

Old Testament Apocrypha

Title	Date	Style	Summary of Contents
Wisdom of Solomon	AD 40	Wisdom / Ethical	Wise sayings to keep the Jews from materialism and idolatry.
Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach)	180 BC	Wisdom / Ethical	Similar to Proverbs. Practical advice. Man is to be remembered for his virtues.
Tobit	200 BC	Religious fiction	The story of Tobit, an Israelite carried into captivity by the Assyrians. Emphasises the importance of observing the law and alms giving.
Judith	150 BC	Religious fiction	Judith, Jewish widow, saves Israelite city from Assyrians.
1 Maccabees	100 BC	Historical	History of Israel during the intertestamental period.
2 Maccabees	100 BC	Historical	A parallel account of 1 Maccabees, covering the victories of Judas Maccabees.
1 Esdras (3 Esdras)	150 BC	Historical	Return of Jews after exile in Babylon. Covers material found in Ezra & Nehemiah
2 Esdras (4 Esdras)	AD 100	Apocalyptic	Seven visions revealing the future supposedly made to Ezra in Babylon
Baruch	AD 100	Prophetic	Claims to be written by Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch. Urges the Jews not to rebel.
Letter of Jeremiah	AD 100	Prophetic	The letter of Jeremiah addressed to Jews in Egypt, warning against idolatry.
Additions to Esther	100 BC	Legendary	Prayers attributed to Esther and Mordecai to compensate for the absence of God's name from that book.
The Song of the Three Holy Children (Prayer of Azariah)	100 BC	Legendary	Inserted between Daniel 3:23 and 3:24. Claims to be prayers and praise of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego whilst they were in the furnace.
History of Susanna	100 BC	Legendary	Added after Daniel 12. Story of Susanna, a Jewish woman falsely accused and saved from death by Daniel.
Bel and the Dragon	100 BC	Legendary	Daniel exposes the folly of idolatry to King Cyrus.
The Prayer of Manasses	200 BC	Legendary	Claims to be the prayer of the wicked King Manasseh mentioned in 2 Chronicles 33:19.

- A. **The Wisdom of Solomon** was written in Greek by an unknown Jewish writer who knew his scriptures and was also aware of more recent trends in Greek philosophy. The overall message is that God blesses those who are faithful to Him (READ WISDOM OF SOLOMON 15:1-6).
- B. **The Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach** is also known as **Ecclesiasticus** ("of the church" and not to be confused with Ecclesiastes "The Preacher"). The book was written in Hebrew by a man named Joshua ("Jesus" in Greek) and was later

translated into Greek by his grandson. Wisdom is praised and many examples are given to show how the wise should live (READ SIRACH 14:20 - 15:10). The most famous passage in the Apocrypha praises famous men throughout Jewish history (READ SIRACH 44), building up to the great Simon son of Onias in chapter 50. The book concludes with a hymn of thanksgiving (READ SIRACH 51:1-12).

- C. **Tobit** is a good and pious Jew living in Nineveh but he has gone blind and is facing a life of poverty. Living in Ecbatana is a relative of Tobit named Raguel who has a daughter named Sarah. She has been married seven times but on every wedding night her husband has been killed by the demon Asmodeus. Both Tobit and Sarah have given up hope and ask to die but God has other plans (READ TOBIT 3). He sends the angel Raphael to take Tobit's son Tobias on a long journey to Ecbatana where he helps Tobias to defeat the demon, marry the girl and return home to his father with a cure for his blindness and everyone is happy. Except the demon (READ TOBIT 12).
- D. **Judith** is the story of a victory won by God's people over an evil oppressor, General Holofernes, thanks to the unlikely intervention of a woman. The Jewish army is besieged at Bethulia and at the point of surrender when Judith comes to their rescue (READ JUDITH 11-13).
- E. **First Maccabees** tells of the Jewish revolt against the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes and the re-establishment of an independent Jewish state under the sons of Mattathias of the family of Hashmon (the Hasmoneans) including Judas Maccabee.
 - 1. Antiochus hated the Jews (READ 1 MACCABEES 1:20-64) but there were some who were prepared to stand against him, including the priest Mattathias (READ 1 MACCABEES 2). After Mattathias died one of his sons, Judas, took up the fight. It was Judas who made contact with Rome (READ 1 MACCABEES 8). Judas was succeeded by his brother Jonathan (1 Maccabees 9) who confirmed the alliance with Rome and also the Greek state of Sparta (1 Maccabees 12: 1-23). Another brother, Simon, follows Jonathan (1 Maccabees 13 - 16) but he was assassinated and one of his sons, John, becomes the next leader (1 Maccabees 16).
- F. **Second Maccabees** is a summary of a much later work by Jason of Cyrene. The passages included within 2 Maccabees are more detailed retellings of material found early in 1 Maccabees with special emphasis on the Temple and also on the importance of keeping the faith even when facing persecution (READ 2 MACCABEES 7). There is also a promise of an eternal reward for those who keep the faith (READ 2 MACCABEES 12:38-45).
- G. **Third Maccabees** is set some fifty years before 1 Maccabees. Ptolemy IV Philopater, the Greek king of Egypt, has defeated Antiochus III, the Greek king of Syria, and is making a tour of his domains. He wants to inspect the Temple in Jerusalem but is prevented by a miracle. In revenge he orders a persecution of the Jewish community in Alexandria in Egypt. The Jews are rounded up and five hundred elephants are sent in to crush them but another miracle takes place and it is the Egyptians who get killed not the Jews. Ptolemy realises that he is wrong and frees the Jews in his kingdom.

- H. **Fourth Maccabees** looks at how total obedience to God's Law leads to a virtuous life on earth as well as the promise of an eternal reward. The martyrdoms of 2 Maccabees are used as examples of how faith leads to salvation.
- I. **First Esdras** parallels material from 2 Chronicles 35 - 36, Ezra, and Nehemiah 6 - 8 although there are additions, omissions and other changes.
- J. **Second Esdras** is an apocalypse with seven visions being given to Shealtiel (who may be Ezra) with some very strange teaching on the end of the world.
- K. **The Book of Baruch** is a collection of four short messages from Baruch, the secretary of the prophet Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 32:12; 36:4). Baruch explains why the Jews have had to suffer but offers hope for the future. (READ BARUCH 4:5-29).
- L. The **Letter of Jeremiah** is sometimes included as the final chapter of Baruch. It is a strong condemnation of idolatry.
- M. The Greek Version of **Esther** follows the same outline as the Hebrew story with which you are familiar. The six new passages provide a different introduction and conclusion, refer to official documents in more detail, and show how God heard and answered prayers.
- N. Some of the Additions to Daniel can be slotted into the Old Testament book while others illustrate his wisdom and holiness without having a specific context. **The Prayer of Azariah** (better known by his Hebrew name Abednego) and **The Song of the Three Young Men** fit between Daniel 2: 23 and 3: 24. The Book of **Susanna** tells how the beautiful and virtuous Susanna is falsely accused by two lecherous elders but saved by the wisdom and courage of Daniel in what has been described as one of the world's first detective stories (READ SUSANNA). **Bel and the Dragon** (or Serpent) are two stories that tell how Daniel reveals the falseness of the idol Bel and then destroys a dragon (or serpent) that was worshipped by the Babylonians.
- O. **The Prayer of Manasseh** is a beautiful prayer of repentance made by the wicked king of Israel (see 2 Chronicles 33:12-20). If it is truly genuine then it shows that anyone, no matter how evil, can repent. If it has been made up as an exercise in wishful thinking it is still a lovely prayer (READ THE PRAYER OF MANASSEH).