

## **ANSWERING THE TOUGH ONES "ON THE APOCRYPHA"**



*Why does the church rarely mention the Apocrypha? If they were not meant to be included in the Bible, why were some of the books found among the Dead Sea Scrolls? I'm torn between two worlds as I can find good arguments for and against it being included.*

Thanks for your questions . . . they are good ones. Regarding why the church rarely makes mention of the Apocrypha, it's probably because the apocryphal books are not considered on the same authoritative level as the sixty-six books of the Bible. Typically if someone wants to know more about the composition of Scripture most churches offer equipping classes that cover topics like this.

To address your second question regarding the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls it may be helpful to give a brief summary regarding what the Apocrypha is and where it came from. Around the year 430 BCE the prophet / teacher Ezra compiled the last books of the Old Testament (*Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah*), and his scribal school synthesized the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament (twenty-two books in Hebrew). From this point on these books were considered authoritative because they belonged to the successive line of inspired prophecy from Moses to Ezra. Starting around 200 BCE, Israel found itself caught in the middle of a power struggle between Egypt and Syria that ended with multiple abuses, including the loss of religious freedom. From this time up to the break in the Common Era, pseudepigraphal (false name) works and the books of the Apocrypha were written with strong messianic overtones, including the apocryphal books found in the Catholic bible. Around this same time the Jewish community living in Alexandria, Egypt was translating the books of the Old Testament from Hebrew into the new international language, common Greek (*koine*). Because the Jewish community in Egypt was not as strict regarding the canon of the Old Testament as Palestinian Jews, some of these apocryphal / pseudepigraphal books began to be added to the Greek version of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint (after the seventy or so scholars that completed the translation). Though the Septuagint was widely used, including the New Testament writers, it was widely accepted that a distinction existed between the twenty-two books of the Hebrew Old Testament and the apocryphal books that were added to the Greek translation later.

Beginning in the 383rd year of the Common Era the scholar Jerome was commissioned to revise the Old Latin version of Scripture into the Latin Vulgate (or common tongue). He used Hebrew texts to translate the Old Testament and therefore (very purposefully) omitted the apocryphal literature, since it only existed in the Greek text, or Septuagint. He recognized the distinction between the authoritative books of the Old Testament and the apocryphal books, that while the Apocrypha could be edifying to read, no apocryphal book should be the basis of doctrine. This distinction was recognized for a while, until during the Middle Ages an Old Latin version of the Apocrypha was added to the Latin Vulgate. Then, in response to Martin Luther and other reformers, the Council of Trent met in 1546 CE and determined that the sixty-six books of the Latin Vulgate *plus* the Apocrypha was authoritative Scripture. This decision ignored established, widespread acceptance of the authoritative books and was largely an attempt to defend corrupt practices such as the sale of indulgences using vague

references to the baptism of the dead in the Apocrypha. The Catholic Church realized its error and corrected the mistake in 1869 CE at the First Vatican Council, where it reinstated Jerome's distinction of the sixty-six authoritative books and the secondary books of the Apocrypha, which are used for edification only.

In 1947 CE approximately one thousand scrolls and fragments were discovered in the area around Qumran near the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. Around six hundred of these texts are from the twenty-two books of the Hebrew Scripture. The rest are apocryphal, pseudepigraphal, and liturgical. However, as is shown below, just because the apocryphal books were copied and used alongside the Hebrew Scripture does not mean they are recognized on the same level as those authoritative books.

I hope this helps to satisfy your questions. Please let me know if you have further questions, I would be happy to continue to interact with you about this. If you'd like to read deeper into this subject I recommend F. F. Bruce's book *The Canon of Scripture*.

In Christ,  
Nathan C. Wagnon