

New Testament Survey

Extra-Biblical Literature

I. Pseudipigrapha and the Qumran Documents¹

A. Pseudipigrapha

The Pseudipigrapha is a class of extra-biblical literature which uses the name of some prominent Bible character to lend credence to the document. For example, the Assumption of Moses, the Book of Enoch, etc.

1. Apocalypses

Apocalyptic literature is a type of literature that deals with the end of the world and final judgment. It is usually characterized by highly figurative language. Some of the more prominent of these are:

a. Book of Enoch

Interestingly, this book is quoted by Jude in Jude 1:14-15.

Mentions fallen angels and giants, some of which are 3,000 cubits tall (4,500 feet).

b. Assumption of Moses

Has Moses telling Joshua of the future of the Jews right down to Herod's death!

c. Apocalypse of Baruch

d. Ascension of Isaiah

e. IV Esdras

2. Narratives and Legends

a. Life of Adam and Eve

b. Jubilees

Sees all of earth's history as a series of Jubilees (49 year segments).

3. Testaments

Testaments are supposed death-bed instructions given by some prominent Bible character, sort of a last will and testament.

a. The Testament of Adam

b. The Testament of Abraham

c. The Testament of Job

¹ James Borland, *A General Introduction to the New Testament*, (Lynchburg: University Book House, 1986), pp. 68-72.

d. The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs

Each of the patriarchs (twelve sons of Jacob) look at one of their major vices and give instructions on how to deal with it.

4. Treatises

a. III Maccabees

Deals with conditions similar to the Maccabees and thus derives its name.

b. IV Maccabees

Philosophical approach to the idea of reason.

c. Sibylline Oracles

A group of some 15 books which treat the last days in an oracular fashion.

d. Letter of Aristeas

Deals with the origin of the LXX.

5. Worship Hymns

Consist of the Psalms of Solomon, some 18 psalms supposedly authored by Solomon.

B. The Qumran Literature

The Qumran literature comes from the caves of Qumran, near the Dead Sea, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These documents were produced by the Essene sect which occupied that area.

1. The Manual of Discipline

Described how the Qumran community was to live and order their existence with a view to the future.

2. The Damascus Document

Deals with matters similar to the Manual of Discipline with a hint of an Eschatological Messiah.

3. The War Scroll

Depicts an eschatological war between the sons of Light and the sons of Darkness.

4. Hymns and Prayers

5. Commentaries

A number of Hebrew commentaries, called *peshet*. The best one is a commentary on Habakkuk. Most deal with how the text applies in one's everyday life as well as the events of the recent Hasmoneans.

6. Apocalypses

Many fragments of apocalypses. Two examples are the Book of Noah and part of a Book of Secrets.

II. The Apocrypha²

A. The Apocryphal Writings

The Apocrypha was not included in the Bible until the Council of Trent in the 1540's. It was included by the Catholic Church as a reaction against the Protestant Reformation.

The Apocrypha is used to substantiate errant doctrines, such as prayers for the dead, the worship of angels, the veneration of saints, purgatory, and the sale of indulgences.

1. Additions

- a. Additions to Esther

Various additions to Esther

- b. Esdras 1

Additions to Nehemiah and Ezra

- c. Prayer of Manasseh

Manasseh's supposed prayer of repentance.

- d. Song of 3 Young Men

The supposed prayer of the three young men while in the fiery furnace.

² Ibid, pp. 63-67.

- e. Susanna

A story about how Daniel used his wisdom to save a beautiful young woman from being falsely accused of being an adulterer.
 - f. Wisdom of Solomon

Additions to the book of Proverbs.
2. Legends
- a. Bel and the Dragon

A story of how Daniel used flour to expose the tricks of pagan priests.
 - b. Tobit

A story of love and intrigue where a young man gains a beautiful woman by saving her from a demon-lover as well as restoring the eyesight of his father.
 - c. Judith

The story of how Judith tricks and kills a Babylonian general named Holophernes.
3. History
- a. Maccabees 1

Contains a history of the Maccabean struggle for independence.
 - b. Maccabees 2

Continues the story of 1 Maccabees.
4. Pseudipigrapha
- a. Baruch

Supposed writings of Baruch, the secretary for Jeremiah.
 - b. Letter of Jeremiah

Supposed letter of Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon.
5. Other
- a. II Esdras

Visions given by an angel Uriel.

b. Ecclesiasticus

Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach,

D. Why the Apocrypha is Rejected

1. The Jews reject the Apocrypha.

All of the Jews in New Testament time, even down to the discussions of the council of Jamnia in A.D. 90, rejected the Apocrypha.

2. Christ and the Apostles never quoted from it.

Christ and the Apostles quoted from nearly every other OT book, but never once quoted from the Apocrypha.

3. It is obviously not inspired due to historical blunders and contradictions regarding doctrinal teachings taught elsewhere in the Bible.

For example, in Judith 1:5, 10 and 2:1, Nebuchadnezzar is called the King of the Assyrians ruling in Nineveh. There are two accounts of Antiochus Epiphanes death, one in Jerusalem (2 Maccabees 1:15-17) and the other in the mountains to the east (2 Maccabees 9:5-29).

4. Its inspiration is denied by ancient and modern authorities.

Josephus excludes the Apocrypha from his list of OT books. (*Against Apion* i.8).

5. It was not accepted by the early church.

6. It was only included in recent times and even then very reluctantly.

7. It was not written by any recognized prophet.

8. It was written in the intertestamental times after the Old Testament canon was closed.

9. It contains many false doctrines not taught elsewhere in the Bible.

Prayers, sacrifices, and offerings for the dead are found in 2 Maccabees 12:40-46. The pre-existence of the soul is found in the Wisdom of Solomon 8:19-20. Poor ethics, lying, scheming, and murder are supported in Judith 8-13.

E. The Value of the Apocrypha

Although the Apocrypha is not inspired Scripture, it does have some value.

1. The Apocrypha provides insight into Jewish thinking and concerns.

2. The Apocrypha provides historical insight into the intertestamental times.

3. The Apocrypha sheds light on the Jewish messianic hope that rose during the intertestamental time.

III. New Testament Apocryphal Writings³

A. Gospels

There are about fifty apocryphal gospels. The purpose of these gospels was either to put forward some heresy, or to supplement the life of Christ.

These gospels have been attributed to the following persons: Ebionites, Hebrews, Judas, James, Bartholomew, Philip, Thomas, and others.

The infancy Gospel of Thomas tells about boyhood miracles of Jesus, including the raising of the dead, Jesus killing some boys giving him a hard time, and the bringing to life of clay pigeons.

B. Acts

A second group of Apocryphal literature is the various acts of apostles. Primary ones concern John, Paul, Peter, Andrew, and Thomas. Most of these include exotic encounters, such as talking animals, beautiful women, sorcerers, kings, etc.

C. Epistles

Spurious epistles form the third group. There is not as many of these as there are gospels and acts. Some of the more notable ones are The Epistles of Christ and Abgarus, The Epistles of the Apostles, and the Apocryphal Epistle of Titus.

D. Apocalypses

The fourth group of apocryphal writings are the vision-format apocalypses. These are attributed to various authors including James, Paul, Peter, Stephen, Thomas, and even the Virgin Mary. In one of them, Peter gives a tour of hell and Paul describes heaven.

³ Ibid, pp. 75-81.