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## An Inviting Exploration

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## AN INVITING EXPLORATION

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David Calabro

**Abstract:** *This informative and very readable volume, targeted to a Latter-day Saint audience, serves as an introduction to the Apocrypha and an exploration of Latter-day Saint views of the books. Even those already familiar with the Apocrypha will find this book insightful in the Latter-day Saint approaches it brings to bear. Even so, the book touches too lightly on some issues, including the extent of the Apocrypha, the phenomenon of pseudonymity, and the reasons for the current exclusion of the Apocrypha from the Latter-day Saint canon.*

Review of Jared W. Ludlow, *Exploring the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint Perspective* (Springville, Utah: CFI, 2018). 234 pp. \$16.99.

Latter-day Saints have a unique relationship to the books that comprise the Apocrypha, a body of religious texts that includes the books of Esdras, Judith, Tobit, Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, and additions to some of the canonical books of the Old Testament. These texts are regarded as scripture by Catholic and Orthodox communities but are excluded from the Jewish and Protestant canons. On one hand, as with the two latter communities, the LDS Standard Works do not include these other texts. On the other hand, however, our belief in revealed ancient scripture outside the traditional canon suggests that we should approach the Apocrypha with special interest and insight. The Lord himself states that those who study the Apocrypha while enlightened by the Spirit “shall obtain benefit therefrom” (D&C 91:4–5). Yet, for the most part, Latter-day Saints have not availed themselves of the benefit of which the Lord speaks. Jared Ludlow, professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, takes a significant step toward

rectifying this situation through his book *Exploring the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint Perspective*.

The purposes of this book, as explained in the preface, are to introduce the Apocrypha to Latter-day Saints and to explain “the role it can play in our own spiritual lives” (x). The organization of the book addresses this dual purpose. Two introductory chapters describe the Apocrypha in general terms (Chapter 1, “Apocrypha: What Is It and Where Did It Come From?”) and recount the history of its reception among Latter-day Saints (Chapter 2, “Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saint Use of the Apocrypha”). Twelve subsequent chapters address each book of the Apocrypha in turn. Each chapter describes the historical background and contents of the book and then, in a “Conclusion” section, evaluates its potential doctrinal significance for Latter-day Saints. Most of the chapters cover narrative books, so the description includes a summary of the narrative; however, in the last two chapters, which cover Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus, Ludlow groups the sayings into categories and summarizes them by topic.

To my mind, the three adjectives that best describe this book are *informative*, *concise*, and *readable*. The book is impressively learned, but the lay reader will be grateful that the erudition underlying the arguments, rather than cluttering the main text, is in large part relegated to the notes at the end of each chapter. The book is designed to motivate readers to read the Apocrypha for themselves, and Ludlow successfully navigates the fine line between too much and too little description.

Latter-day Saints will find many interesting gems in this book. For example, Ludlow highlights the messianic prophecies in 2 Esdras (see pages 84, 88, 89), and he discusses Esther, Susanna, and Judith in terms of their potential as role models for women believers (see pages 40–41, 52, 57, 141–42). Even those already familiar with the Apocrypha will find this book stimulating in the way it presents the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint perspective. For instance, I found Ludlow’s discussion of Jewish and Latter-day Saint responses to persecution, in the conclusion to the section on 1 Maccabees (163–65), especially thought-provoking.

In my reading of *Exploring the Apocrypha*, I noted a few points I wished were explored in more depth. One of these is the fluid boundary around the corpus of books that we call the Apocrypha. Ludlow touches lightly on this issue in parts of his discussion in Chapter 1. For instance, he mentions that the apocryphal books included in the earliest complete Greek Bible manuscripts (4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) had “different contents and ordering, which seems to indicate fluidity related to these texts at that

time” (9). He also mentions that “Eastern Orthodox Christians tended to accept all the books of the Apocrypha and some additional ones, including 3 Maccabees, Psalm 151, and 4 Maccabees (in an appendix)” (9–10). These other books do not receive much discussion elsewhere in *Exploring the Apocrypha*. Psalm 151, for example, is mentioned as one of the “[w]orks for which the discovery of Hebrew or Aramaic manuscripts of their texts ... has confirmed the view that they were composed in one or other of these languages” (5), but it does not appear on the categorized list of apocryphal books on the preceding page, and it is not discussed further in the volume.

The fluidity of this group of books implies that the distinction between “the Apocrypha” and the broader category of “apocryphal texts” or “Pseudepigrapha” is less rigid than Ludlow’s brief discussion (6–7) would suggest. Without an explicit discussion of this issue, some readers of *Exploring the Apocrypha* may be tempted to imagine a neat three-part division between the biblical canon, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha. Yet the more fluid view resonates with the Latter-day Saint belief in an open canon which is, itself, at the tip of a continuum of authoritative and semi-authoritative texts. Examples demonstrating the fluid nature of this continuum include the Lectures on Faith, which were included in the Doctrine and Covenants from 1835 to 1921; the Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri, which have an ambiguous relationship to the canonical Book of Abraham; and the hymn “O Say, What Is Truth,” which was included in the Pearl of Great Price when it was originally canonized in 1880. All this points to a close parallel between our Restoration canon and the ancient biblical canon.<sup>1</sup>

On pages 6–7 and in endnotes 21–22 on page 17, Ludlow provides a brief but intriguing discussion of how the apocryphal texts came into being. He addresses the classic problem of how those apocryphal books that are pseudonymously attributed to Old Testament prophets could ever have been promulgated as legitimate religious texts. (In the narrow definition of the “Apocrypha,” this question would apply mainly to 2 Esdras, but in view of the permeable boundary between the Apocrypha and the broader category of “apocryphal texts,” as discussed above, the question has wider relevance.) In answer to this question, Ludlow takes up a theory developed by R. H. Charles around 1912 and endorsed to an LDS

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1. For further examples and discussion, see Robert J. Matthews, “Whose Apocrypha? Viewing Ancient Apocrypha from the Vantage of Events in the Present Dispensation,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 1–18.

audience by Stephen E. Robinson in 1983.<sup>2</sup> The pseudonymous books of the Apocrypha, according to this theory, were produced as a “pious fraud,” or, in other words, “an intentional deceit practiced to gain normative standing for new ideas.”<sup>3</sup> Such a measure was necessary, according to Charles and Robinson, because religious authorities at that time believed “that the heavens were sealed and that the spirit of prophecy had departed from Israel,” so that any work claiming inspiration outside the established prophetic canon would fail to find acceptance among the authorities.<sup>4</sup> (It is worth noting that the explicit reference to the fraudulent, deceptive nature of this enterprise is Robinson’s; Charles is more concerned with the motivating factor, the belief that the canon was closed.)

More discussion of this issue would have been helpful, particularly since Charles’s theory is both problematic and contested.<sup>5</sup> Although it is certain that some religious groups of the relevant period (around 200 BC to 100 AD) held a conservative view of the biblical canon, the religious climate of that time was very diverse, and there is little if any evidence for the kind of censorship that Charles’s theory posits; “indeed there was nothing to prevent any writer at this time issuing his book either anonymously or in his own name.”<sup>6</sup> Further, “Charles’s explanation charges the apocalyptists [or the writers of pseudonymous apocryphal works] not only with deception but also with a marked credulity in believing that such deception would be accepted by their readers at its face value.”<sup>7</sup> This points to a *non sequitur* in Charles’s theory, for if the prophetic canon were regarded as closed and final, putting a new work under the name of an ancient prophet would by no means guarantee its acceptance; in fact, in the religious climate this theory presupposes, such

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2. R. H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), x; Charles, *Eschatology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 196–205; Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2:viii–ix; Stephen E. Robinson, “Lying for God: the Uses of Apocrypha,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 133–54.

3. Robinson, “Lying for God,” 141, 143.

4. *Ibid.*, 142.

5. On this issue, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 14–15, 39–40; Bruce M. Metzger, “Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 1 (1972): 17, 20–21; D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 127–39, 158–77; Russell, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Patriarchs and Prophets in Early Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 8–12.

6. Russell, *Method and Message*, 131.

7. *Ibid.*

a work would doubtless come under accusations of sacrilege. Ultimately, Charles's interpretation represents a refusal to come to grips with the mystical worldview embodied in the texts, an aspect of Charles's work that has been noted elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

Personally, I find the theory of D. S. Russell to be more persuasive. According to Russell, the pseudonymous writers of apocryphal texts "believed that they themselves were recipients of divine revelations." Their descriptions of the ancient prophets receiving revelation "reflect an actual experience in which they believed themselves to be inspired by the spirit of God and thereby to receive revelations concealed from the ordinary run of men." More specifically, "the apocalyptic visionary saw the ancient patriarch or prophet being introduced to these mysteries and in so doing he was introduced to them himself. What the ancient worthy saw he himself was now seeing. They were sharing a common knowledge; they were recipients of a common revelation."<sup>9</sup> This would, of course, resonate with Restoration scriptures like the Book of Abraham, in which Abraham recounts in the first person revelations that he received. Joseph Smith, who received the Book of Abraham by revelation, would be a precise modern parallel to the "apocalyptic visionary" that Russell describes. This does not necessarily imply that all these texts are equally *true* revelations. Nevertheless, this approach is a less arbitrary alternative to that of Robinson, which would label Joseph Smith's scripture as *revelation* and the apocryphal works as *fraud*. Our experience as Latter-day Saints, which often includes having to endure uncharitable labeling of our scripture, should give us empathy for the ancient writers.

In his analysis of the Lord's statement regarding the Apocrypha in D&C 91, Ludlow states that "the Apocrypha was not to be translated as part of the JST, and, consequently, it is not part of the LDS canon" (23). But the fact that the Apocrypha was not translated is not a sufficient reason for its exclusion from the canon. Other parts of the Bible also were not touched in the JST and yet remain in the canon, most notably Song of Solomon, about which Joseph Smith wrote in the manuscript of his inspired translation, "The Songs of Solomon are not Inspired writings."<sup>10</sup> Further, this would imply that the decision not to include the Apocrypha in the canon occurred early in the Church's history and was directly

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8. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 14–15.

9. Russell, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 9–10.

10. See Dana M. Pike, "Reading the Song of Solomon as a Latter-day Saint," *Religious Educator* 15, no. 2 (2014): 91–113, <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/re-15-no-2-2014/reading-song-solomon-latter-day-saint>.

based on this revelation, which is contradicted by the very interesting story Ludlow recounts about the deposit of the Bible in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo Temple, in which it was decided that the Bible placed in the deposit “should be complete — containing the Apocrypha” (24).

How, then, do we explain the eventual exclusion of the Apocrypha from our canon? Ludlow mentions a more satisfying possibility: “Beyond these cases of Apocrypha use during the time of Joseph Smith, we can search in vain for instances of Joseph Smith preaching from the Apocrypha; they don’t seem to exist. ... This may be a reason the Apocrypha was not included in the LDS canon: it was simply not a major source for sermons or writings” (27). Bound up with this is doubtless the fact that the Bible many early Church members owned would have contained only the Protestant canon, without the Apocrypha.

If the exclusion of the Apocrypha from our canon was due to accidents of history, which I think is likely, one may wonder whether these books could legitimately be regarded as part of our canon after all. Indeed, on reading D&C 91, it is hard to see what in this revelation distinguishes the Apocrypha from the rest of the Bible. Other parts of the Bible have also been tampered with by the hands of men (see 1 Nephi 13:20–41). Scripture in general, including the Bible, can be understood properly only by the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:11–16; 2 Peter 1:19–21; Moroni 10:4–5; D&C 50:19–23). A ready illustration of this last point is found in Ludlow’s discussion of teachings in Ecclesiasticus that do not “agree with LDS teachings or modern sensibilities.” He refers to the statement in D&C 91 that the Apocrypha contains both true and false teachings, and he suggests applying this principle to avoid “false doctrine.” But the examples that Ludlow gives in footnote 9, including the doctrines of harsh discipline for children, the finality of death, and God as a source of evil (specifically in the punishment of sinners), are not so different from doctrines taught in the Bible itself.<sup>11</sup> It is even possible that the reason Joseph Smith was not required to translate the Apocrypha was not because the Apocrypha was regarded as less important or authoritative but because it was less problematic than other parts of the Bible. The Lord states in D&C 91:1 that the Apocrypha “is mostly translated correctly” — something that could not be said, for example, of the book of Genesis and the Gospels of Matthew and John! Thus, Joseph Smith may not have needed to translate the Apocrypha because it was already acceptable as it stood. However, on the other side of the argument, it could be that it was specifically the

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11. See Proverbs 22:15, 23:13, 29:15; Psalm 88:10; Ecclesiastes 9:5–6; Joshua 23:15; Judges 9:23; 2 Kings 21:12; Jeremiah 21:10; and Amos 9:4.



“interpolations” that were at issue in the Apocrypha, in contrast to the rest of the Bible, in which Joseph Smith’s task was to restore “plain and precious things” that had been “taken away” (1 Nephi 13:28).

In summary, *Exploring the Apocrypha* is an excellent introduction to a very complicated body of literature. It makes the Apocrypha accessible to a lay readership, and it also suggests ways in which Latter-day Saints can understand and apply its teachings. The book is well-researched and accurate, although a few points it covers briefly could be corrected or discussed in more depth. Ludlow has fulfilled his task as an experienced guide. May his readers go on to undertake their own explorations of this fascinating corpus.

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