

The Ethiopian Bible

Summaries and evaluations taken from GotQuestions.org articles unless otherwise noted.

Prayer of Manasseh

The Prayer of Manasseh is a part of the Apocrypha. It is a short work, containing just 15 verses. It purports to be a prayer by King Manasseh of Judah (697-642 B.C.), but it was pseudonymously written as early as the second century or just before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Second Chronicles 33:19 says that Manasseh prayed but does not record the prayer itself referring the reader to what was “written in the records of the seers.”

King Manasseh, the thirteenth king of Judah, was one of the most wicked and idolatrous kings in biblical history (2 Kings 21:1-18). He was captured by the Assyrians and imprisoned in Babylon. There, he prayed for mercy and repented of his sin of idolatry (2 Chronicles 33:1-19).

The Prayer of Manasseh is considered by Jews, Catholics and Protestants as apocryphal, i.e., non-canonical and of doubtful authenticity. However, the fourth-century Vulgate included it at the end of the book of 2 Chronicles. It later became part of the Matthew Bible and the Geneva Bible of 1599. It is also found in the Apocrypha of the King James Bible.

The prayer departs from Christian teaching in that it says men such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not need to repent because they “did not sin” (verse 8). This runs counter to the clear teaching of Scripture that all have sinned (Romans 3:10-12; Romans 3:21-26). The righteousness of Abraham was a product of his faith in God and was not anything inherent in him (Romans 4:3; Philippians 3:8-9).

In summary, God has told us that Manasseh prayed a much-needed prayer of repentance, but He has not told us the content of that prayer.

Book of Jubilees

The Book of Jubilees, sometimes called the “Lesser Genesis,” “Little Genesis,” or “The Testament of Moses,” is a pseudepigraphal work of Jewish apocalyptic literature. It was probably written in the second century BC, sometime between 135 and 105. The Book of Jubilees records an account of biblical history from the creation of the world to the time of Moses, as delivered to Moses by an angel on Sinai. The book divides history into periods or “jubilees” of 49 years. Generally, the Book of Jubilees follows the account of creation as recorded in the Book of Genesis, but it inserts interesting details such as the names of Adam’s daughters and the creation of angels. Some scholars consider the Book of Jubilees to be an extended midrash on Genesis through the first part of Exodus.

According to the Book of Jubilees, on Mt. Sinai “the angel of the presence spake to Moses according to the word of the Lord, saying: Write the complete history of the creation” (Jubilees 2:1, Charles, R. H., trans., 1902). This angel told Moses that God created various categories of angels on the first day of creation. Great stress is laid on the Sabbath in Jubilees 2:17–32. In chapter 3, Adam and Eve are in Eden for a period of seven years. Then, after “seven years exactly,” the serpent tempted Eve (Jubilees 3:17). It was only after the fall that Adam had sex with his wife (Jubilees 3:34).

Jubilees chapter 4 introduces Noah and his wife (who is named Emzara). Chapter 5 narrates the flood. In chapter 6, after the flood, God says to Noah, “Command thou the children of Israel that they observe the years according to this reckoning—three hundred and sixty-four days, and (these) will constitute a complete year” (Jubilees 6:32). The 364-day solar year (rather than the 360-day lunar year) is one of the main thrusts of the Book of Jubilees. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is the only group today that accepts the Book of Jubilees as canonical. There are several problems with including the Book of Jubilees in the Bible as part of inspired Scripture. Probably the most significant is that the author of Jubilees, in retelling the story of Genesis, changes the biblical record in several respects. In

general, the patriarchs are glorified as holy men who were scrupulous in keeping the law—even the ceremonial aspects—long before Moses climbed Sinai. As portrayed in the Book of Jubilees, Jacob does not lie to his father; Isaac eventually declares Jacob to be his true heir, an elderly Jacob settles on Leah as the wife he loves, and Abram's deceit of Pharaoh is never mentioned. Clearly, these heroes of the faith are handled with kid gloves by the author of Jubilees; in contrast, Scripture presents a candid record of their faults.

Further, the Book of Jubilees adds to the Law of Moses and goes far beyond Scripture in its stress on punishment. For example, if someone eats blood, "he and his seed shall be rooted out of the land" (Jubilees 6:18). A father who gives his daughter in marriage to a Gentile "shall surely die, and they shall stone him with stones . . . and they shall burn the woman with fire" (Jubilees 30:11–12). Adding to the Bible, the Book of Jubilees says that during the Feast of Tabernacles (which Abraham first celebrated) Israel is to "set wreaths upon their heads" and carry branches around the altar seven times each morning (Jubilees 16:39, 41). Also, Jubilees stipulates the type of wood to be used for the fire of the burnt offering (Jubilees 21:16–19).

Baruch 2

This is not from gotquestions.com. This is CJ's research and summary.

2 Baruch portrays Baruch as a prophet in his own right.

2 Baruch 54:15 says: "each of us has been the Adam of his own soul" indicating that sin is not hereditary. We believe Romans 5:12-21 teaches that sin entered the world through one man – Adam – and that sin can be defeated by one Man – Jesus.

Book of Enoch (Enoch 1, 2, and 3)

In its Ethiopic form, the Book of Enoch is arranged in five sections:

Section I (chapters 1—36) has Enoch pronouncing God's judgment on the angels who cohabited with the daughters of men (see Genesis 6:1–4). In this section, two hundred angelic "Watchers" rebel against God and are cast out of heaven along with Satan. On earth, they indulge their lust and have sexual relations with human women, producing the Nephilim, a race of evil giants who terrorize the antediluvian world. Enoch sees a "chaotic and horrible" place and a fiery prison reserved for the angels who sinned (Enoch 21:3, 7).

Section II (chapters 37—71) has three parables relating apocalyptic judgments. It also contains the story of Enoch's translation into heaven (see Genesis 5:24). In this section, Enoch describes the activity of an angel named Gadreel: "He it is who showed the children of men all the blows of death, and he led astray Eve, and showed [the weapons of death to the sons of men] the shield and the coat of mail, and the sword for battle, and all the weapons of death to the children of men. And from his hand they have proceeded against those who dwell on the earth from that day and for evermore" (Enoch 69:6–7, trans. by Charles, R. H., 1917).

Section III (chapters 72—87) is primarily an explanation of the workings of the stars in their pathways, as per a vision that Enoch has.

Section IV (chapters 88—90) contains Enoch's vision of the coming flood and prophecies concerning other events yet future, including the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan, the building of the temple, the fall of the northern kingdom, the destruction of Jerusalem, the final judgment, the building of the New Jerusalem, the resurrection of the saints, and the coming of the Messiah.

Section V (chapters 91—105) pronounces woes on sinners and promises blessings to the righteous. It ends with a promise of peace to the "children of uprightness" (Enoch 105:2).

The biblical book of Jude quotes from chapter 1 of the Book of Enoch in Jude 1:14–15, “Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: ‘See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.’” Jude’s quotation does not mean the Book of Enoch is inspired by God or that it should be in the Bible.

Meqabyan 1, 2, and 3

This is not from gotquestions.com. This is CJ’s research and summary.

First thing to note, these are not the same as the Catholic 1 and 2 Maccabees.

These three books are only accepted in the Ethiopian Bible and are sometimes referred to as the Ethiopic Maccabees.

The criteria for what makes a book "inspired" differs between traditions. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church includes them because they emphasize ancient church tradition and value the spiritual lessons in the texts. They are unique Ethiopian writings (written in the Ge'ez language) that deal specifically with martyrdom, faithfulness to God, and Ethiopian cultural survival.

Books of 1 and 2 Esdras

There are some historical problems with 1 and 2 Esdras. In the narrative of 1 Esdras, the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes incorrectly precedes those of Cyrus the Great (c. 559—529 BC) and Darius I (Darius the Great, 521—486 BC), although some believe this is simply a literary device called “prolepsis” in which a person or event is assigned to an earlier period or represented as if it had already occurred. First Esdras appears in the Septuagint as an expanded book of Ezra, containing four additional chapters. It is an account of King Josiah’s reforms and history of the destruction of the temple in 586 BC and chronicles the Jews’ return from

Babylonian captivity under Zerubbabel. This book was said to be known by Josephus (born AD 38).

Second Esdras was written too late to be included in the Septuagint and, therefore, does not appear within the more prominent canon (Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox). Second Esdras is also known by many other names, making it difficult to track fully. For example, 2 Esdras contains portions known in some circles as 3 Ezra, 4 Ezra, 5 Ezra, and 6 Ezra. The Ethiopian Church considers 4 Ezra to be canonical, whereas the Eastern Armenian Church labels it as 3 Ezra. Further, some scholars believe these books were written by several authors, including some possibly as late as the second century AD.

Second Esdras is often referred to as the Jewish Apocalypse of Ezra and contains seven visions of Ezra dealing with his angst over the pain and suffering inflicted upon Jews by Gentiles. Some scholars believe the book was written shortly after the AD 70 destruction of the temple in Jerusalem during the reign of Emperor Domitian (AD 81—96). While there is a definite tone of sadness in this work, there is consolation regarding ultimate retribution. There are six Messianic references within 2 Esdras.

Psalm 151

The traditional Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible contain 150 psalms. However, some versions of the Bible, such as the one used by the Greek Orthodox Church, contain Psalm 151.

Psalm 151 is not considered canonical in either Protestantism or Catholicism and is not included in most Protestant or Catholic Bible translations. The psalm purports to have been written by David and speaks of his selection by God as the new king of Israel and of David's victory over the Philistine giant, Goliath. Psalm 151 is quite autobiographical, giving details of David's life such as his flute-playing and harp-making; his anointing by Samuel, who bypassed his brothers, "handsome in form and appearance: / Their stature tall, / their hair beautiful" (Psalm 151:5–6, CEV); and his beheading of Goliath.

The Letter of Jeremiah

Although the document is called the Letter of Jeremiah, it is neither a letter, nor is it from Jeremiah. The date of writing places it nearly 300 years after Jeremiah's call to prophesy. The text is largely made up of denouncements of idolatry. It begins with a warning to the exiles of the idolatry they would see in Babylon, which is followed by a series of colorful descriptions about how ineffectual and helpless idols are. It concludes with a final warning and exhortation to avoid idolatry. Like all apocryphal books, this one cannot be considered the inspired Word of God. However, this does not mean that it is a bad book; much of the material in the book is both true and helpful. It may have good advice, even godly advice, but it cannot be considered inerrant.

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (or Three Holy Children)

The Prayer of Azariah is an apocryphal insertion of 22 verses into the biblical book of Daniel in the Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament). The Prayer of Azariah was later included in the Latin Vulgate and as a result is today considered part of the biblical canon for the Roman Catholic Church.

The Prayer of Azariah is an expansion on Daniel 3 at the point where Daniel's three friends refuse to bow down to the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar and are thrown into the fiery furnace. The three friends are most commonly known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, names they were given in Babylon. However, their Hebrew names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Thus, Azariah is Abednego, one of the three who was thrown into the fiery furnace.

The Prayer of Azariah is inserted between Daniel 3:23 and 24 and records words supposedly spoken by Azariah while he and his two friends are in the fiery furnace.

Following the Prayer of Azariah in Catholic editions is another apocryphal addition called the Song of the Three Young Men, which is a hymn of praise to God. The Prayer of Azariah is a lament and a plea that God will forgive the nation of Israel for forsaking Him. The prayer for deliverance is for the nation rather than for Azariah and his friends. There is nothing unorthodox about the content of the prayer or the song that follows. The only reason that it is rejected by evangelical scholars is that they do not think it is an original part of the book of Daniel. There are no Hebrew manuscripts that contain the prayer, and Bruce Metzger, an expert on Greek and textual criticism, has found evidence that the Prayer of Azariah was originally composed in Greek, which would mean it is a later addition (see Bruce M. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, Oxford University Press, 1977).

Susanna

The Book of Susanna (also known as History of Susannah and the Elders) is part of what is considered the Apocrypha / Deuterocanonical books and appears in the Old Testament of Catholic Bibles. The books of the Apocrypha were generally written in the roughly 400 years between the composition of the books in the Old and New Testaments, the intertestamental period. Susanna is one of 12-15 books generally recognized as comprising the Apocrypha.

Susanna is among the additions to the book of Daniel (as are Bel and the Dragon, The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews) and was most likely composed between 200–100 B.C. The Book of Daniel, written by the prophet Daniel himself (12:4) in the sixth century B.C., is placed in different locations of the Bible depending on the culture: the Jews place it among the Writings, dismissing its prophecies, while the English translations place it among the Major Prophets.

The Book of Susanna is most commonly placed before the events of Daniel 1 (Theodotion tradition); however, the Septuagint and Vulgate editions position it between Daniel 12 and 14. Susanna's strongest literary influences are the Old Testament books of Genesis, Leviticus and

Deuteronomy, though, ironically, it is not dependent on Daniel itself. Though the early church originally considered it canonical, debate erupted to whether it should be excluded as early as the third century, as attested in the Letter to Africanus, a detailed correspondence between Africanus and Origen.

Bel and the Dragon

Bel and the Dragon is one of several additions to the book of Daniel. The original book of Daniel ends after chapter twelve. The extra material is found only in translations, such as the Septuagint, but not in the Masoretic Text. Bel and the Dragon is a later addition most likely derived from various legends and folk stories about Daniel. This non-canonical material includes chapter 13, known as the “Song of the Three Children”; chapter 14, known as “Susanna”; and chapter 15, known as “Bel and the Dragon.” The fifteenth chapter is a single narrative in three parts.

According to the text of Bel and the Dragon, Daniel is honored above all others by the new Persian king, Cyrus. The king asks Daniel why he does not worship the statue of Bel, to which the people have been offering great quantities of food every day. Daniel replies that he does not worship false gods made with human hands but only the living God. Cyrus claims that Bel is a living god, since all of the food offered to him disappears each night—eaten, he claims, by the idol. Daniel repeats his belief that his God is superior to Bel.

In a rage, Cyrus pits the Persian priests against Daniel. If they cannot prove that Bel eats the food, they will be executed. If Daniel cannot prove someone else is eating it, he will be executed. The priests ask the king to place the food himself and then seal the room with his own signet. Without telling the priests, however, Daniel spreads ashes in the idol’s chamber, as the king watches. The idol and food are then sealed in the room overnight.

The next morning, the king breaks the seal and sees that the food has been eaten. He begins to praise Bel when Daniel points out the evidence in the ashes. There are footprints of men, women, and children leading to a

secret door in the wall. The seventy priests and their families have been sneaking in nightly to eat the idol's offerings. Cyrus is furious and orders the priests, their wives, and their children killed. He gives the idol of Bel to Daniel to be destroyed.

The second part of Bel and the Dragon involves an actual living dragon, which Cyrus again tells Daniel to worship. Since the dragon is flesh and blood, Cyrus claims, it is superior to Bel and should be honored. Daniel again claims to worship only God and says he can kill this dragon without weapons. The king agrees to Daniel's demonstration, and Daniel poisons the dragon with a mixture of tar, hair, and ashes. This causes the dragon to burst open, proving it to be an inferior creature and not a god to be worshiped.

The final part of Bel and the Dragon is a re-telling of Daniel's experience in the lions' den. Angry that Daniel destroyed the idol Bel and the living dragon, the people of Persia demand Daniel be handed over to them. King Cyrus is afraid of a revolution, so he agrees. Daniel is thrown into a den with seven lions for six days. These lions were typically fed two human corpses and two sheep every day, but, to make them more ferocious for Daniel, they are starved.

According to the story, God provides for Daniel through the prophet Habakkuk. God does this by sending an angel to carry Habakkuk from Judea, by his hair, and holding him over the den so he can drop food to Daniel. On the seventh day, Cyrus sees that Daniel is alive and well. He orders the ringleaders of the people thrown into the lions' den instead, and they are immediately devoured.

The book of Daniel is inspired, but Bel and the Dragon, as an addition to the inspired text, is not considered part of the biblical canon. It is included in some apocryphal Bibles and in Catholic versions of the text.