

## *The Apocrypha*

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The term apocrypha means different things to different groups. In this chapter it refers, as in the common non-Roman Catholic use, to 14 or 15 specific documents from antiquity. These were composed during the last two centuries before Christ and in the first century afterwards. Since the most easily accessible English edition of these books is the Revised Standard Version (1957), we shall list the titles as given in that volume:

1. The First Book of Esdras
2. The Second Book of Esdras
3. Tobit
4. Judith
5. The Additions to the book of Esther
6. The Wisdom of Solomon
7. Ecclesiasticus, or The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach
8. Baruch
9. The letter of Jeremiah (The letter of Jeremiah is in some editions incorporated into the book of Baruch as the last chapter)
10. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men
11. Susanna
12. Bel and the Dragon
13. The Prayer of Manasseh
14. The First Book of the Maccabees
15. The Second Book of the Maccabees

### **I. THE PROBLEM STATED**

Since 1546 the Roman Catholic Church has considered certain of these books to be inspired and on a par with the Old Testament. These are, specifically, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, I and II Maccabees, and some supplements to Esther and Daniel. Inasmuch as no religious

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group considers any of the other books to be a part of their Bible, consideration is here given specifically to these. Our main problem is whether these additions in the Roman Catholic Bible should be honored as Scripture, or whether they should be omitted in conformity with Protestant conviction.

A volume of literature about two-thirds the size of the New Testament is involved in this discussion. The usefulness of these volumes is not in debate. Much has been written about their relative value and reference will be made to it at the end of this chapter. But the primary consideration here is the question whether these writings deserve a place in the "Canon" or

not. This forces us to consider the attitude of the Church and of Judaism to these books, both in antiquity and through the centuries. To this problem we shall address ourselves first from the negative point of view, and then from positive considerations.

### ***Negative Value of Internal Evidence***

Considerations of internal evidence are doubtless interesting and valuable. One writer says: "Certainly a book that contains what is false in fact, erroneous in doctrine or unsound in morality, is unworthy of God and cannot have been inspired by Him. Tried under these criteria the Apocryphal books stand self-condemned" (Merrill F. Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, p. 109) . Another writer observes:

The most cogent proof that these books are intrinsically on a different plane from the books of the New Testament is afforded merely by reading them side by side with the books of the New Testament and allowing each to make its own impression. Then, in the words of M. R. James, "it will very quickly be seen that there is no question of anyone's having excluded them from the New Testament: they have done that for themselves" (Bruce M. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, pp. 172, 262).

But all writers qualify their objections in their survey of internal evidence. For example, the Book of I Maccabees is quite generally recognized to be on a different order of accuracy from such a book as Judith, or even II Maccabees. Historically and theologically some of these books are inestimably superior to others. But if internal evidence is to be the exclusive criterion for the reception or rejection of a book as Scripture, one must ask whether, judged by this standard alone, the inclusion of such books as Esther or Ecclesiastes in the Scriptures can be justified. But we neither accept nor reject the Apocryphal volumes from the Bible simply because of internal evidence, whether of doctrine or type of literature.

### ***Negative Value of Internal Order or Language of Composition***

Two other indecisive criteria for the rejection of these books are illustrated by the case of I Esdras. This Greek book covers the same general material as is found in Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah. It differs in the order of the stories

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and in some other particulars. Some scholars suggest that this book was rejected because the Hebrew form of these stories was long known and believed to be purer in form. This circumstance would give priority to books written in Hebrew and more familiar in order of content. It is possible, some scholars point out, that such books as Tobit and Judith existed only in the Greek language at the time when the Hebrew Canon was fixed. The additions to Esther are found only in Greek. That is the case with Wisdom. It is assumed, therefore, that a book had to be composed in the Hebrew language to be in the Canon. But this is a poor criterion to apply to the Apocryphal books inasmuch as the language of the original composition of many of them is unknown. It is a poor criterion for another reason. Some of the Apocryphal books were definitely composed in Hebrew. Notable among these is the book of Ecclesiasticus. This book was rejected despite its composition in Hebrew. Thus the value of the argument from original language is very limited, if not altogether valueless. The argument concerning the purity of the form of the stories is purely an appeal to tradition and gives little objective basis for the reception or rejection of a particular book. Neither the criterion of the language of composition nor of familiarity of order serves as an adequate basis for accepting or rejecting the canonical status of a given document.

### ***Time of Composition Important***

Jewish authorities put forward another reason for rejecting a book. To merit a place in the collection of canonical literature a given volume had to be written within what they called the "prophetic period." They understood this period to be between the time of Moses and Artaxerxes. This would rule out, automatically, such volumes as I and II Maccabees which were composed considerably after that time.

In summary, then, the Jewish and general reasons for rejecting the non-canonical volumes have included: (1) content which might be either historically or theologically unacceptable, or not in accepted order; (2) language of composition other than Hebrew; (3) time of composition later than Artaxerxes.

## **II. HEBREW AND GREEK CANONS**

The number of books in the Hebrew Old Testament is 24 by the Hebrew method of counting (though sometimes condensed to 22, the same titles are included). This is exactly equivalent to the 39 books of our English Old Testament. The Septuagint version, the pre-Christian translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, contains 14 additional books or parts of books. These are the Apocrypha. Thus there appear to be two canons, the Hebrew or shorter one, and the longer so-called "Greek Canon." The first is Palestinian and the second Alexandrian. Some have erroneously believed that there were two separate canons and that today we may choose between

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them. Others assume that the original was a longer canon and that by the first century of the Christian era the extra books were rejected from the Hebrew Canon and that we should therefore accept the longer one today.

The attitude of the early Christian Church toward the Apocrypha deserves special notice. W. O. E. Oesterley (*An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha*, pp. 525-130) sums up the view of some scholars as follows: "There can be no doubt that during the first two centuries all the books of the Greek Canon were regarded as Scripture." Thus we are driven to such questions as: What was the original Hebrew Canon? What was the Hebrew Canon at the time of Christ? What Canon did Christ accept?

## **III. REASONS ALLEGED FOR INCLUDING THE APOCRYPHA**

It is alleged that some New Testament books reflect the thought of the Apocrypha, and even quote them, and that these Biblical writers therefore considered the Apocrypha on a par with the Old Testament Scriptures. It is asserted that the New Testament writers took their quotations of the Old Testament from the Greek translation, the Septuagint, rather than from the Hebrew. Since the scrolls of the Apocrypha were mixed together from the earliest times with the scrolls of the Septuagint, this New Testament use of the Septuagint is alleged to sanction the other books preserved alongside the scriptural writings in the Septuagint collection. Thus it is contended that the writers of the New Testament considered the Apocrypha as Scripture.

It is alleged, moreover, that in the earliest post-Biblical Christian literature some Apocryphal books were definitely quoted as Scripture by leaders of the Church, and these leaders used them in public worship services just as they used the canonical books.

It is alleged, furthermore, that the early Church, as represented by such Church Fathers as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, accepted all the books of the Apocrypha as Scripture. Origen quotes from almost every book of the Apocrypha. Additional proof of this ecclesiastical reverence assertedly is supplied by catacomb scenes which picture episodes from many of these books.

It is usually alleged also that the "change of attitude" in the Christian Church during the fourth century certifies the earlier acceptance of these books.

It is alleged that these books belong in the Canon on the basis of the fact that the great Biblical manuscripts (Codex Vaticanus, Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Sinaiticus) interspersed the books of the Apocrypha between the books of the Hebrew Canon. For example, Codex B contains all but I and II Maccabees. The other manuscripts, while incomplete, contain some Apocryphal books. Thus the Church which made and preserved these manuscripts assertedly considered them worthy of a place in the Canon.

It is alleged that the attitude of the Syriac Church shows that it accepted

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these books. The original Peshitta Old Testament, translated from the Hebrew into Syriac in the second century A.D., did not contain the Apocryphal books. But the Syriac Apocrypha was added in the fourth century.

The Greek (Eastern) Church reverted to the alleged attitude of the early Church in accepting all the books of the Apocrypha.

[The attitude of the churches in later times may be summarized briefly. After 1672 most of the books absent from the Hebrew Canon were not accepted by the Eastern Church. The Eastern Church accepted only Tobit, Judith, Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom. The Western Church continued to accept the Apocryphal books, but many notable leaders rejected some or all of them. In 1546, at the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church accepted all of the books listed above as Apocryphal except II Esdras and the Prayer of Manasses. These two were kept in the New Testament as an appendix, to be read for edification, but not as Scripture. Not all in the Roman Catholic Church accepted the conclusion of the Council of Trent. The Protestant churches followed the Hebrew Canon, which did not include the Apocryphal books. While rejecting these books, and not considering them as Scripture, some within the Protestant churches continued to refer to them as books of considerable value in certain areas.]

We shall have to investigate the validity of the foregoing arguments. Then we must consider whether some better basis exists for determining the canonicity of the books of the Old Testament, or whether we rest our case for acceptance only of those books found in our present Old Testament, and for the rejection of all the Apocrypha, on considerations of the kind already adduced.

Let us first look at some of the particular allegations professing to find a precedent in the practice of various branches of Christendom for the inclusion of these books.

### ***New Testament Use of Apocrypha***

Does the New Testament quote the Apocrypha? The answer is a categorical no. There is not a single quotation from any of the 14 or 15 books. No doubt the New Testament writers knew of the existence of these books. Not in a single instance, however, is one of them quoted, either as inspired Scripture, or as authority, or in any way. Not in a single case is one of them quoted in any way for any purpose. Professor C. C. Torrey, who, in his *The Apocryphal Literature*, lists a very large number of alleged Apocryphal quotations or allusions, is forced to admit of the New Testament that "in general, the Apocryphal Scriptures were left unnoticed" (p.18). The alleged quotations are from books outside of those under consideration here, the Apocrypha. An example is the quotation of Enoch in Jude. All that can be said is that the New Testament authors have some acquaintanceship with earlier written materials, to which at most they allude indirectly, or with facts which eventually appear in both Biblical and non-Biblical documents.

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Concerning New Testament quotation of the Old by way of the Septuagint, which is considered significant because of the fact that the Septuagint preserved the Apocryphal books, it need only be observed that from this source the writers never quote any but a strictly Biblical book. The fact that the collection of books preserved in Alexandria also contained extra-Biblical books does not necessarily mean that those who preserved them considered all of the books preserved as on the same plane, that is, as Scripture. It merely indicates that they chose to preserve the specified number of books. Before we could conclude that because they are listed together they are all intended to be received as Scripture, we would need such additional information from the pens of those who preserved these books. This information is lacking.

### ***Use of the Apocrypha by the Fathers and the Early Church***

The contention that the early Fathers regarded the Apocrypha as Scripture and quoted them this way also is unconvincing. Use by post-Biblical writers does not per se indicate that they considered the books on a par with what they held as Scripture. All through the period, Church Fathers may be found who surely did not hold that view (Unger, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-507, contains a summary of this evidence). And it may be questioned whether other Fathers who allegedly held the view actually did so. For example, Augustine is asserted to have regarded these books as Scripture. While the influence of Augustine predominated at the Council of Carthage, and the Council of Carthage included in their Canon all the books that the Roman Catholic Church considers as canonical, including the Apocrypha, it remains true that, in writing on the books of Judith, Augustine said this book was not in the Canon as the Jews received it. On another occasion, when an appeal was made to a passage in II Maccabees to settle an argument, Augustine said that those making the appeal were in a bad way to have to resort to a book not in the same category as those received and accepted by the Jews. The testimony of Augustine, then, like that of Jerome, is clear. It is against the inclusion of the Apocryphal books as Scripture.

Certain writers in the fourth century who did not recognize the books of the Apocrypha as canonical cited them nonetheless by the same formulas used when citing from canonical

books (see Oesterley, *op. cit.*, p. 126). Thus the force of the argument which relies on The formula of citation is greatly weakened. The formula does not necessarily imply that the one making the quotation regarded what he was quoting as Scripture. One and the same formula was employed for quoting both scriptural and non-scriptural works, without any implication that both are of equal authority.

Even from the first, in fact, some in the Eastern Church did not recognize these books as canonical. The Western Church was much more unanimous in its acceptance of them as Scripture, but important exceptions must not be overlooked: Hilary of Poitiers, Rufinus and Jerome. Jerome accepted only

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the books in the Hebrew Canon as *libri canonici*. The excluded Apocryphal books, not found in the Hebrew Canon, he accepted as merely *libri ecclesiastici*. The first were canonical, the others held ecclesiastical value only.

In the Thirty-Ninth letter Athanasius discusses the "particular books and their number, which are accepted by the Church." In paragraph 4, he says, "There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number"; and he enumerates only the books in our Bible, in almost exactly the same order as in our present English Bible. In paragraph 4, also, he enumerates the books of the New Testament: these are identical with those now found in our Bible. In paragraphs 6 and 7, he clearly states his attitude on the extra-Biblical books. These are not "included in the Canon" but merely "appointed to be read."

The catalogues of Old Testament books and the evidence of the first four centuries of the Christian era seem quite generally to agree. They favor the Canon as received by the Jews. For example, the oldest catalogue of canonical books of the Old Testament now available is that of Melito, Bishop of Sardis about 170 A.D. His Canon does not contain any of the Apocryphal books. Origen, who died in the middle of the third century, had a catalogue of 22 books only (cf. his *Ecclesiastical History*, 1:25). The testimony of Athanasius we have already noted.

The testimony of the Western or Latin Church is substantially the same as in the Greek or Eastern Church. The early Fathers followed the Hebrew Canon closely. Tertullian, in the early third century, lists 24 books as being canonical. Hilary of Poitiers in France, fourth century, and Rufinus of Italy, early fifth century, listed 22 books in their Old Testament. The testimony of Jerome in the early fifth century is clear. He rejected the Apocryphal books in forthright language. He has only 22 books in his Canon. We have already noted the testimony of Augustine from the same century.

### ***The Great Manuscripts and the Apocrypha***

The presence of the Apocryphal books in the great manuscripts preserved by the Christian Church is alleged to argue for their scriptural status. Until actual citations from the writers themselves definitely establish this claim, we can only say that they considered both Scripture and the extra books worthy of preservation. Because they chose to preserve both does not per se mean that they considered all the books on an equal plane.

### **Summary**

The plain fact of the matter is that too many arguments for the inclusion of the Apocrypha as Scripture rest on silence. We do not really know why these books were preserved in the Greek Canon. Was it because they actually thought them to be Scripture, or merely because they considered the books to have value for the Church, and so in their library of good books they chose to preserve these works along with Scripture? In any case, the earliest exist-

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ing manuscripts of the Septuagint are not older than the fourth century A.D. This is 600 years after the translation of the Septuagint. During this 500 to 600 years the Apocryphal books gradually crept into the collection of books preserved by the Christian Church. They were never admitted into any canon of the Jewish community. This is true both in Palestine and in Alexandria. In attestation of this fact we have the witness of not only Josephus but also Philo. Nor is there any evidence to show that they were in the "Canon" of the Church. There simply is no evidence that in the time of Christ, or earlier, both a long and a short canon existed in either Jewish or Christian circles. If there were such competitive canons, is it not quite incredible that no related controversy arose in ecclesiastical circles?

## **IV. BASIS FOR REJECTING THE APOCRYPHA**

If the usual reasons for accepting or rejecting the Apocryphal books may not be relied upon, on what basis may we determine whether a given book belongs to the Canon? If it is sometimes difficult to discover whether a book originated in the Hebrew language, if problems are raised by considering extraneous material in the books, if the alleged New Testament use of these books is not decisive, if the use made of them by early post-Biblical writers and the Church Fathers is inconclusive, and if their presence in certain collections of sacred writings is not conclusive, how may we know what books are Scripture and what books are not?

Here we are concerned only with the books which may or may not have been dropped from the Old Testament. We are not concerned with New Testament Apocryphal or pseudepigraphic books, since all who wish to include the extra books wish to include them in the Old Testament. Thus we may limit our search to reasons for excluding a book from the Canon at the end of Old Testament times, that is, before the New Testament Canon grew up.

### ***A Jewish Condition—"Prophetical Period"***

The Jewish authorities had one primary condition of canonicity, doubtless among others. The book must have been written within what they considered the "Prophetical Period," that is, between the time of Moses and Artaxerxes. This is clear, for example, in the statement of Josephus (*Contra Apionem*, I, 38-42):

For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, (as the Greeks have,) but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times which are justly believed in. Of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years. But as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the

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prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time. And how firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it is become natural to all Jews immediately and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain Divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly die for them.

Oesterley in *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* (p. 3) refers to this criterion. He states:

According to Josephus' belief... the canonicity of a book depended upon whether it had been written within a clearly defined period.... The artificiality of this test is shown by the fact that, as Ryle has pointed out, "the mention of this particular limit seems to be made expressly with reference to the book of Esther, in which alone the Artaxerxes of Josephus (the Ahasuerus of the Hebrew book of Esther) figures."

This is not a valid criticism of the evidence of Josephus on the Canon. Josephus does not use this time range as a test of canonicity as Oesterley here, and some other scholars elsewhere, imply. It may only be inferred from Josephus that, whatever the tests were, they had to apply within this stipulated period of history.

Metzger (*op. cit.*, p. 8) does not refer to this particular evidence. But he does state:

The Hebrew canon had been approved by long and approved usage of the books, and the Assembly of Jamnia (A.D. 90) merely ratified what the most spiritually sensitive souls in Judaism had been accustomed to regard as holy Scripture.... The standards of judgment which led to the approval of some books and the rejection of others are unknown to us today. At a later date the theory was elaborated by the Rabbis that inspiration belonged to the prophetic office, which began with Moses and ended in the time of Alexander the Great. Therefore books which were obviously of later origin could not be regarded as canonical.

Metzger rejects this particular criterion as invalid when he says "The fact that this theory does not fit all of the cases (for example, the present form of the Book of Daniel appears to be later than Ecclesiasticus) does not mean that in general most Jews would not have felt its force. From all that is known or can be inferred, the process of canonization was complex and subtle" (p. 9). [For a refutation of the allegation that certain Old Testa-

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ment books were written later than the time of Artaxerxes about 400 B.C., see the special introduction sections of such a work as E. J. Young's *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1949). There is no incontrovertible evidence to prove that any book necessarily comes from a period later than Artaxerxes.]



### ***Importance of the Jewish Canon***

Thus the collection of books in the Jewish Canon grew up gradually over the period of years during which they were being composed. But all Jews accepted only 24 books, our 39, as Scripture. Those 24 books include none of the Apocryphal books. This was the Canon of the Jews at the time of Christ, the Canon which he accepted, the Canon of the Christian Church. The crux of this argument is that these books in the Hebrew Canon, 24 in number, were considered a closed Canon by the end of the prophetic era 400 B.C. by all Jews, including Alexandrian Jews. This point is in debate between liberal and evangelical authors. Referring to the extra books preserved by the Christians in Alexandria, Metzger notes: "It is extremely difficult, therefore, to believe that the Alexandrian Jews received these books as authoritative in the same sense as they received the Law and the Prophets" (*op. cit.*, p. 177).

This tradition about their Canon did exist in this form among the Jews in ancient times. It is a matter of historical evidence. One may not like this conviction, held by the Jews of Josephus' day (just after Christ), but one cannot deny its existence. We do not know why certain books were received by the Jews and others rejected. From Josephus' statement and from others, it is clear, however, that they knew which ones were received and which were not. This is the significant and only historical basis upon which a conclusion can be reached. We have seen that all other alleged criteria are inconclusive. There is, however, no question as to the number of books received by the Jews in the time of Josephus (just after the death of Christ) and the earliest catalogue of the books by name gives us a list identical in number with the number given by Josephus and Philo.

### ***Hebrew Threefold Grouping***

There is another important consideration. From very early times, at least as early as the time of the prologue to Ecclesiasticus, the books of the Old Testament were referred to in a threefold way: the Law; the Prophets; and a third group variously described as Psalms, writings, the rest of the books, and perhaps in other ways as well. There were, thus, exactly designated groups, first Law, second Prophets, and third a miscellaneous collection (although not all the particular books were rigidly classified into the second or third group). The prologue to Ecclesiasticus in the second century B.C. refers to the Old Testament in this way. Josephus and Philo refer to the books in this manner, and Jesus Christ also in Luke 24:44: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must

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be fulfilled, that were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me." In the third group, Jesus mentions only one book, the Psalms. Probably the reason for singling out this one is that it was the best known book of the third division, and that it contained more material relevant to himself than others in the group. As Edward J. Young observes "This was the Christological book par excellence of the third division of the Old Testament canon. In other places Christ referred to other Messianic and prophetic materials" (*op. cit.*, p. 37).

No reason exists for believing that the collection of books thus referred to by Christ and considered as Scripture by him differed in any particular from the collection of the Jews. There is no evidence of any dispute between him and the Jews on this point. Christ opposed the Pharisees, not over the identity of the canonical books but because their oral tradition made the Canon void. The statements of Josephus and Philo make it clear that they also

recognized this threefold distinction. By comparing Josephus and the later Talmud and other sources, such as Melito the Bishop of Sardis (170 A.D.), we may learn the names of all the books of the three groups in the Jewish Canon of the day of Christ. These are 24 in number, the same books numbering 39 in our Old Testament Canon.

### ***Reasons for Origin of Threefold Grouping Not Relevant***

The historic existence of this threefold grouping of Old Testament books is therefore obvious. The explanations of how it came into existence are both interesting and important. This importance springs in part from the fact that the threefold division is often interpreted in a manner that diverts attention from the principal test of canonicity to secondary considerations. Some say that this threefold division represents three degrees of inspiration. Others, while making no distinction in the level of inspiration, hold that the authors of the third group had the gift of prophecy whereas the second group were men who had the prophetic office as official prophets. Both explanations are purely philosophical. They rest on no objective foundation. They are of no value in helping us to answer the question why certain books belong in the Canon and others do not. Who, today, is going to be able to distinguish between the Holy Spirit and the "Spirit of prophecy," especially when historical books are found in both the second and third groups, and when prophetic books are found in both groups, and when certain books such as Ruth and Lamentations are found sometimes in one group and sometimes in the other, and, finally, when the early threefold groupings do not agree as to the exact content of any but the first group?

These same objections apply to a widely accepted evangelical assumption that the division is determined by the official position or status of the writers: those by Moses, then those by persons having the prophetic office, and finally those having the prophetic gift or the gift of prophecy. If this is our criterion for accepting a given book as canonical, we have no objective basis for

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canonicity. The simple consideration that some books are written by unknown authors indicates this. How do we know, when the author is unnamed, whether he had the prophetic office or just a gift of prophecy? If we answer by stating that his writing is found in the second or third grouping, then we do not rise above circular reasoning.

Another hypothesis for the existence of these three groups is that they are due to different stages or time-periods of canonization. Exponents of this view state that the first five books were canonized between the seventh and fourth centuries B.C., the Prophets or second group sometime before 250 B.C., the final group sometime before the beginning of the Christian era but after 100 B.C., and that all finally received their ratification with the completed Canon at the Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. This is purely an hypothesis, however. No historical evidence exists that such a threefold collecting took place. Nothing in the historical references to the Great Synagogue indicates that just five books, the Law, were received as canonical in that time. There is no evidence of any council during the time 300-200 B.C. There is no evidence that another group of persons made a third collection sometime between the time of the Maccabees and the time of Christ, or even shortly thereafter. The only evidence upon which this threefold hypothesis presumes to rest is the fact that there are three groups of writings and that there was a Great Synagogue (what it did in this regard is not known), and that finally in 90 A.D. there was a council at Jamnia. This is very tenuous support for a theory

so important. Furthermore, the now accumulating evidence from Qumran indicates positively that the Dead Sea community revered alike the books of the so-called third Canon and the second. This has important implications (cf. R. L. Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, Zondervan, 1957, chapter 6).

What then is the basis for rejecting the Apocrypha and receiving only 24 books? This question cannot be answered merely from a consideration of the fact that there was a threefold grouping. Whether that threefold grouping can be explained or not is entirely immaterial in determining an answer to our question about the canonicity of these books. It may have been simply for convenience in finding the books quickly for their liturgical use, or it may be because of some particular attitude about them held by the Jews who used them, or for some other reason. The reason is not important for the problem of Canon and thus for the problem of the inclusion or exclusion of the Apocrypha.

### ***A Matter of History***

We must pick up the argument at that point where it had to be left when we digressed to explore the problem of the threefold grouping of the Old Testament books.

We do not know why certain books were received by the Jews and others

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rejected. We do not know why they rejected the Apocrypha. The writers and recipients, those who under God made these decisions, left us no record that elucidates for us this aspect of our total problem. We might make surmises. None of them makes it possible for us to answer our question with satisfaction. Some account for some books, others for other books, but none for all. We do know, however, what books they did receive and when they closed that collection. The Apocrypha were not in that collection.

It would be subjective for us today, in the absence of recorded evidence, to set up the criteria by which the ancients made their decisions that caused the Apocrypha to be rejected. It is a strictly objective and historical matter as to what the Hebrews did receive and what books they did not receive in their devotion to revealed religion.

A purely historical investigation of their selectivity in handling the ancient writings will prove illuminating. We may begin our consideration of this by referring to Deuteronomy 31:24-26.

“And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.” Joshua added his words to the book of the Law; “And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord” (Joshua 24:25). Samuel also added at least a part of his writings, for so it would seem from I Samuel 10:25: “Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house.”

These passages indicate that there was an immediate reception by the people of God of certain writings. The evidence is admittedly scant. It does set the pattern, however. Certain writings were so treated from the first. The writings so treated and received did not include the Apocrypha.

The available historical evidence indicates that in the Jewish mind a collection of books existed from at least 400 B.C. in three groups, two of them fluid, 22 (24 by another manner of counting) in number, which were considered by the Jews from among the many other existing books as the only ones for which they would die rather than add to or take away from them, books which they considered veritably from God. No other historical material exists pointing to any other conclusion. The subsequent historical references, admittedly few in number, yet valuable for their weight, indicate that the same threefold grouping continued to be the authoritative collection of the Jews through the time of Ecclesiasticus, through the time of Jesus, through the time of Josephus and Philo, down to the time when we receive our first listing of Old Testament books by name. That list gives us the exact number

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and names of the books and it conforms to the number of books in the Hebrew Canon and those in our English Old Testament, 39, no more and no less. The Apocrypha are not included.

#### ***Attitude of Church Fathers Not Determinative***

Thus certain other considerations are worthy of note. The attitude of the Church Fathers is significant even if not decisive in weight. Those Fathers who received the Apocryphal books unjustifiably departed from the tradition of Jesus and the Jews. Those Fathers who protested and who held the books of two orders, one canonical and the other ecclesiastical, were correct. The attitude of the Church Fathers and eventually of the Council of Trent, while important, does not change the fact that the Canon of the Jews, which Jesus accepted, did not include these books.

The fact that the Apocryphal books were preserved in Alexandria and not in Palestine is also of note, as is the presence of these Apocryphal books in the great manuscripts of the fourth century A.D. and subsequently. While the attitude of the Christian Church in Alexandria is of interest, it has no bearing on the question of the canonicity of the Apocryphal books because that question was settled by the attitude of the Jews, both of Alexandria and Palestine, which Jesus himself accepted. The testimony of Jesus and of the Jews excludes from the category of Scripture what the early Christian Church chose to preserve as books worthy of perpetuation. This argument is strengthened further by the evidence concerning the New Testament use of the Apocryphal books. Were it clear that the New Testament actually quotes these books, or a pseudepigraphical work, the picture might be somewhat different. However, when there is no evidence that it actually quotes any Apocryphal book, or even alludes to one, it becomes increasingly clear that the attitude of the New Testament, as well as the attitude of Jesus and the Jews, is the same. There was no room in the thinking of the New Testament writers for any canonical book other than the 22 (or 24) of the Hebrew Canon.

This approach to the problem also makes unnecessary the consideration of the language in which the original books were written, or the consideration of whether this material or that (doctrinal content) is extraneous or not extraneous.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, then, the case rests wholly upon objective, historical research into the question of what the recipients considered to be the Word of God and what they considered to be other books of value but not Scripture. While the evidence is scant, it is nevertheless clear. History supplies no evidence to the contrary. Many interesting philosophical considerations might lead to other conclusions, but the historical evidence is unambiguous; the conclusion from history is that Apocrypha do not merit a place in the Scripture if we

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are to limit the Scripture to those books which Jesus, the Jews, and the early Church used and approved as Scripture.

## **V. VALUE OF APOCRYPHA**

Some reference should be made, in conclusion, to the value and usefulness of the Apocryphal books. Even though they may not be considered Scripture, the attitude of the Church, especially in the Western branch, that they have some value is, of course, correct. For this reason it is imperative that they be preserved. One need not discuss here the value of these works. That has been done excellently in the recent volume by Professor Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*. One may merely conclude by noting the items under which he outlines the places and media in which the books of the Apocrypha left their mark: "Not only have they inspired homilies, meditations, and liturgical forms, but poets, dramatists, composers, and artists have drawn freely upon them for subject matter. Common proverbs and familiar names are derived from these books" (p. 205).

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Prepared for the Web in April 2009 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

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