

Introduction to the Apocrypha – Psalm 151 Session Two



Infrared photograph of a version of Psalm 151 from Qumran (11Q5)

Types of Literature in the Apocrypha
The Books of the Apocrypha as accepted part of Canon
Psalm 151 (Septuagint version)
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Psalm 151 (Dead Sea Scrolls version)
Sources

Types of Literature in the Apocrypha

Historical Fiction

Tobit (*Diaspora*)

Judith (*Judah*)

Susanna (*Diaspora*)

Bel and the Dragon (*Diaspora*)

3 Maccabees (*concerns suffering of Jewish people in Egypt under Ptolemaic rulers – half century before the rise of the Maccabees*)

Additions to Esther

Devotional Writings

Prayer of Manasseh (*hymnic lament*)

The Prayer of Azariah (*psalm – liturgical in form*)

The Song of the Three Jews (*psalm – liturgical in form*)

Psalm 151 (*psalm*)

Letters

Letter of Jeremiah (*perhaps a model for New Testament compilers*)

Apocalyptic

2 Esdras (*uses metaphoric language, symbolic numbers and angelic messengers who reveal hidden information*)

Wisdom literature (Didactic)

The Wisdom of Solomon – (*Greek literary style – probably from Alexandria, Egypt*)

The Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach (Sirach or Ecclesiasticus) –

(Originally written in Hebrew. Similar in style to Proverbs)

4 Maccabees (*Greek philosophical treatise addressed to Jews on the supremacy of reason over the passions of the body and soul.*)

Baruch (*Mixture of kinds. May have been originally written in Hebrew*)

Histories

1 Esdras (*summarizes 2 Chronicles 35 – 36 and Ezra and Nehemiah*)

1 Maccabees (*Seleucid persecution and rebellion and rise of Maccabees*)

2 Maccabees (*“Pathetic history” used to stimulate emotions of readers*)

– from the New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha – New Revised Standard Version

The Books of the Apocrypha As Accepted Part of Canon

The Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Canons of the Old Testament

	Roman Catholic	Greek Orthodox	(Russian Orthodox)	Latin Vulgate Appendix	Greek Appendix	Protestant Anglican Apocrypha
Tobit	*	*	*			*
Judith	*	*	*			*
Additions to Esther	*	*	*			*
Wisdom of Solomon	*	*	*			*
Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)	*	*	*			*
Baruch	*	*	*			*
Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch Ch. 6)	*	*	*			*
Additions to Daniel	*	*	*			*
1 Maccabees	*	*	*			*
2 Maccabees	*	*	*			*
1 Esdras		*	*	*		*
Prayer of Manasseh		*	*	*		*
Psalms 151		*	*			
3 Maccabees		*	*			
2 Esdras			*	*		*
4 Maccabees					*	

– from the *New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha – New Revised Standard Version*

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

³ he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

Psalm 151
[Septuagint - Greek Version]

¹ I was small among my brothers
and the youngest in my father's house;
I tended my father's sheep.
² My hands made a harp;
my fingers fashioned a lyre.
³ And who will tell my Lord?
The Lord himself; it is he who hears.
⁴ It was he who sent his messenger
and took me from my father's sheep
and anointed me with his anointing oil.
⁵ My brothers were handsome and tall,
but the Lord was not pleased with them.
⁶ I went out to meet the foreigner,
and he cursed me by his idols.
⁷ But I drew his own sword;
I beheaded him and removed disgrace from the people of Israel.

Psalm 151 and the Dead Sea Scrolls

The discovery of the first Dead Sea Scrolls near Qumran in 1947, and subsequently many more near Qumran and at other sites in the Judean desert, has revolutionized biblical studies. For example, several scrolls offer new insights on the formation and contents of various books that we now call biblical.

In the traditional Hebrew Bible, the Book of Psalms contains 150 psalms, but some early Bibles – namely, the Septuagint and Syriac Bibles – include Psalm 151 and Psalms 152-55.

Psalm 154 is represented in two Qumran scrolls: the Great Psalms Scroll and the *Apocryphal Psalm and a Prayer for King Jonathan*. Psalm 154 is a wisdom poem, which may be classified as a call to worship. One feature is the personification of Wisdom as a woman (verses 5 onward), which also occurs in the Hebrew Bible (Prov 8:34) and in the book of Sir 1:15. Psalm 155 is also found in the Great Psalms Scroll and may be described as a psalm of thanksgiving that incorporates a plea for deliverance. It contains a large amount of biblical vocabulary and is reminiscent of Ps 22 and Ps 51.

Psalm 151 is the last psalm in the Septuagint (Greek) Psalter and is accepted as canonical by all the Orthodox churches. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, this psalm was known only as a single composition in the Septuagint and in the Latin and Syriac translations made from it. A Hebrew copy of Psalms 151 is found in the Great Psalms Scroll, but as two separate compositions – Psalms 151A and 151B.

The discovery of Psalms 151A and 151B among the Qumran scrolls is important for several reasons. As in the Septuagint, the Great Psalms Scroll Psalter ends with Psalm 151. Although the Hebrew text differs from the Greek in many ways, this “Qumran Psalter” shows that by the Common Era some Jews were using a collection of Psalms that also closed with Psalm 151. Having both the Hebrew original and the Greek translation provides important insights on the technique used by the translator. Reworking his source material, he condensed Psalms 151a and 151b into one Greek psalm of seven verses, changing the order of several verses and omitting some material. Additionally, Psalms 151A and 151B (Hebrew) and 151 (Greek) are the only psalms considered to be autobiographical in terms of clearly relating to actual events in David’s life. While some superscriptions to Psalms 1 – 150 include similar references to David, the actual texts of those Psalms never mention him.

A comparison of the superscriptions in the Great Psalms Scroll and the Septuagint shows the dead Sea Scroll version to be more Davidic. The Septuagint – although

ascribing the Psalm to David and mentioning his encounter with Goliath – declares it to be “outside the number” of the book of Psalms). This seems to reflect later editors’ concerns about the place of Psalm 151 in the Greek Psalter, in the early centuries of the Common Era, when the form now represented by the Masoretic collection of 150 psalms was becoming increasingly influential for Judaism.

– Peter W. Fint

Psalm 151 **Dead Sea Scrolls Version**

151A [Translated from Hebrew]

A hallelujah of David, Jesse’s son.

¹ I was the smallest of my brothers,
the youngest of my father’s sons.
He made me shepherd of his flock,
ruler over their young.

² My hands made a flute,
my fingers a lyre.
Let me give glory to the Lord,
I thought to myself.

³ The mountains
cannot witness to God;
the hills cannot proclaim him.
But the trees have cherished
my words,
the flocks my deeds.

⁴ Who can proclaim,
who can announce,
who can declare the Lord’s deeds?
God has seen everything;
God has heard everything;
God has listened.

⁵ God sent his prophet to anoint me;
Samuel to make me great.
My brothers went out to meet him,
and some in form and appearance:

⁶ Their stature tall,
their hair beautiful,
but the Lord God
did not choose them.

⁷ Instead, he sent and took me
from following the flock.
God anointed me with holy oil;
God made me leader for his people,
ruler over the children
of his covenant.

151B [Hebrew and Syriac]

At the beginning of David's power after the prophet of God anointed him.

¹ I went out to attack the Philistine,
who cursed me by his idols.

² But after I uncovered his own sword,
I cut off his head.
So I removed the shame
from the Israelites.