

# EXTRA-CANONICAL JEWISH LITERATURE

## I. Introduction

### A. Canonicity

#### 1. Defined

“A measuring rod, a rule or standard” (Hebrew = מִנְיָן ; Greek = κανων)

—The recognized collection of God-inspired, authoritative books of sacred Scripture

INSPIRATION implies the source and authority of God, while  
CANONICITY implies the recognition of the church

#### 2. Five tests in recognizing canonicity (see Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*)

a. Authoritative? (dogmatic vs. fanciful)

b. Prophetic source? (a spokesman for God?)

c. Veracity? (ring of truthfulness & historical accuracy?)

d. Dynamic? (Heb. 4:12; II Tim. 3:15) (life-changing?)

e. Acceptance by people of God?

- 1) initial reverence
- 2) universal recognition
- 3) efforts to transcribe for future generations

### B. The place of revered intertestament writings

#### 1. Excluded from the OT canon

##### a. OT indications

—Malachi 4:5 = final OT message that anticipates John as the messenger to look for

Mal. 4:4,5 "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

b. Intertestament admissions

—I Maccabees 4:45,6; 9:27; 14:41

44 They discussed what should be done about the altar of burnt offering which had been profaned, 45 and very properly decided to pull it down, rather than later be embarrassed about it since it had been defiled by the gentiles. They therefore demolished it 46 and deposited the stones in a suitable place on the hill of the Dwelling to await the appearance of a prophet who should give a ruling about them.

—II Macc. 2:27,28

Nevertheless, for the sake of rendering a general service, we remain glad to endure this drudgery, 28 leaving accuracy of detail to the historian, and concentrating our effort on tracing the outlines in this condensed version.

—1QS IX:11 - leadership of presbyters because no prophet

c. Early common era witnesses to a recognized canon of the OT

(1) Josephus: "*Contra Apion*" I:8 — lists the OT canonical books

(2) Talmud: "Sanhedrin Tractate" VII-VIII:24

"After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel"

(3) NT witness of a closed canon: NT might allude but never quotes apocrypha

(a) Lk. 11:51 = sweep of sacred history from Genesis to 2 Chronicles (24:21).  
2Chron = close of the present Tanach

(b) Jesus quotes 22 canonical books as authoritative, but never quotes apocrypha

d. See II. D

2. NT use of non-canonical writings

a. Allusions

—Heb. 11:35 cf. II Macc. 7,12

Heb. 11:35 "And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection."

2Mac. 7:7 After stripping the skin from his head, hair and all, they asked him, 'Will you eat some pork, before your body is tortured limb by limb?' 8 Replying in his ancestral tongue, he said, 'No!' So he too was put to the torture in his turn. 9 With his last breath he exclaimed, 'Cruel brute, you may discharge us from this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up, since we die for his laws, to live again forever.' 10 After him, they tortured the third, who on being asked for his tongue promptly thrust it out and boldly held out his hands, 11 courageously saying, 'Heaven gave me these limbs; for the sake of his laws I have no concern for them; from him I hope to receive them again.'

—Heb. 11:37 cf. “Martyrdom of Isaiah” 5:11

Heb. 11:37 “They were stoned, or sawn in half, or...”

—Jude 9 cf. now lost “Assumption of Moses” at the end of the *Testament of Moses* (see Charlesworth, I:924); also Jude 14,15 compared to Enoch 1:9

Jude 9 Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

14 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, 15 "to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

—II Tim. 3:8; unnamed magicians of Ex. 7:11 are named in “Penitence of Jannes and Jambres,” characters who also are cited in the Cairo Damascus Document.

b. No authoritative formulae used in these citations

c. Paul in the NT quotes heathen poets

(1) Aratus: Acts 17:28 —“We are his offspring...”

(2) Menander: I Cor. 15:33 —“Evil companions corrupt good manners”

(3) Epimenides: Titus 1:12 —“Cretans are evil beasts and lazy gluttons.”

## II. The Apocrypha (“Deutero-Canonical Books,” per the Roman Catholic perspective)

### A. Meaning: “Hidden”

1. “Hard to understand” (cf. Dan 12:4 “...shut up the words of this book...” & II Esdras 14:42ff.)

As employed by the Greek patristic writers, the name implies that these writings are of a mysterious, esoteric nature that only the initiated can fathom.

2. “withdrawn from common use”

This is often the historic meaning of “apocrypha” intended by Protestants. Jerome, who accepted only the Palestinian canon of the Jews, popularized this term.

## B. Historical relation to the canon

### 1. LXX influence

- a. The OT LXX was translated over several generations, the law and the prophets being finished by 200 b.c. As respected writings growing out of this period (e.g., Ecclesiasticus) were also being translated, they were used and stored with the scrolls of the books of the LXX. The confusion over the canonicity and authority of these intertestamental books becomes obvious.
- b. Due to the same Alexandrian influence that led to arbitrary allegorization of scripture texts, the bounds of the canon outside of Palestine were viewed in an undefined state of flux.
- c. Whereas the NT quotes extensively the LXX OT texts, the NT does not directly quote the apocrypha nor cite its authors, even though the apocrypha developed and was in use in at approximately the same time as the translation of the late books of the LXX

### 2. Exclusion by the Jews at the academy of Jamnia, 90 A.D.

—Palestinian canon vs. the Alexandrian canon that included 14-15 additions beyond the recognized canon, 11 of which are in the RC Bible under seven new titles. 3 & 4 Esdras were excluded from the Deutero-canon by the RC church.

### 3. Early church

- a. Apocrypha utilized by some church fathers in worship and catechizing, e.g., Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian;  
BUT opposed by Origen and Athanasius
  - b. Apocryphal scenes etched in catacombs of Rome
4. Jerome (IV a.d.) questions canonicity of Apocrypha, while Augustine accepts a large majority of them as at least Deutero-canonical.
  5. Luther and Calvin followed Jerome and relegated them to the category of pious books for personal edification. This got the apocrypha moved to the back of the OT during the Reformation period; Luther’s German Bible introduced this section with these words: *“The Apocrypha: Books which are not to be held equal to Holy Scripture, but as useful and good to read.”*

6. Council of Trent (1546) establishes Deutero-canonicity of 12 of the 15 additions in the Douay Bible

“The synod... receives and venerates... all the books (including the Apocrypha) both of the OT and NT— seeing that one God is Author of both... if anyone receive not as sacred and canonical the said books entire with all their parts... let him be anathema.”

## 7. Early Protestant English Bibles

- a. New Geneva Bible of 1560 actually included the Apocrypha at the end of the OT with the qualification that these books “*were not to be read and expounded publicly in the church.*”
- b. KJV (1611) translated with apocrypha, but deleted by early 1800’s.  
In 1615, George Abbot, Calvinist Archbishop of Canterbury, mandates the inclusion of the Apocrypha in all English Bible publications. This is finally overturned by the Long Parliament in 1644 just before the production of the Westminster Confession:  
“*The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings*” (I:3).

## C. Contents (\* indicates not included in RC canon)

### 1. Didactic

- a. Wisdom of Solomon (30 B.C.)
- b. Ecclesiasticus (180 B.C.), a.k.a. “Wisdom of ben Sirach”

### 2. Religious Romance (listed after Nehemiah before Esther)

- a. Tobit (200 B.C.)
- b. Judith (150 B.C.)

### 3. Historic

a. \*I Esdras

b. I Maccabees (110 B.C.)

c. II Maccabees (110-70 B.C.)

#### 4. Apocalyptic

a. Baruch (150-50 B.C.)

b. Letter of Jeremiah (300-100 B.C.)

c. \*II Esdras (100 A.D.)

#### 5. Legendary

a. Additions to Esther

b. Additions to Daniel

(1) “Prayer of Azariah and The Song of the Three Young Men” (200-1 B.C.)

(2) “Susanna” (220-1 B.C.)

(3) “Bel and the Dragon” (100 B.C.)

c. \*Prayer of Manasseh (200-1 B.C.) (cf. 2Chron 33)

#### D. Internal arguments vs. canonicity of the Apocrypha

##### 1. Unbiblical/heretical teachings

a. Prayer for the dead – II Macc. 12:45,46

“44 For had he not expected the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead, 45 whereas if he had in view the splendid recompense reserved for those who make a pious end, the thought was holy and devout. Hence, he had this expiatory sacrifice offered for the dead, so that they might be released from their sin.”

### b. Salvation by works

8 'Prayer with fasting and alms with uprightness are better than riches with iniquity. Better to practice almsgiving than to hoard up gold. 9 Almsgiving saves from death and purges every kind of sin. Those who give alms have their fill of days' –Tobit 12:8-9

“3 Whoever respects a father expiates sins;”

14 for kindness to a father will not be forgotten but will serve as reparation for your sins.

15 On your own day of ordeal God will remember you: like frost in sunshine, your sins will melt away.”

–ben Sirach 3:3,14-15

### c. Creation from pre-existing matter – Wisdom 11:17

17 And indeed your all-powerful hand which created the world from formless matter, did not lack means to unleash a horde of bears or savage lions on them

## 2. Sub-biblical teaching

– Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon teach a situation ethic

– cf. Judith 9,10,13 = God’s involvement in sexual seduction

Judith 9: 12 King of your whole creation, hear my prayer.

9:13 Give me a beguiling tongue to wound and kill those who have formed such cruel designs against your covenant, against your holy dwelling-place, against Mount Zion, against the house belonging to your sons. 14 And demonstrate to every nation, every tribe, that you are the Lord, God of all power, all might, and that the race of Israel has no protector but you.

10:4 She put sandals on her feet, put on her necklaces, bracelets, rings, earrings and all her jewellery, and made herself beautiful enough to beguile the eye of any man who saw her.

13 I am on my way to see Holofernes, the general of your army, to give him trustworthy information. I shall show him the road to take if he wants to capture all the hill-country without losing one man or one life.' 14 As the men listened to what she was saying, they stared in astonishment at the sight of such a beautiful woman.

11:5 Judith said, 'Please listen favorably to what your slave has to say. Permit your servant to speak in your presence, I shall speak no word of a lie to my lord tonight.

16 Glory to the Lord who has protected me in the course I took! My face seduced him, only to his own undoing; he committed no sin with me to shame me or disgrace me.'

## 3. Fanciful nature of some tales vs. grave sacred history, e.g., “Bel and the Dragon”

## 4. Historical errors

–How could Tobit be alive at Jeroboam’s revolt vs. Israel (921) yet be alive at the fall of Israel (722), while his total lifespan is calculated at 158 years? (See Tobit 14:11 compared with 1:3-5.)

–Judith (1:1) says Nebuchadnezzar reigned in Nineveh, and that Nebuchadnezzar was emperor of the Assyrians (10:11, 11:1)

Judith 1:1 It was the twelfth year of Nebuchadnezzar who reigned over the Assyrians in the great city of **Nineveh**.

5. No claims of it being God's revelation vs. "Thus saith the Lord!"

### III. Pseudepigrapha

#### A. Introduction

##### 1. Meaning

"Spurious works purporting to emanate from biblical characters" –Webster's 3rd Edition

"Writings falsely attributed to ideal figures of the OT" –Charlesworth, *The OT Pseudepigrapha*, p. XXV

—Note that there are several books (e.g., III & IV Maccabees, Jubilees), which do not carry pseudonyms for titles

##### 2. Historical development

a. Time frame: 200 B.C. – 200 A.D.

Apparently, there was an abundance of pseudepigraphal writings from this era that did not survive to modern times. Note the following:

- (1) many references in the fathers
- (2) internal indications
  - (a) legend says Enoch wrote 366 works
  - (b) II Esdras says there were 70 of Enoch's works in existence

b. Pseudepigrapha never included in LXX

c. Historical context

- (1) Purpose of these works: Attempt to maintain Jewish identity in a pagan world
  - a) many anti-pagan themes
  - b) immanence of God in judgment

(2) No contemporary prophets, so heroic names borrowed to lend credibility

d. Significance: understanding religious and social dimensions of early Judaism

- (1) Jewish heritage not lost in days of temptation and despair



(2) Tensions among factions of Jews revealed

(a) e.g., Psalms of Solomon, Testament of Moses

(b) While there was a mainstream of orthodoxy, there were many divergent currents united only by a common enemy

## B. Representative works

### 1. Palestinian

a. Testaments of 12 Patriarchs, I b.c.

(1) Jacob's predictions for his sons with implications for the Hasmoneans in the last days

(2) Ethical and apocalyptic applications

b. Jubilees, II-I b.c.

(1) Legendary additions to Genesis and Exodus

(2) History is divided into Jubilee spans of 49 years and further sub-divided into sevens, progressing into the future kingdom as evil is more and more restrained and nature is transformed

c. Psalms of Solomon

(1) after Pompey conquers Jerusalem

(2) total of 18, two of which are Messianic

### 2. Non-Palestinian

a. Book of Enoch (Ethiopian Enoch), II-I b.c.

(1) History of Israel after Enoch

(2) Apocalyptic: revelations by angels

b. Letter of Aristeas, II-I b.c.

—legendary apology for the LXX

c. III Maccabees, I b.c.

—stories of Ptolemy IV's actions against the Jews

d. IV Maccabees, I b.c.

e. II Enoch (Slavonic Enoch), I a.d.

- (1) Enoch's trip through the seven heavens
- (2) Seven millennia between the flood and the last judgment

f. Sibylline Oracles, II b.c. - V a.d.

- (1) = Noah's daughter-in-law who was supposed to be a prophetess
- (2) Predicts world history to coming of Messiah

## C. Apocalyptic Literature

### 1. Introduction

a. Defined: 'divine' visions and revelations concerning imminent judgment of the present evil age and the establishment of God's kingdom in history

OT examples are Isaiah 24-27, Daniel 2,7,9,12, Zechariah 9-14

b. Delimited: related to eschatology. Not all prophecy is apocalyptic

c. Described

- (1) mysteries unveiled
- (2) really not visions, but self-serving theological statements in pseudepigraphal lit.
- (3) emphasis on symbolism
- (4) pseudonymous

### 2. Cause and effect

In times of perplexity and persecution, and because of the absence of God's intervention, and the lack of any authoritative prophetic message, "apocalyptic emerged to attempt to reconcile the prophetic promises with the disastrous course of current history and to project the fulfillment of these promises into an age yet to come" —Donald Guthrie, "Pseudepigrapha," *New Bible Dictionary*

Oppression developed during the intertestament period instead of the promised Messianic salvation of

the latter prophets; “to fill this vacuum, apocalyptic writings appeared between 200 BC and 100 AD, which purported to bring revelations from God explaining the reason for the prevalence of evil, disclosing heavenly secrets, and promising the imminent coming of His kingdom and salvation of the afflicted,” —George E. Ladd, “Apocalyptic,” *NBD*

“The apocalyptic movement may be succinctly described as the late Jewish attempt to revive Old Testament doctrines of history. In a world filled with a rich mixture of ideas, many of Hellenistic, Iranian, and ancient oriental origin, the apocalyptic impulse to recapture the old prophetic understanding of the history of salvation results in fact in the creation of a new theology of history obsessed with “last things.” Prophecy became eschatology.

“Apocalypticism sees world history in the grip of warring forces, God and Satan, the spirits of truth and error, light and darkness. The struggle of God with man, and of man with sin, evil, and death becomes objectified into a cosmic struggle. The world, captive to evil powers and principalities which have been given authority in the era of divine wrath, can be freed only by the divine might. But the day of God’s salvation and judgment dawns. The old age has moved to its allotted end and the age of consummation is at hand, the age of the vindication of the elect and the redemption of the world. Current events signal the approach of the end. The final war, Armageddon, has begun. The Messiah is about to appear “bringing a sword.” The Satanic forces, now brought to bay, break out in a final, defiant convulsion, manifest in the persecutions, temptations and tribulations of the faithful. In short, the apocalypticist lives in a world in which the sovereignty of God is the sole hope of salvation, and in the earnestness of his faith and the vividness of his hope he is certain that God is about to act. The faithful will be given the gift of salvation.

“Such apocalyptic themes find their way into various forms of literature, as we shall see. Characteristic, however, as the term “apocalyptic” makes evident, is the apocalypse, a book of revelations of things to come in the last days. Daniel and Revelation are canonical examples; the Enoch literature and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs are non-canonical representatives of the genre.

“The apocalyptic literature is featured by fantastic visions, calculation of times, and veiled references to contemporary history. The mythological imagery and astrological motives of the ancient Near East, including dualistic themes from Iran, strongly color the language of visions and can be recognized in the speculations about angels and spirits, and preoccupation with calendrical observations. Myths of creation are turned to the use of eschatology, to point to the struggle issuing in the “new creation.” The national Messiah of Israel, a “historical” savior, is transformed into a trans-historical warrior (and ultimately into a cosmic redeemer). Yet with all these transcendental and mythological elements, the main impulse of the apocalyptic is the Old Testament understanding of the history of salvation. The diverse borrowings are wholly informed by the Judaic spirit.” —F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran & Modern Biblical Studies*, pp. 76-78.

### 3. Major themes

#### a. Sin, evil, theodicy

(1) source of sin = evil angels among men

(2) allusions to Gen. 6 explained as angels’

(a) desire to reproduce

(b) lust

(c) pride of conquerors

#### b. Transcendence of God

–God’s remoteness excuses his inaction in the midst of trouble

c. Messianism

- (1) not so much a Person, as His kingdom
- (2) the ideal man as a leader; often the king/priest: see Zech 6 & Psa 110
- (3) emphasis on administration of power

d. Resurrection and paradise

–kingdom is imminent, sometimes on earth, sometimes in the third heaven with images of fruit trees and fragrances

4. Style

a. Professedly revelatory

b. Imitative

-Daniel = the archetype; effected style of dream narrations

c. Pseudonymous

d. Symbolism

5. Less than positive Traits

a. Dualism of 2 ages

b. Pessimism

c. Ethical passivity; no moral urgency

—no prophetic judgments on God’s people or calls to repentance, as opposed to prophetic covenant messengers (note prophetic admonition of Apocalypse 2,3)

2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place -- unless you repent."  
2:19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last *are* more than the first."  
3:19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."

d. Determinism without human responsibility

6. Contrast with NT eschatology (see F.F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, pp.170,174)

a. The Book of Revelation calls itself "a prophecy" (1:3)

b. Revelation makes moral pronouncements (2; 3; 6; 16:9,11)

IV. Significance of extra-canonical literature

A. Details of contemporary history

B. Subsequent Cultural/Historical contributions

1. Christopher Columbus and II Esdras 6:42

—proportion of world land to water is "6:1"

2. Handel's "Judas Maccabeus"

3. See Metzger's *Introduction to the Apocrypha* and Bruce's *The Canon of Scripture*

C. Devotional contribution