

Catholic Bible

Summaries and evaluations taken from GotQuestions.org articles.

Sirach

Jesus, son of Eleazar, son of Sirach, is believed to have written this book between 200–175 BC. The book of Sirach possesses a wealth of varied expressions of wise and foolish behavior reminiscent of the book of Proverbs. Many of its verses have Old Testament antecedents, especially from the book of Proverbs (dozens of related verses) and the Pentateuch, which is comprised of the first five books of the Bible. Portions of Sirach are used today in Catholic Church liturgy.

While most of this book tracks with long-standing, sound biblical doctrine, there are several tenets that conflict significantly with Christian beliefs. In several places, Sirach implies our actions can bring favor upon ourselves, mitigate our sin in God's eyes, and anticipate reciprocal responses from those we assist in their time of need (chapters 3, 7, 12, 17, and 22). This is in stark contrast to the Bible's teaching to be a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7), salvation through faith and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9), and Jesus' exhortation to give without expecting anything in return (Matthew 6:3).

Judith

The Book of Judith, believed to be written in the late second century or early first century B.C., recounts the story of God providing a woman, Judith, to deliver the Jewish people in a time of great need and despair. In the story Judith lives in the town of Bethulia. She is a beautiful and wise widow who becomes incensed with her town elders when they "test" God rather than trust Him and they decide to capitulate to King Nebuchadnezzar's top general, Holofernes, to surrender if God does not save them in five days.

Judith feels that giving God such a deadline is arrogant and inappropriate in the extreme. She tells the elders she has a plan, but must leave the city for it to be successful. She refuses to divulge any details, departs with her slave woman, and enters Holofernes's camp on the pretext of providing him help to defeat her fellow Jews.

Holofernes is mesmerized by her beauty and takes her into his camp and company. Her voluptuousness and wiles attract him, and lust blinds him to her deceit. Judith manages to get Holofernes alone in his tent when he is excessively drunk. When he passes out, she beheads him, steals back to Bethulia, displays the result of her intrigue, and becomes the town's heroine.

This Book of Judith was believed to be written first in Hebrew, but the Septuagint scripture crafted in Koine Greek was accepted by the Catholic Church for its Bible. Jerome, a Catholic priest and apologist (c. A.D. 347 – 420), was said to produce a text of Judith in Latin from a secondary Aramaic text.

As with other books in the Apocrypha, there are anachronisms, most notably the claim that Nebuchadnezzar ruled over the Assyrian Empire from Nineveh. He actually ruled over Babylonia. Plus, Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar, had destroyed Nineveh years earlier, making this story's history suspect. However, many view this account as a variation of the Exodus story, where faith in God and reliance on Him for deliverance from fear and protection from harm and evil is what believers must always do. This book is regarded as an appropriate reflection during the Passover celebration.

Tobit

The Book of Tobit, also referred to as Tobias, believed to have been written early in the second century B.C., recounts the story of a man named Tobit and his family exiled to living in Nineveh shortly after the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. Tobit and his family strive to love and honor God and act as righteous followers of the Law. The Book of Tobit is regarded as a book of history, and its literary form is regarded by some as that of a religious novel. However, the teaching of the book is not driven by or relevant to historical events. Rather, it instructs about piety, honoring one's parents, giving alms to the poor, intercessory prayer, marriage, and following the Law.

The story of Tobit revolves around a righteous, law-abiding Jew who did not abandon traditional Jewish beliefs and practices while other Jews living in exile with him were worshiping idols and failing to follow God's laws. Tobit did many good deeds, including burying Jews according to ritual at some risk to himself and giving alms to the poor. His family was wealthy. However, one hot night after burying a body, Tobit slept outside, and sparrow droppings fell into his eyes and blinded him. He despaired and asked God that he may die. On that same day in Media, Sarah, one of Tobit's kinsman, prayed to God to take her life also because she was constantly ridiculed for marrying seven times, and each time the demon Asmodeus killed her husband before the marriage could be consummated.

With Tobit expecting to die soon, he sent his only son, Tobiah, to Media to return a large sum of money on deposit with a relative. During this trip, Tobiah was unknowingly accompanied by the angel Raphael (who appears only in the Apocrypha, not the Bible). Tobiah was attacked by a large fish, which Raphael tells him to kill and extract its gall bladder, liver, and heart, because they "can be used as medicines." Upon arriving in Media, Tobiah marries Sarah at Raphael's insistence and uses the fish heart and liver to dispose of the demon and protect the marriage bed. When Tobiah returns home, he applies the gall and restores his father's sight.

This book was written in Aramaic, a rather common international language used by Jews and many others living during the intertestamental period. For centuries the original text was lost, and the Greek translation served as the primary source for this book. However, in Cave IV at Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls discovery), fragments of Tobit were found written in Aramaic and Hebrew, and conform closely to the Greek recension used for current translations.

Several verses in Tobit repeat Old Testament Scripture, such as First and Second Kings, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, and many others. Tobit also hints at the birth of Christ described in the New Testament Gospels and the end times in apostle John's Book of Revelation.

Many have highlighted a few historical and theological errors in Tobit. First, Tobit 1:15 incorrectly notes that Sennacherib was Shalmaneser's son, rather than the son of Sargon II. Also, Tobit seems to imply that he was alive during the reign of Jeroboam I (about 930 B.C.), but at his death he was reported to be 117 years old. Theologically, Tobit asserts that almsgiving alone "will save you from death," not, as Paul states in Galatians 2:16, that man is justified (saved) "by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified." And Jesus, in John 3:16, says that "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Faith alone, therefore, not works or observing the Law, provides salvation.

Wisdom of Solomon

The Wisdom of Solomon was believed by some to have been written by King Solomon, although his name appears nowhere in the text. However, the early church rejected the authorship of Solomon; an ancient manuscript known as the Muratorian fragment refers to the Wisdom of Solomon as having been written by "the friends of Solomon in his honor." It is widely accepted today, even by the Catholic Church, that Solomon did not write

the book, which dates back to the 1st or 2nd century BC, many centuries after the death of Solomon.

While Solomon wrote much on the subject of wisdom in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, he never elevated it to the status of part of the Godhead, a philosophy found in The Wisdom of Solomon. The book refers to Wisdom in terms the Bible reserves for the Messiah, saying, “She [wisdom] is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (Wisdom 7:26). The book of Hebrews reserves such accolades for the Son of God, who “is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3). Even more egregious, Wisdom 9:18 says that salvation is an act of wisdom, whereas Scripture is clear that salvation is by faith, a gift of God to those whom He calls, justifies, and sanctifies (Ephesians 2:8–9; Romans 8:30). In fact, if man were to depend upon his “wisdom” for salvation, we would be lost forever with no hope because the unredeemed are dead in trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1–4) and their minds are darkened (Ephesians 4:18; 1 Corinthians 2:14) and their heart deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9).

The apocryphal books are accepted by the Roman Catholic Church because many of the books teach Catholic doctrines that are not in agreement with the Bible, including praying for the dead, petitioning Mary to intercede with the Father, worshiping angels, and alms-giving as atonement for sins. Some of what the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonals say is true and correct. However, due to the historical and theological errors, the books, including The Wisdom of Solomon, must be viewed as fallible historical and religious documents, not as the inspired, authoritative Word of God.

Ecclesiasticus

Ecclesiasticus was apparently written by Jesus, grandson of Sirach, sometime between 190 and 170 BC. He is also referred to as Yeshua Ben Sirach or simply Ben Sira. He was a philosophical observer of life who lived in Jerusalem and was well-versed in the Hebrew Scriptures and traditions. The original book was written in Hebrew, and a Greek translation was produced by the author's grandson about 132 BC. In the Greek edition's prologue, the writer identifies the accepted Hebrew canon as being composed of "the Law and the prophets, and the others who followed after." By this three-fold categorization, the writer indicates that the Old Testament canon was considered closed, and his own book was not included. This view is supported by other ancient writings that list the Old Testament books and do not include any of the deuterocanonical or apocryphal books.

The common title of the book comes from the fact that it was used in ancient synagogue services, and it even had popular use in early church meetings. The Book of Ecclesiasticus was included in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament written around 250 BC, as well as Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus (both from the 4th century AD). Despite its inclusion in the Septuagint and its widespread use in the early centuries, it was not included in the Hebrew canon, and no early church father included it in the canon until Augustine in AD 397. Epiphanius wrote in AD 385 that the canonicity of the book was disputed among the Jews of his day, and the Council of Laodicea in AD 363 omitted the book in its list of accepted Scriptures. Melito, the bishop of Sardis in AD 170, made a point of omitting the disputed books from the canon, and Eusebius of Caesarea gave his recommendation to Melito's writing. The Catholic Church gave its official support to the deuterocanonical books with the decision of the Council of Trent in 1546, thus solidifying the Catholic canon as distinct from the previously accepted canon of Scripture. Most Protestants still hold to the ancient canon and reject the deuterocanonical books.

The contents of Ecclesiasticus are much like the other Hebrew wisdom books. Advice on a wide variety of topics in no particular order, and poems extolling wisdom and the Lord as the source of wisdom comprise most of the book. One area in which Ecclesiasticus differs from Scripture is in its treatment of retribution for sin. It is possible that Ben Sira identified with the Sadducees, who did not believe in life after death. The Hebrew version denies any retribution in the afterlife, teaching instead that God will punish those sins in this lifetime. Daniel 12:2 states clearly that some will awake to everlasting life, and “some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Psalms 9:17 also says that the wicked will be sent to hell, and Jesus rebuked the Sadducees (Matthew 22:29-32) for their ignorance in denying life after death.

For the most part, the remainder of the book can serve as a valuable commentary and instructional guide, since it finds its foundations in the Scriptures. Much of the book reflects the teachings of earlier biblical books, and it holds a traditional conservative Jewish theology. God is depicted as unchanging, all-knowing, and merciful. Even though sin is a result of man’s choice, there is hope even for sinners, because they can turn away from sin and repent. The essence of the book is that wisdom, identified with the Law, is bestowed only on one who fears the Lord (cf. Proverbs 9:10).

Baruch

In response to the Reformation, the Catholic Church, after centuries of not acknowledging these writings fully, canonized the Apocrypha at the Council of Trent in 1546 in part to provide “biblical” justification for some doctrines not found in originally canonized works, e.g., praying for the dead, purgatory, salvation by almsgiving, etc. It was during the Reformation that doctrinal validity was judged against the principle of sola scriptura (Scripture alone). So, by accepting writings in the Apocrypha that mentioned the above practices not found in original Scripture, the Catholic Church could support its theological position and the validity of these doctrines during this tempestuous time.

The Catholic Church uses Baruch 3:9-37 as part of its Holy Saturday liturgy during Passiontide (Easter Season). This portion of the book, which speaks of obtaining and desiring wisdom, concludes with a verse referencing Christ’s living among us. The Eastern Orthodox Church uses Baruch among its Old Testament readings during Christmas Eve services. Some early Christian theologians quoted from Baruch, including Thomas Aquinas, St. Clement of Alexandria, and St. Hilary of Poitiers.

The Bible records that Baruch was Jeremiah’s secretary, who wrote the prophet’s words on a scroll (Jeremiah 36:4). Within the Book of Baruch, the central themes are Israel’s disobedience to God, God exiling Jews to Babylon due to their behavior, God’s just action, the need to repent and honor and obey God’s Word, and begging for God’s mercy. In the first chapter of Baruch, it is stated that Baruch read this book aloud to Judah’s King Jeconiah (Baruch 1:3). Jeconiah is also mentioned in the Old Testament as someone who did “evil in the eyes of the Lord,” as did his father, Jehoiakim (2 Kings 25:8).

1 and 2 Maccabees

First and Second Maccabees were Jewish writings regarding the history of the Jews during the intertestamental period, the portion of time between the Old and New Testaments. They were written in the second century BC (likely date of 1 Maccabees) or first century BC (likely date of 2 Maccabees), probably originally in Hebrew for 1 Maccabees and Greek for 2 Maccabees, though the surviving manuscripts are in Greek.

The two books share some commonalities with parts of Scripture in that they emphasize faithfulness to God under oppression (Daniel 1:8, 3:16-18) and God's provision for His people (Exodus 14; 2 Kings 4:1-7). However, they focus on military deliverance rather than the New Testament message of spiritual deliverance amid worldly oppression (Matthew 5:38-48; Romans 12:17-21). These two books are included in the Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical Books that are accepted by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, but are rejected as Scripture by most Protestant groups since they were not part of the Jewish Old Testament or the New Testament.