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Christians and the Apocrypha

The Apocrypha consists of several books that are included in the Septuagint but are absent from the Hebrew Bible:

Additions to Daniel¹

Additions to Esther

Baruch

1 Esdras

Judith

Letter of Jeremiah

1 Maccabees

2 Maccabees

3 Maccabees

4 Maccabees

Prayer of Manasseh

Psalms 151

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)

Tobit

Wisdom of Solomon

In the New Testament, the Apocrypha is never cited as Scripture, but Paul and other authors appear to have read some of these books and to regard their teaching favorably:

Romans 1:20–29	recalls	Wisdom 13:5–8; 14:24–27
Romans 9:20–23	recalls	Wisdom 12:12, 20; 15:7
2 Corinthians 5:1–4	recalls	Wisdom 9:15
James 1:19	recalls	Sirach 5:11
James 1:13	recalls	Sirach 15:11–12

In modern Christianity there is a spectrum of opinion regarding the Apocrypha.

Greek Orthodox churches regard all the books listed above as part of their Old Testament canon of Scripture.

Roman Catholic churches follow a decision made at the Council of Trent (1546) to regard most of these books (all but 1 Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, 3 Maccabees, and 4 Maccabees) as Scripture. They resist the term “apocrypha” and prefer to call the books “deuterocanonical” (which means “secondary canon” or “added to the canon later”). The books are read and used in church on a status almost equivalent to other writings of the Old Testament, with the caveat that no teaching or doctrine is to be established from these writings alone.

Anglicans and Episcopalians do not usually refer to the books of the Apocrypha as Scripture, but they do regard them as ancient sacred writings that may be used in liturgy and as texts for preaching in church.

Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and some other Protestant denominations commend the books of the Apocrypha for reading and regard them as works of historical and spiritual interest, but they do not regard them as Scripture and (unlike the Anglicans) have not traditionally authorized their use as sacred texts in worship.

Other Protestants regard the Apocrypha with attitudes ranging from respect to disdain. The Puritans who came to America viewed the Apocrypha with suspicion and objected to the books being included in printed Bibles. That attitude has taken hold among many American denominations.

1. Sometimes these are listed separately as Prayer of Azariah and Song of Three Jews; Susanna; Bel and the Dragon.