

What Christians Believe About...

The Bible - part 4

The Apocrypha and Gnosticism

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(Presentation Notes)

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This section is the final part of a four-part treatment of the subject of the Bible.

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The Bible - part 4

The Apocrypha

▶ [Carrying a Bible with Romans 15:4]

Use this slide to prepare the atmosphere for your presentation. It will gather attention and focus the group on the topic.

▶ [The Apocrypha]

WHAT IS THE APOCRYPHA?

▶ [Hidden writings]

The term apocrypha refers to any collection of writings that falls outside the canon [For an explanation of what the Canon of Scripture is, and how it was arrived at, see The Bible Part 3. Details of how this and other section in this series may be downloaded are in the introductory notes.]

The word apocrypha comes from the Greek : “to be hidden away”.

▶ [...rejected because of doubtful teachings]

“Apocrypha” was also applied to writings that were rejected by the church, because of their doubtful, even heretical teaching.

Some branches of the Christian church accepted the books and included them in their version of the Bible. But other branches of the church rejected them.

If the Bible were a library with shelves, “Bible Library” of those who accept the Apocrypha would contain a small bookcase between the Old Testament and the New testament.

▶ [Old Testament bookcase]

The Old testament ...

▶ [written over 1100 years]

...took 1100 years to be written.

▶ [New testament bookcase]

The New testament...

▶ [written over 60 years]

...was written over 60 years or so.

There was a space between these two testaments...

▶ [About 400 years] ...of about 400 years

▶ [Apocrypha bookcase] During this inter-testamental (“between the testaments”) period, the books of the **BIBLICAL APOCRYPHA** were written.

▶ **WHY ARE THESE BOOKS NOT INCLUDED IN THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE?**

▶ **TITLE: Apocrypha not accepted**

The bottom line is that they are not inspired by God. We know this for the following reasons:

▶ [No claim to inspiration]

1. **None of the writers claims to be inspired by God.**

The apocryphal books themselves make reference to what we call the “Silent” 400 years, when there was no prophet of God to write inspired materials. So the writers of these apocryphal books stated themselves that they were writing at a time when there was no direct revelation from God.

▶ [Unaccepted by the Jews]

2. **The New Testament Jews** never included them in any Jewish collection of Scriptures. Firstly, because the Apocryphal books were written in Greek, and not in the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

But secondly, because they **didn't regard these books as divinely inspired**. Later, the Jewish historian Josephus expressed this view, which was common at the time of Jesus.

▶ **[Poor literary style]**

3. **The literary style of the Apocrypha** is regarded by scholars as being very different from the style of the Biblical Hebrew Old Testament writings. Experts say that the language is stiff and the lacks originality and beauty associated with the Old Testament books.

▶ **[Never validated by Christ]**

4. **Unlike the Old Testament, the Apocrypha was never validated or quoted by Christ.**

▶ **[Filled with error]**

5. **The Apocrypha contains a great variety of errors - historical, geographical, chronological, and moral.** For instance:

- ▶ These books describe Jeremiah and Baruch as being in Babylon when the Bible says they were in Egypt.
- ▶ They give one man, Tobit, a life span of 158 years, but place him at events 210 years apart.
- ▶ They teach that suicide is a noble and manful act
- ▶ They teach that magic potions can drive away demons

▶ **[Unbiblical teaching]**

6. **The Apocrypha promotes doctrines which contradicts the Bible, such as:**

- ▶ prayers of the living can bring salvation for the dead
- ▶ giving to the needy can atone for sin
- ▶ humans can reach a stage of sinless perfection
- ▶ women are less than men and should be dominated by men

We can only thank God for the wise and Spirit-filled early churchmen, who were guided to preserve the truth and keep it free from error. Like them, Paul says we need to “Test everything. Hold on to the good”(1 Thessalonians 5:21)

▶ **[Hold fast-Title]**

▶ **[hand gripping rope]** We need to be like mountaineers, and hold tight to the Word of God as we climb spiritually.

▶ **[baby grips father's hand]** We can also be like a tiny baby holding on to its father's hand. That physical contact is a comfort to the baby and brings such joy to the father. In the same way, we can have a contact with our Heavenly Father through holding tight to the true Word of God and meeting him there.

▶ **[Bible quote from *The Message*]** *The Message* Bible's interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 5:21 cautions us: “Don't be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what's good. Throw out anything tainted with evil.”

▶ **[Blue Background Title: The APOCRYPHA]**

The term “apocrypha” does not only mean those books which are between the Old and New Testaments.

there is another group of books, written AFTER the New Testament was completed.

▶ They are called The Gnostic GOSPELS or sometimes the *New Testament Apocrypha*.

▶ The word Gnostic comes from the Greek *gnosis*, which means knowledge.

The gnostics wanted to keep their “knowledge” to themselves.

▶ We said earlier that “apocrypha” means hidden. The gnostics wanted to keep their teachings secret for several reasons.

▶ **[Gnostics said]** They said that the knowledge they had was ...

- too deep and mystical to make it widely available
- too hard for ordinary people to understand
- too sacred to be given just to anybody other than those specially initiated into the mysteries contained in the books.

▶ By the end of the first century of Christianity, two main divisions had developed.

▶ Firstly, there were the **apostolic Christians**. These were true Christians who followed the teachings of Christ and the apostles.

▶ Secondly there were the **Gnostics**.

▶ [arrow and text] The apostolic Christians accepted as divinely inspired the books we now have in the Bible.

The Gnostics held a totally different view of the Bible, of Jesus Christ, of salvation, and of virtually every other major Christian doctrine.

▶ [arrow and text] However, they did not have any writings by apostles to give legitimacy to their beliefs.

▶ [Pic of Old Gnostic gospel] So they wrote the Gnostic gospels. The Gnostics fraudulently attached the names of famous Christians to their writings, such as “the gospel of Thomas”, “the gospel of Philip”, “the gospel of Mary”, etc.

All these books and other gnostic volumes are generally referred to as the ***New Testament Apocrypha***.

▶ ***These books were totally rejected by the early church and have continued to be rejected by Bible-believing Christians, because the Gnostic gospels contradict the Bible with their false teachings.***

▶ GNOSTICISM TODAY

▶ Similar to New Age

Gnosticism has a lot of appeal for many today. It links strongly with New Age teachings which have abounded. Both New Age teachings and Gnosticism are based on an approach to “truth” which is mystical and based on your own thoughts and feelings— certainly not on any authority outside themselves. So they rebel against God.

▶ Becoming more popular

One apocryphal book is the *Gospel of Thomas*, which is becoming popular again as there is a rise in the heresy of Gnosticism. The *Gospel of Judas*, a Gnostic gospel, also received much media attention when it was reconstructed in 2006.

▶ Famous “easy-to-read” supporters

Several famous writers have recently taken up the cause of Gnosticism.

▶ Dan Brown, in his novel *The da Vinci Code*, put into print what he believes. Among other gnostic heresies, this book speaks about Mary Magdalene marrying Jesus Christ.

▶ Elaine Pagels, a professor of religion who specialises in studies of the Gnostics, has written several popular books which attempt to destroy the beliefs of orthodox Christians. Her easy-to-read style and persuasive arguments have made her very popular among non-specialists and academics alike.

▶ We are with Paul on this one. Speaking to Timothy and warning him against the gnostic heresies he said:

“By making such profession some have erred (missed the mark) as regards the faith.”
(1Tim 6:20)

▶ WHAT IS GNOSTICISM?

Briefly, here is what gnosticism teaches:

▶ **Gnostics say that: The physical world—anything that is material—is evil and should be shunned.**

The Bible contradicts this and says that when God made the material world he declared that all his creation was good (Gen. 1:31)

▶ **Gnostics say that: The God of the Bible is a lower, imperfect god, who should never have come into being and is the cause of all evil**

The Bible contradicts this. God is perfect and good. Evil and sin came into the world through rebellion against God (Gen. 3)

▶ **Gnostics say that: The Absolute Supreme Being is unknowable**

The Bible contradicts this. Jesus said that when we know him, we can know God (John 14:9). Solomon was encouraged to know God more intimately. (1 Chron. 28:9)

▶ **Gnostics say that: Jesus could not be God in flesh, because all physical matter is evil.**

The Bible contradicts this, referring to Christ: God was manifest in the flesh, preached on...believed on and received into glory"1 Tim. 3:16).

▶ **Gnostics say that: Salvation (escape from the material world) is achieved through intellectual, mystical knowledge ("gnosis").**

The Bible says: Salvation is only through faith in the redemptive work of Christ (Acts 4:12)

▶ **Gnostics say that: Jesus is a mystic who revealed truth to only a few who were deep enough to understand.**

The Bible says: Jesus is the Redeemer for all (John 3:16).

▶ **[Jesus died for all] We believe that salvation is not just for a special few, initiated into some mystical knowledge. Salvation through Christ is for everyone who repents and puts their trust in him!**

Gnostics were active during the New Testament period.

Paul spoke in 1 Tim 6:20 against the heresy:

▶ **[Quote - "O Timothy.."]**

"O Timothy, guard and keep the deposit entrusted [to you]! Turn away from...the subtleties and the contradictions in what is falsely called knowledge and spiritual illumination."

The Greek words for knowledge and illumination used here by Paul were ones the Gnostics had taken from Christian doctrine and twisted to suit their own beliefs.

Gnostics were active in NT times and they are active today.

▶ **[Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet]**

We, too, need to guard God's Word, in that we should treasure and act upon what God is saying to us personally, through His Word and not let the devil rob us of any blessing, or lose any benefit by being lack-a-daisical about the Word of God.

This is how we know the truth and stay free from error.

▶ **[the Spirit of Truth...]**

If we read the Bible regularly, and trust the Holy Spirit to teach us, we need not be afraid of falling into error. God will guide us into all truth.

▶ **[Fade to black]**