include:
 - Verses 24-90 in Chapter 3:
 - Which include the praise of Azariah in the fiery furnace and the song of the three children,
 - Which we sing in the third canticle during the midnight praises
 - Chapter 13:
 - Which 13 is the story of Susanna.
 - Susanna was a very beautiful Jewish God-fearing woman falsely accused of adultery and was to be brought to death.
 - This was because she refused to commit sin with two of the elders who were appointed judges to govern the people.
 - God stirred up the holy spirit of Daniel who interfered and tried the two elders separately where their lie was evident and she was saved from death.
 - Chapter 14:
 - Which is about the story of Bel and the Dragon.
 - Bel was an idol worshipped by the Babylonians, everyday they provided for it six barrels of fine flower, forty sheep, and six measures of wine.
 - The king worshipped it and adored it everyday; but Daniel adored only his God.

Psalm 151

¹ I was small among my brothers, and youngest in my father's house. I tented my father's sheep. ² My hands formed a musical instrument, and my fingers tuned a lute. ³ Who shall tell my Lord? The Lord himself, he himself hears. ⁴ He sent forth his angel and took me from my father's sheep, and he anointed me with his anointing oil. ⁵ My brothers were handsome and tall; but the Lord did not take pleasure in them. ⁶ I went out to meet the Philistine, and he cursed me by his idols. ⁷ But I drew his own sword and beheaded him and removed reproach from the children of Israel."

4. Proof of Authenticity of the Deuterocanonical Books

First Proof:

- Several councils have decided on the authenticity of the deuterocanonical books.
 - The council of Hippo held in 393 A.D., in which St. Augustine was present.
 - The council of Carthage held in 397 A.D.

Second Proof:

- Fathers of the second and third generations like:
 - Clement of Alexandria
 - Origen of Alexandria
 - Dionysius of Alexandria
 - Cyprian of Carthage
- Fathers of the fourth generation like:
 - Basil the Great
 - Gregory of Nazianzus
 - John Chrysostom

all made equal references in the books they wrote to the Protocanonical and the Deuterocanonical books.

Third Proof:

- The deuterocanonical books were included in the canonical books in the Apostolic Canons which was proved by sheikh El-Safie Bin El-Assal in his Book, "The Collection of Canons" (Chapter Two).

Fourth Proof:

- The Deuterocanonical books were found in many old versions of the Bible:
 - These books were found in the **Septuagint version** (i.e., the three copies of the manuscripts written in the 4th century after Christ which was translated by 72 Jewish Scholar Rabbis, it indicates that they recorded the deuterocanonical books with the other books, giving them equal status.
 - They were also found in the **Coptic version**, all dialects, which is considered the oldest translation after the Septuagint.
 - Although only sections of it were found which were published by foreign scholars, these books were also found in the **old Latin version**.

Fifth Proof:

- In John's Gospel, Christ the Lord mentioned the Feast of Dedication.

❖ John 10: 22

“²² Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter.”

- This Feast was not mentioned in the Bible in the Protocanonical books.
- It was proved to be found in the Book of Maccabees that Judas Maccabeus was the first to initiate this feast when he purified the temple of the profanities of the Gentiles and renewed the altar.
- This is clear evidence that the Jews received the commemoration of this feast from the Deuterocanonical books.