

Mount Olive Baptist Church
Bible Study Series: *How We Got the Bible*
Session 9 — “The Apocryphal Books”
Chapter 15

I. How the New Testament Canon Developed (pp. 156–160) – CONTINUED FROM LAST SESSION

At first, the church had no New Testament.
 Their Bible was the Old Testament, and apostolic teaching spread orally.

Gradually:

- Apostles wrote letters to churches.
 - Gospels recorded Christ’s life.
 - These writings were read publicly in worship.
- Scripture was forming through use before it was formally listed.

II. Early Lists and the Muratorian Fragment (pp. 157–160)

One of the earliest New Testament lists included:

- The four Gospels
 - Acts
 - Paul’s letters
 - Revelation
 - Other recognized apostolic works
- Some books were discussed temporarily because circulation varied among churches.

Other writings such as the **Shepherd of Hermas** or the **Epistle of Barnabas** were valued devotionally but never treated as Scripture.

III. Final Recognition of the Twenty-Seven New Testament Books (pp. 159–161)

By **A.D. 367**, **Athanasius** listed the exact twenty-seven New Testament books we have today.

This did not create the canon. It confirmed what the churches had already been using for generations.

Recognition was based on:

- Apostolic origin
- Doctrinal consistency
- Widespread use in worship
- Evidence of divine authority

IV. The Canon Was Recognized — Not Invented (p. 161)

The formation of the canon was:

- A historical process
 - A spiritual discernment
 - A recognition of God’s revelation over time
- No church council created Scripture or granted it authority.

Councils later affirmed what had already been recognized.

God inspired it.

Believers received it.

The church acknowledged it.

V. The Apocryphal Books (pp. 163–165)

The word “**Apocrypha**” comes from the Greek word meaning “**hidden**” or “**concealed.**”

Originally the word referred to writings of uncertain origin, but over time it came to describe books that were considered non-canonical.

A major difference between **Protestant and Catholic Bibles** involves these books.

Both traditions accept **27 books in the New Testament.**

However, the Roman Catholic Old Testament includes **additional writings** that are not found in most Protestant Bibles.

Catholics often refer to these books as **Deuterocanonical**, meaning “**second canon.**”

Protestants typically refer to them as **Apocrypha**, meaning writings that are **outside the canon of Scripture.**

VI. The Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament (pp. 164–165)

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|---------------------------|---|
| • First Esdras | • Letter of Jeremiah |
| • Second Esdras | • Prayer of Azariah / Song of the Three Young Men |
| • Tobit | • Susanna |
| • Judith | • Bel and the Dragon |
| • Additions to Esther | • Prayer of Manasseh |
| • Wisdom of Solomon | • First Maccabees |
| • Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) | • Second Maccabees |
| • Baruch | |

VII. Types of Apocryphal Writings (pp. 165–166)

The Apocrypha covers several different literary categories.

1. Historical

Examples:

- 1 Esdras
- 1 and 2 Maccabees

First Maccabees provides valuable historical information about the **Jewish revolt against Syrian oppression** in the second century B.C.

2. Legendary

Examples:

- Tobit
- Judith
- Additions to Esther
- Additions to Daniel

These writings often contain dramatic stories intended to inspire faith and patriotism. However, many scholars consider these stories legendary rather than historical.

3. Prophetic

Examples:

- Baruch
- Letter of Jeremiah
- 2 Esdras

Some of these books claim prophetic authority but were written long after the prophets they are associated with.

4. Ethical / Devotional

Examples:

- Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Prayer of Manasseh

These writings often contain **wisdom teachings similar to Proverbs** and can be spiritually insightful.

VIII. Why These Books Are Rejected as Scripture (pp. 167–172)

The issue is not whether these books contain valuable ideas.

The real question is:

Should they be considered inspired Scripture?

The book gives several reasons why they are not included in the biblical canon.

1. They Were Never Included in the Hebrew Bible

The Jewish canon of Scripture contained **twenty-two books** (equivalent to our thirty-nine Old Testament books).

Jewish historians such as **Josephus** never included the Apocrypha among inspired writings.

No Jewish community treated them as Scripture.

2. Jesus and the Apostles Never Treated Them as Scripture

Jesus frequently quoted from the Old Testament.

The New Testament writers quote nearly every section of the Hebrew Scriptures.

However:

There are no quotations from the Apocrypha recognized as Scripture.

3. They Were Not Accepted by Early Jewish or Christian Leaders

Important historical figures rejected their canonical authority, including:

- **Philo**
- **Josephus**
- **Origen**
- **Jerome**

Jerome, who translated the **Latin Vulgate**, strongly argued that these books should not be part of the canon.

4. Some Contain Historical or Factual Problems

Several books contain:

- Historical inaccuracies
- Chronological problems
- Geographical errors

For example:

The book of **Judith** incorrectly describes historical rulers and events.

5. Many Contain Legendary or Fictional Elements

Some stories include:

- exaggerated exploits
- fanciful narratives
- contradictions with canonical Scripture

This raises questions about their divine inspiration.

6. Their Canonical Status Was Uncertain for Centuries

These writings circulated widely but were **never universally accepted** as Scripture.

Different manuscripts and traditions included different collections.

7. Their Canonical Status Was Declared Late

In **A.D. 1546**, during the **Council of Trent**, the Roman Catholic Church officially declared many of these books to be canonical. This happened **more than a thousand years after the early church period**.

IX. Apocryphal Books of the New Testament (pp. 171)

There are also **New Testament apocryphal writings**.

These include works such as:

- Gospel of Peter
- Infancy Gospel of Thomas

- Acts of John
- Acts of Paul