
Apocrypha

D&C 91: Introduction

The word *Apocrypha* means “of doubtful or questionable origin.” It also means “hidden, obscure, and esoteric.” “The Apocrypha” is used to describe “fourteen books which were part of early Greek and Latin versions of the Bible but were not part of the Hebrew Bible.”¹ In the original 1611 King James Version of the Bible, the Apocrypha books were positioned between the Old and New Testaments. The Apocrypha was part of the King James Version of the Bible for 274 years. It was removed in 1885.

The books of the Apocrypha are said to be a history of the Hebrews from Old Testament times to New Testament times. They were written from 200 BC to AD 400. Fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls contain parts of the Apocrypha books in Hebrew.

Although the names of the Apocrypha books vary, most scholars agree that the books were named 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees.

The King James Bible that Joseph Smith was using as he was “engaged in the translation of the Old Testament” included the Apocrypha (D&C 91: Introduction). Joseph inquired of the Lord about the Apocrypha and received this revelation on March 9, 1833, in Kirtland, Ohio.

In the revelation, the Lord told Joseph, “There are many things contained therein that are true, and it is mostly translated correctly” (D&C 91:1). The Lord also told Joseph, “There are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations by the hands of men,” meaning some of the writings and word phrases are not found in the original

¹ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1958), 41.

manuscripts (v. 2). He was further told that it was not needful that the Apocrypha should be translated (v. 3). Joseph Smith did not translate the Apocrypha books.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had this to say about Joseph Smith and the Apocrypha:

In 1833, while engaged in revising the King James Version by the spirit of revelation, the Prophet felt impelled to inquire of the Lord as to the authenticity of the Apocrypha. From the answer it is clear that the books of the Apocrypha were inspired writings in the first instance, but that subsequent interpolations and changes had perverted and twisted their original contexts so as to leave them with doubtful value.²

Elder McConkie reasoned, “To gain any real value from a study of apocryphal writings, the student must first have an extended background of gospel knowledge, a comprehensive understanding of the standard works of the Church, plus the guidance of the Spirit.”³

² McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 41.

³ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 41–42.