

Why is the Apocrypha not Considered Scripture?

If you are coming to Grace Church from a Roman Catholic background, you may notice a difference in the Table of Contents in the bibles we have available. This may be especially true if you have grown up with, or are accustomed to, reading a bible translation aimed specifically at Roman Catholics, such as the New American Bible or the New Jerusalem Bible. In exploring the bibles at Grace, you may notice the absence of fourteen Old Testament books that were declared part of the Canon of Scripture by the Roman Catholic Church long after the original sacred Canon had been set. These added writings are called the Apocrypha. While there is nothing wrong with reading or learning from these books, we do not corporately read or teach from the Apocrypha because we do not believe these books are inspired or authoritative for several reasons.

First, not one of the Apocryphal books were written by a recognized prophet. All fourteen books of the Apocrypha were written during the Inter-testamental Period: the 400 years between the writing of Malachi and the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist. During those 400 years, no Jewish prophet was recognized as a true prophet of God. Since a prophet was the only person who could speak for God, the Jewish people—and by extension we as Christians—received no revelation from God for those four centuries. This time period is often referred to as “The Silent Years.” Because none of the Apocryphal books were written by a recognized prophet of God, they cannot be placed on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures, all of which were authored by a prophet such as Moses, Samuel, Daniel, or Jeremiah.

It is also important to note that the earliest church fathers did not recognize the Apocrypha as Scriptural. The most ancient known listing of the Old Testament canon was written down in 170 AD by Melito of Sardis, an early bishop of the church at Sardis. This list does not contain any of the books of the Apocrypha, and no other early church fathers disputed Melito’s omission of the books. Furthermore, neither Jesus nor any of His apostles ever quoted or alluded to any of the fourteen books of the Apocrypha. Throughout the New Testament, the Old Testament is referenced over one thousand times, but in all of those instances, not once is the quotation referring to a book in the Apocrypha. This is very important because the New Testament writers generally read and quoted the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Septuagint was widely read among those

whose native tongue was Greek. The Septuagint contained all the Apocrypha, but the Apostles who read it and then wrote the New Testament made little to no mention of those books.

Likewise, the books themselves do not make any claim to inspiration or equation with Scripture. The books do not contain an authoritative message such as “Thus says the Lord your God” or “The Word of the Lord came to _____.” Every other book in the Old Testament, except Esther, contains at least one mention of a command or a message given to a prophet directly from God. Since the Apocryphal books lack such a command or message, it is difficult to give them the same level of authority as the divinely inspired books of the remainder of the Old Testament.

Finally, not one Christian leader claimed the books in the Apocrypha belonged in the Canon until 1150, years after the Old and New Testament canons were generally settled. The Apocrypha was decreed to be canonical at the Council of Trent in 1546. It is important to realize that the Council of Trent was called by the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church in part to discuss the huge numbers of Roman Catholics leaving the church because of the growing Protestant Reformation. It is feasible that the Roman Catholic Church would have wanted to draw as many clear distinctions between themselves and the newly extant Protestants during this time. One way to distinguish the Roman Catholics could have been the adoption of a slightly different bible and the declaration that anyone who did not use the Apocrypha was not to be considered part of the faith.

All this is not to say the books of the Apocrypha are some kind of demonically inspired writings that we must flee from under all circumstances. Several of the books are useful and educational. Indeed, much of what we know of the history of the Inter-testamental Period comes from 1st and 2nd Maccabees and 1st and 2nd Esdras. These writings, used properly, can be edifying for a Christian, but one must always remember the distinction between beneficial and Scriptural. Because the Apocrypha is not Scriptural, the doctrines rooted in the books of the Apocrypha are uninspired and not authoritative. To avoid confusion and the danger of giving this material more weight than it deserves, we at Grace Church do not read or teach from the Apocryphal books.



*Note: If you'd like to read more about how the Canon of Scripture was formed and decided upon, one fantastic resource is *The Canon of Scripture* by the famous bible scholar Dr. F.F. Bruce.*

The Apocrypha consists of the following works of writing:

1 Esdras

2 Esdras

The Rest of Esther

Song of the Three Holy Children

History of Susanna

Bel and the Dragon

Prayer of Manasses

Tobit

Judith

Wisdom of Solomon

Ecclesiasticus (not to be confused with the canonical book Ecclesiastes)

Baruch

1 Maccabees

2 Maccabees

