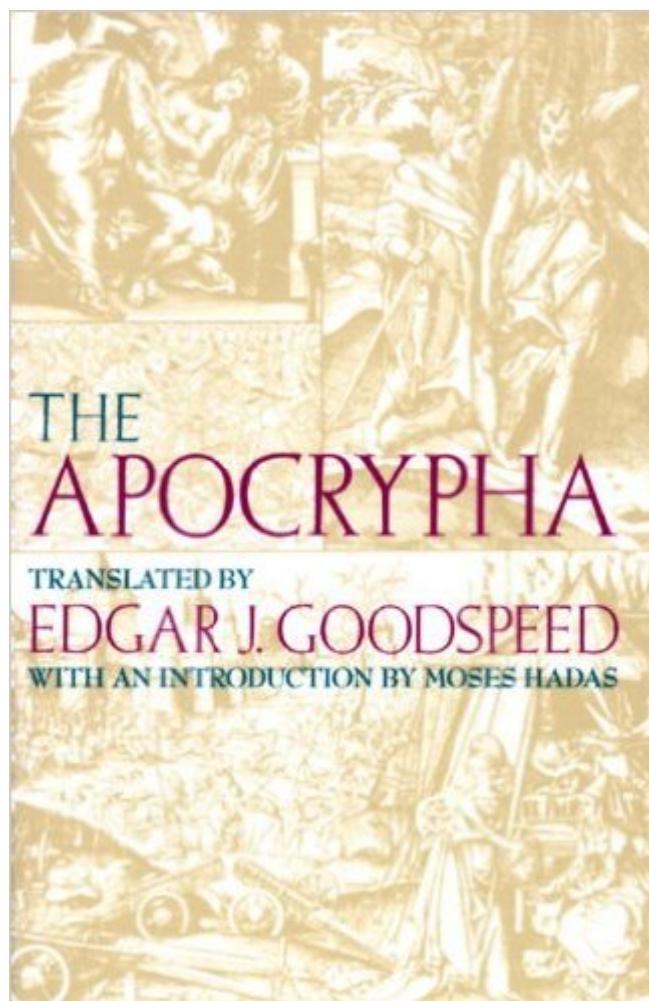


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The Apocrypha



Synopsis

The Apocrypha consists of the books that are found in the Greek version of the Jewish Bible--the Septuagint, the earliest complete version of the Bible we possess--but that were not included in the final, canonical version of the Hebrew Bible. For this reason, they were called "Apocrypha," the hidden or secret books, and while they formed part of the original King James version of 1611, they are no longer included in modern Bibles. Yet they include such important works as The First Book of Maccabees, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, and the stories of Susanna, Tobit, and Judith, and other works of great importance for the history of the Jews in the period between the rebuilding of the Temple and the time of Jesus, and thus for the background of the New Testament. These works have also had a remarkable impact on writers and artists. Beyond this, they are often as powerful as anything in the canonical Bible. The translation into contemporary English is by Edgar J. Goodspeed.

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Customer Reviews

The book is a translation of the Apocrypha. It is a nice beginning into the study of early Christian texts. Its only flaw was that I thought it could have used a little more introduction into the work itself and its history. It isn't set up in chapter and verse like the KJV or other Bible translations so it may seem a little bit unfamiliar, but don't let that deter you as a reader.

The current Vintage edition is just called "The Apocrypha," but the original cover title was "The

Apocrypha: An American Translation," and also uses that for listing some editions. The longer title may have seemed equally simple, but it concealed a story; indeed a set of stories. Edgar J. Goodspeed (1871-1962) was a Baptist minister, and a classical scholar at the University of Chicago (he had published on Greek papyri), and by the 1920s was a well-known popularizer of critical New Testament historical and textual studies for middle class (and, many felt, middle-brow) American readers. Due to his criticisms of the existing translations, including the recent R.F. Weymouth (1903) and James Moffatt (1913) New Testaments, he was recruited for the Chicago University Press's "American Bible" project of the 1920s and 1930s, with J.M. Powis Smith as primary co-editor for the Hebrew side. The idea seems to have been to break away from the British-dominated scholarship and language of the past, and offer a Bible to a fast-growing part of the American public that wanted to be informed, or at least edified, in its own grammar and vocabulary. (The then-recent American Standard Version was just a modification of the British Revised Version of the 1880s; and deliberately archaic, in fact more so than the King James Version in places!) The sponsoring institution was to be not only academic but secular -- although in practice "secular" apparently still meant non-sectarian, in the sense of "generic Protestant." (So a Baptist like Goodspeed might be joining with Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Methodists.) Goodspeed was responsible for both the 1923 "New Testament," the first part to appear, and for the final, 1938 volume, "The Apocrypha" -- that is, for the translations from Greek originals. J.M.P. Smith, A.R. Gordon, T.J. Meek, and L. Waterman took responsibility for the larger Hebrew (and Aramaic) part of the canon, which appeared between them. So the "American Translation" (or, as some called it, "The Chicago Bible") was intended to present a plain-English rendering based on the most advanced textual and linguistic scholarship of the day, for the use of ordinary educated readers. It did not offer elaborate study aids, or theological instruction; and the tone was Christian, and Protestant, but non-denominational. It competed for a time with Moffatt's "A New Translation of The Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments" (1922-1935, 1948), before the Revised Standard Version (RSV) debuted, to great controversy, but ultimate acceptance, in the 1950s. (Some of those whose predecessors denounced the RSV as "Communist" now regard it as almost a last bastion of True Religion....) The whole project seems to have slipped into relative obscurity thereafter; without the backing of a denomination whose views it embodied, or the interdenominational standing of the RSV, it may have had trouble finding a steady market. And the up-to-date language may have jarred for those who had never considered that the Bible wasn't really composed in late Elizabethan English; although three quarters of a century later, with modern-language versions abounding, this is probably not so glaring. And it was (and apparently is) a target of Fundamentalist-minded

"literalists," over its more accurate renderings of the ancient languages (like "young girl" for "virgin") and following of better manuscript traditions (e.g., without a recognized insertion of "Father and Son and Holy Ghost"), construed as rejections of Biblical Truth. There are in fact some problems with the translation, but they lie elsewhere than refusing to perpetuate invalid proof-texts. (These "radical" innovations were in fact flashpoints for the RSV as well; and still give rise to complaints, although there does seem a wider awareness that the "changes" from the KJV are based on real issues, rather than deliberate heresy.) Some other the features of the "American Translation" have become comparatively commonplace. The relatively obscure Apocrypha don't provide, I think, an obvious example. However, Smith et al. may have been the first to use "When God began to create" in Genesis 1:1 in a widely-read English translation, instead of the KJV's "In the beginning, God created." This was not, as sometimes still alleged, because they wanted to follow the (pagan) Babylonian "Enuma Elish" ("When on high"), but because such cuneiform texts had provided new support for a traditional Jewish understanding of the Hebrew, as against the Greek rendering which had been followed by Jerome and later translators. The Hebrew grammar of the verse is very difficult, despite the seemingly unanimous reiterations of precedent in older Christian versions -- The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) offers three versions of the opening words!(From an outsider's perspective, it is a little amusing to see some self-described zealous Protestants insisting on following Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions; "by Scripture alone" seems to have its limits.) As suggested above, the "American Translation" is one of the ancestors of the many "modern language" and "dynamic equivalent" Bible translations which now crowd the bookstore shelves, unlike the more formal-sounding Revised Standard and New Revised Standard Versions, and various more orthodoxy-affirming re-workings of the King James Version (KJV). Still, the 1939 complete edition, as well as its 1927 Old Testament volume, and the 1923 New Testament, all seem to have dropped out of publishers' catalogues long ago. So did the useful "The Goodspeed Parallel New Testament: The American Translation and The King James Version in parallel columns, with introductions and explanatory notes" (1943). But the 1938 "The Apocrypha" was picked up by Knopf and Random House in 1959, reprinted in a mass-market paperback under the Vintage imprint, and later reissued in the present trade edition. In these forms it has an introduction by Moses Hadas; then well-known to the well-educated reading public as classical scholar, but also, as it happens, a Rabbi. Which does add an ecumenical tone to the volume. For those not familiar with the term in this usage, "Apocrypha," meaning "Hidden Writings," was used by St. Jerome to describe books whose presumed Hebrew originals could not be found when he set out to provide a new translation into Latin, now known as the Vulgate. Where there was a major discrepancy between the Greek and

Hebrew of two other books, Daniel and Esther, he based the translation on the Hebrew, but added the "supplements" as appendices, out of their narrative order. These books and parts of books were accepted as canonical by some Protestants, but others began using the term "Apocrypha" to dismiss them as unreliable -- the current colloquial meaning. They became a source of inter-Protestant as well as Protestant-Catholic conflict; and to add to the confusion, in the Counter-Reformation the Catholic Church treated some as edifying but non-authoritative, while the majority are regarded as Deuterocanonical (Second Canon). In a more technical meaning, the term now covers a portion of what Christian scholars (not Jewish) often refer to "Inter-Testamental Literature" -- much of the rest is conveniently classed as "Pseudepigraphy," falsely-ascribed writing, which includes works of much later date. So these Apocrypha are mainly works found in the Greek translation of the Bible, the Septuagint, for which no Hebrew or Aramaic original is (or, in recent years, was) available, plus others which probably never existed except in Greek. Most of these are considered simply canonical by the Greek Orthodox Church; a few are debated or rejected, but sometimes included in Orthodox Canons; others have been accepted at times only by the Catholic Church among Western Christians. (See below for a list.) The genres of the books are various, including: prophetic exhortation (Baruch) history (First Maccabees) and history retold in Hellenistic style (Second Maccabees, First Esdras); Wisdom in Old Testament style, slightly Hellenized (Ecclesiasticus) and a more fully Hellenized variant (Wisdom, otherwise "Wisdom of Solomon"); and pious romance (Tobit) and patriotic adventure (Judith). There are reasons for this persistence of the Goodspeed translation of these works in print. True, most (although not quite all) of these works are included in all Catholic Bibles. They form a section by themselves in many Protestant and Ecumenical editions. But other editions, even of the same translations, exclude them. (A common radical Protestant practice, it was particularly common in the United States due in part to the ubiquitous Gideon Bibles, which ignored their very existence.) The Revised Standard Version originally omitted them, although the lack was soon supplied; and the current New Revised Standard Version is available with and without them, as was the case with the New English Bible (now the Revised English Bible). So there are still many Bible-owners who find themselves without a copy that includes the Apocrypha, and are curious about their contents. Goodspeed has long been an inexpensive alternative to buying an almost-duplicate volume, and by far the most readily available stand-alone version as well. (At times it has competed with single-volume editions of the KJV translation of these works; which has been out of copyright for a long time!) And, of course, Jewish Bibles never include these books, so Goodspeed's version, relatively free of obvious and obtrusive Christian interpretations, and endorsed by Hadas, offered a useful source for Jewish

readers. (Some of these books have in fact had specifically Jewish translations and commentaries in modern times; and Jewish scholarship is represented in elaborate translations-with-commentaries in the Anchor Bible series, and elsewhere in studies and translations of pseudepigrapha -- some by Moses Hadas, as it happens.) For those left largely uninformed by the view of the Table of Contents offered by , Goodspeed's translation offers these books and portions of books, in the following order; with their status and some alternate titles in Roman Catholic (RC), Greek Orthodox (G), and Russian Orthodox (Slavonic Bible, S) canons indicated:

The First Book of Esdras (Greek retelling of Ezra and Nehemiah; 2 Esdras in Slavonic Bible; RC 3 Esdras, currently in a Vulgate Appendix)

The Second Book of Esdras (Ezra Apocalypse) (Greek; 3 Esdras in Slavonic; RC 4 Esdras, in Vulgate Appendix)

The Book of Tobit (RC, G, S)

The Book of Judith (RC, G, S)

The Additions to the Book of Esther (from Greek Esther) (RC, G, S)

The Wisdom of Solomon (RC, G, S)

Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of [Jesus son of] Sirach (Ben Sira) (RC, G, S)

The Book of Baruch (and The Letter of Jeremiah) (RC, G, S)

The Story of Susanna (from Greek Daniel) (RC, G, S)

The Song of the Three Children (from Greek Daniel) (RC, G, S)

The Story of Bel and the Dragon (from Greek Daniel) (RC, G, S)

The Prayer of Manasseh (G, S; RC in Vulgate Appendix)

The First Book of Maccabees (RC, G, S)

The Second Book of Maccabees (RC, G, S)

Goodspeed's translation does not include the following, which are included the Apocrypha of the New Revised Standard Version, and in some late editions of the Revised Standard Version before it:

Psalm 151 (Greek, Slavonic)

3 Maccabees (Greek, Slavonic)

4 Maccabees (Appendix to Greek)

The translation of "Second Esdras" here is particularly problematic, for serious study, because this visionary apocalyptic work about the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the end of the world has a confusing textual tradition, and Goodspeed did not offer a selection of alternate readings, or interpretive helps. (He did base it on the still-standard edition of the Latin version.) "Tobit" and "Ecclesiasticus" have both had their textual traditions enriched by Hebrew and Aramaic fragments from Qumran, and, in the latter case, Masada and medieval Egypt as well. (In fact two-thirds of the long-lost Hebrew for the latter has been recovered in some form, enormously complicating the translator's task.) So Goodspeed's base texts for these are seriously antiquated from a critical standpoint.

Finally, the NRSV has set a good precedent by translating the whole of the Greek versions of Daniel and Esther, with the "additions" restored to their proper places, instead of leaving them floating without context, in the manner of St. Jerome. Goodspeed remains what it has long been; a very readable and very convenient introduction to these books and fragments of books. Its age and format (with an aging Introduction and only the barest of introductory head-notes by way of commentary) mean that the interested reader will probably want to turn to other resources later. The full editions of the "HarperCollins

Study Bible" and "The New Oxford Annotated Bible" might be good starts; and include works Goodspeed excluded. And, for most of the books translated by Goodspeed, the Catholic "New Jerusalem Bible" has, in its full Study edition, excellent textual and interpretive notes as well. The "Esdras" texts are not included in it; but "The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha" collection edited by James H. Charlesworth (Volume I, 1983) includes an exceptionally elaborate treatment of the second of them as "The Fourth Book of Ezra." It there appears along with "The Greek Apocalypse of Ezra," "Questions of Ezra," "Revelations of Ezra," "Visions of Ezra," and "The Apocalypse of Sedrach," a complex of seemingly dependent works of clearly later date, which should not be confused with what Goodspeed meant by "The Apocrypha."

I had always wanted to delve into the Apocrypha but had never had the time. This book was perfect. Here are its advantages:(1) There was none of the faux-pretentious King James-style English. Not that the KJV is bad, it was fine for 1611, but why have 17th century-sounding English in the 21st century if you don't need to?(2) very good intro that explains the origin of the Apocrypha and the history of its various books. In a short space the author tells everything an interested amateur like me needs to know.(3) very reasonable price for the book, which was appreciated. As for the Apocrypha itself, it renewed my interest in bible study. I found the Maccabees to be invaluable to my understanding of the progressive combination of political-religious leadership, which provided a good bridge to understanding the political order found in the New Testament. The stories of Daniel were interesting in and of themselves. And there were nuggets of wisdom such as "where man ends, God begins" that were exceptionally thought-provoking, at least to me. Highly, highly recommended.

I have read through Goodspeed's translation, and I thought it was understandable and quite the interesting read. Everyone who values their Bibles ought to see for him or herself what the Apocrypha really says. Of course, none of these books are in the Protestant's canon, not even in the Jewish canon for that matter, but the stories are still fascinating and include important history for several hundred years before and after Christ. Well worth the price for those who are curious.

Edgar Goodspeed's translation of the Apocrypha is easy to read. These books were canonised at some point in history but later they were removed. The Apocrypha is not the same as "apocryphal" books that are of a dubious nature. The Introduction is very informational and the Preface was also helpful. Of the 14 books in this translation I appreciate the following books the most: *1st and 2nd

Maccabees are Jewish history books covering the Maccabean revolt. They are written by two authors and overlapping in time. The date for these books is around 312 B.C.*II Esdras is an apocalyptic book that has wisdom for everyday life. It also has Messianic prophecies and angelic visions. This book apparently has additions making it difficult to date. An example: 6:49 "Then you preserved two living creatures; one you named Behemoth; and the other you named Leviathan..."*The Wisdom of Sirach(Ecclesiasticus) is similar to Proverbs. Date is 180 B.C according to Mr. Goodspeed. A passage-8:7 "Do not exult over a man who is dead; Remember that we are all going to die."*The Wisdom of Solomon is another book similar to Proverbs. This book is dated roughly the first century B.C. An Example- 2:5 "For life is a fleeting shadow, And there is no way to recall our end, For it is sealed up and no one can bring it back." I recommend this book for extra-biblical and historical study.

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