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A VALUABLE LDS RESOURCE FOR LEARNING FROM THE APOCRYPHA

Jeff Lindsay

Abstract: *Latter-day Saints are often aware that the Apocrypha contains valuable sacred material along with some “interpolations of men,” but few know how to approach those ancient texts and what they could learn from them. A new book by Jared W. Ludlow provides a helpful tool to guide LDS readers in appreciating the Apocrypha and exploring the material in these highly diverse sacred documents.*

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

Never repeat a conversation, and you will lose nothing at all. With friend or foe do not report it, and unless it would be a sin for you, do not reveal it; for someone may have heard you and watched you, and in time will hate you. Have you heard something? Let it die with you. Be brave, it will not make you burst! Having heard something, the fool suffers birth pangs like a woman in labor with a child. Like an arrow stuck in a person's thigh, so is gossip inside a fool.

—*Ecclesiasticus*, aka *The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira*,
aka *Sirach* 19:7–12.

The above passage is one of many treasures discussed in a new book aimed at helping Latter-day Saints better appreciate the Apocrypha, Jared W. Ludlow's *Exploring the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint Perspective*. Ludlow's book is a valuable resource for Latter-day Saints (and others) seeking to better understand an important part of the sacred texts respected by many in Christianity and Judaism. Though not part of our

official canon, they have been a part of the canon in other faiths and are included in a majority of the Bibles used by Christians around the world. For Latter-day Saints, according to a canonized statement regarding the Apocrypha, we are told that “There are many things contained therein that are true” (D&C 91:1) and that “whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom” (D&C 91:5), in spite of the “interpolations by the hands of men” that are also at play (D&C 91:2).

Latter-day Saints, unfortunately, have tended to ignore the Apocrypha, but there is value that we should be extracting. Ludlow’s book is precisely the kind of guide that many of us need in order to know where the richest sources of value can be found and what the key lessons are that we can learn.

Ludlow begins with a helpful overview of what the Apocrypha is. The 183 chapters in that collection come from early Jewish writers well after the latest books in our current Old Testament were written (ca. 400 BC), with many dated to around the first and second centuries BC. These texts were circulated among Greek-speaking Jews as the Septuagint translation from Hebrew to Greek was created. Many appear to be original Greek compositions rather than translations from Hebrew or Aramaic to Greek. Ludlow groups them according to three categories and considers each text in this order:

Biblical Expansions

- The Additions to the Book of Esther
- Daniel Stories: Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon
- First Book of Esdras (Greek form of the name Ezra)
- Second Book of Esdras (the only Apocrypha text not from the Greek Septuagint but found in several Old Latin manuscripts)
- Prayer of Manasseh
- Baruch and Letter of Jeremiah

Heroic Stories

- Tobit
- Judith
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees

Wisdom Literature

- Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach

As Ludlow reviews each of the books of the Apocrypha, he thoroughly illustrates how “the Apocrypha can be a valuable tool for helping us understand the political, cultural, and religious background of Jesus Christ and his contemporaries” (5) and how these texts provide teachings and stories relevant to Latter-day Saints.

Ludlow explains that as Jewish and Christian groups debated the value of these texts, they were given the label *apocrypha*, meaning “things that are hidden.” It was a positive label for some and a negative label for others. The term is also applied to many other texts outside the Apocrypha that were falsely attributed to various prophets and apostles (generally known as the “Pseudepigrapha,” a Greek term describing texts with a “false superscription”), but Ludlow considers only the closed set of books formally known as the Apocrypha.

Ludlow reviews the history of the debate over these books, where views have varied widely. The Catholic church in the 1546 Council of Trent declared all the books to be deemed canonical except 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. Protestants have generally rejected them, but some (such as Martin Luther) saw value in some of the Apocrypha, and portions have often been printed in Protestant Bibles.

Despite the Apocrypha’s checkered canonical history, there can be no doubt that it has impacted Christian and Jewish cultures. In Jewish practice, Hanukkah has become a central festival, and the Maccabees form a part of Jewish identity. In the Christian world, the Apocrypha has influenced poets, artists, hymn-writers, dramatists, composers, and even explorers such as Christopher Columbus, who used a passage in 2 Esdras about the earth being composed of six parts land to seek financial support for his journey westward. Even in early Christian sites like the catacombs of Rome, depictions of Apocrypha scenes have been found. (12)

Ludlow devotes a chapter to reviewing the history of LDS views regarding the Apocrypha. The beginning of LDS inquiry into the Apocrypha comes from Joseph Smith, wondering if his inspired translation of the Bible should include the Apocrypha. The answer, through revelation on March 9, 1833, is now printed in Section 91 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

1 Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you concerning the
Apocrypha—
There are many things contained therein that are true, and it

is mostly translated correctly;

2 There are many things contained therein that are not true,
which are interpolations by the hands of men.

3 Verily, I say unto you, that it is not needful that the
Apocrypha should be translated.

4 Therefore, whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the
Spirit manifesteth truth;

5 And whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit
therefrom;

6 And whoso receiveth not by the Spirit, cannot be benefited.
Therefore it is not needful that it should be translated. Amen.

Joseph made other statements that point to the value of the Apocrypha and apparently respected it enough to include the Apocrypha in the “complete Bible” that was deposited in the Nauvoo Temple (24). However, it doesn’t seem to have influenced his sermons or teachings (27), though a few other early LDS leaders occasionally used small portions from the Apocrypha.

Ludlow’s review of the contents and highlights of each of the books of the Apocrypha provides valuable historical information that will help readers better appreciate the cultural, religious, and political setting as the New Testament begins. One can also sometimes see influence from the Apocrypha on New Testament writers, such as the Book of Judith’s treatment on searching the depths of God and not knowing His mind, which appears to have influenced Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 2:6-7, 12 (133).

There are also occasional nuggets of particular interest to LDS readers, such as the Wisdom of Solomon’s teaching on the Creation, praising God for His all-powerful hand “which created the world out of formless matter” (Wisdom of Solomon 11:17), an acknowledgment that creation was not *ex nihilo* (188).

The Wisdom of Solomon also has brief references to the premortal existence (193). Indeed, it was the final section on the Wisdom literature of the Apocrypha that I most keenly enjoyed, and I think many LDS readers will find particular value in those books and that portion of Ludlow, though the entire treatment is clear, interesting, and well-suited for a broad LDS audience.

In his closing remarks, Ludlow nicely summarizes the nature of the diverse and complex texts he has treated:

The Apocrypha consists of a variety of texts making it both interesting and challenging. Comprising wisdom literature, apocalypses, tales, and scriptural expansions, the Apocrypha

runs the gamut of ancient religious literature. Its eclectic collection is reflected in how each book of the Apocrypha is handled in this work; varied approaches are used in different chapters because of the diverse styles of the texts. Yet despite their diversity, the texts give us a glimpse into the world of Second Temple Judaism and its Hellenistic influence. These texts are also important to understanding the historical background to Jesus and the early Christians and the concerns and aspirations of early Jews and Christians. (223)

I strongly recommend Ludlow's thoughtful work for any LDS reader interested in better understanding the broad body of treasured ancient texts encompassed in the Apocrypha.

Jeffrey Dean Lindsay and his wife Kendra are residents of Shanghai, China. Jeff has been providing online materials defending the LDS faith for over twenty years, primarily at JeffLindsay.com. His Mormonity blog (<http://mormonity.blogspot.com>) has been in operation since 2004. He also wrote weekly for Orson Scott Card's Nauvoo Times (NauvooTimes.com) from 2012 through 2016. Jeff has a PhD in chemical engineering from BYU and is a registered US patent agent. He serves as Head of Intellectual Property for Asia Pulp and Paper, one of the world's largest paper companies. Formerly, he was associate professor at the Institute of Paper Science and (now the Renewable Bioproducts Institute) at Georgia Tech, then went into R&D at Kimberly-Clark Corporation, eventually becoming corporate patent strategist and senior research fellow. He then spent several years at Innovationedge in Neenah, Wisconsin, helping many companies with innovation and IP strategy. Jeff has been in China for seven years, where he works with various APP companies and mills in advancing their intellectual property and innovation. Since 2015, Jeff has been recognized as a leading IP strategist by Intellectual Asset Magazine in their global IAM300 listing based on peer input. He is also lead author of *Conquering Innovation Fatigue* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009). He is active in the chemical engineering community and was recently named a Fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. Jeff served a mission in the German-speaking Switzerland Zurich Mission and currently serves as counselor in the district presidency of the Shanghai International District. He and his wife Kendra are the parents of four boys and have nine grandchildren.

