

# SCHOLAR'S CORNER

## How was it decided which books would be included in the Old Testament? And why do some churches (including the Episcopal Church) use the books of the Apocrypha, when those books are not in the Jewish Bible?

The dominant theory about the canonization of the Old Testament says it happened in three stages: the Torah (Genesis - Deuteronomy) around 400 BCE, the Prophets (Joshua - Kings, plus Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve “minor” prophets, not including Ruth, Lamentations or Daniel) by about 200, and the Writings (everything else) around 100 CE (AD).

The canonization of the Torah is thought to be reflected in the account of Ezra reading “the Book of the Law of Moses” to the people of Jerusalem (about 450 BC). The prophets' section seems to have been formed by 200 BCE because Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), written about 180 BCE, recounts (chs. 48-49) the prophets in canonical order.

The writings seem not to have been entirely “solidified” until after 70 CE

when the rabbis (Pharisees) meeting at Yavneh (Jamnia) were still discussing whether the Song of Songs and Esther should be considered holy. Some scholars, however, hold that the Pharisees closed the Hebrew canon before the first century.

Either way, the decisions made by the Pharisees/rabbis were irrelevant to most Christians because most Jewish Christians (Paul was an exception) did not come out of Pharisaic Judaism anyway, but out of other “streams” of Judaism, which read books the Pharisees did not read. That is why early Christians read books not in the Jewish Bible, because the Jewish Bible is a Pharisaic product, and Christianity originated for the most part among non-Pharisaic Jews.

Until the Protestant Reformation, all

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New Testament and discovered that Hebrew Bibles lacked the books of the Apocrypha. Assuming that the Bible of rabbinic Jews was THE Old Testament, the reformers concluded that the Apocrypha was not part of the Bible.

The Reformed (Calvinist) tradition and the Anabaptists (Mennonites and Amish) at the Reformation rejected the Apocrypha as worthless, and all younger Protestant churches have followed suit.

In contrast, the Lutheran and

churches used some books not in the Jewish Bible. The reformers (including the English reformers) wanted to get behind the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible to the original Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the

Anglican traditions retained the Apocrypha, though not as inspired Scriptures but as uninspired but still useful, ancient Jewish religious literature. Lutheran and Anglican Bibles, including the “King James Version” of 1611 have usually included the Apocrypha, though in a separate section usually printed between the Old and New Testaments.

Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox (and the other ancient churches of the East) do not print the Apocrypha in a separate section but dispersed throughout the Old Testament based on literary genre (historical, prophetic, etc.).

Since no Christian tradition is likely now to make any dramatic changes in its Bible, these differences are likely to remain.

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