

Why not the Apocrypha?

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Some Bibles have additional books besides the thirty-nine that make up the Old Testament and the twenty-seven that make up the New. These are in Greek and are commonly referred to as the Apocrypha. This edited version of a two-part article first published in February and April 1947 shows why they should not be considered as part of the inspired Word of God, the Bible.

THE SEPTUAGINT (known by the symbol LXX) is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is traditionally ascribed to seventy (or seventy-two) scholars working under the patronage of Ptolemy Philadelphus at Alexandria in the third century B.C. We read: "There is no reason to doubt this tradition so far as it applies to the Pentateuch. The remaining books were translated at various unknown periods during the next 150 years". The extract from the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* in the box below provides a comprehensive definition of our subject, and indicates our line of enquiry. *Why* have the books of the Old Testament Apocrypha failed to secure a place among the canonical Scriptures?

The Apocrypha in the Septuagint

In addition to translations of the recognised Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint contains translations of certain other Hebrew religious

and historical writings, and these writings are now included in what is termed the Old Testament Apocrypha. Dr H. E. Ryle, in *The Canon of the Old Testament*, says:

"The inclusion of the so-called Apocryphal Books in the LXX version is sometimes alleged to be a proof that the Alexandrian Jews acknowledged a wider Canon of Scripture than their Palestinian countrymen. But this is not a legitimate inference. Our copies of the LXX are derived from Christian sources; and all that can *certainly* be proved from the association of additional books with those of the Hebrew Canon is that these other books found favour with the Christian community. Doubtless, they would not thus have found favour with the Christians, if they had not also enjoyed high repute among the Jews, from whom they were obtained along with the undoubted books of the Hebrew Canon. The fact, however, that neither in the writings of Philo, nor in those of Josephus—Jews who both make use of the LXX version—have we any evidence favouring the canonicity of the Apocryphal Books is really conclusive against their having been regarded as Scripture by Greek-speaking Jews before the second century A.D."

Our own view is that these apocryphal writings were included in the Septuagint, not because

The name 'Apocrypha' is used to denote a large body of Jewish and Christian literature, consisting of writings which either their authors or their admirers have sought to include among canonical Scriptures, but which have ultimately failed to secure such a position in the estimation of the Church at large.

This special usage of the word is derived from the practice common among sects of embodying their special tenets or formulae in books withheld from public use, and communicated to an inner circle of believers. Such books, generally bearing the name of some patriarch, prophet or apostle, were called by their possessors 'apocryphal', the designation implying that they were hidden from the outer world, and even from the ordinary members of the sect itself; in such cases the epithet 'apocryphal' was used in a laudatory sense. Since however the books were forgeries, the epithet gradually came to take colour from that fact, and in process of time it was employed to indicate other writings that had been forged. In the common parlance of today, it denotes any story or document which is false or spurious.

Encyclopaedia Biblica

the translators regarded them as inspired Scripture, but because they desired the Septuagint to be a compendium of Hebrew religious literature.

Attitudes to the Apocrypha

In A.D. 384, or thereabouts, Jerome published a Latin text of the New Testament, and the text of the Old Testament in Latin about two years later. Although the Old Testament text was translated directly from Hebrew into Latin, and not from the Greek text of the Septuagint, Jerome incorporated into his version (afterwards known as *Vulgata*; in English, Vulgate) practically all the Apocryphal books included in the Septuagint.

Jerome's version has become, with very little revision, the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, and contains, in addition to the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament as it appears in the English Bible, the following Apocryphal books: Tobit; Judith; The Wisdom of Solomon; Ecclesiasticus; Baruch; 1 and 2 Maccabees; and (possibly) the following additions to the Book of Daniel: The Song of the Three Children, The Story of Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. These books were declared canonical by the Council of Trent in 1546. It was then declared:

"If any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate edition, and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema" (Session 4, Decree 1).

The Church of England, although making frequent use of Apocryphal writings, does not argue for their canonicity, but says of them: "The Church doth read [them] for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine" (Sixth Article of Religion¹).

There are, however, certain modern non-Catholic theologians who argue that some, if not all, these Apocryphal writings ought to be accorded a place in the Canon of Holy Scripture. We believe that readers of *The Testimony* will prefer, and share, the view expressed in the Westminster Confession, that these books "are not to be any otherwise approved or made use of than other human writings",² and will be unmoved by the anathema pronounced upon them by the Council of Trent.

Why do we reject the claims of the Roman Church regarding the Apocrypha? Is it because

of prejudice against papist dictation, or is it the outcome of a considered and independent judgment of the merits and demerits of these books? In short, Why not the Apocrypha? This is the question we now go on to answer.

Not quoted in the New Testament

As stated above, most of the books of the Apocrypha were included in the Septuagint, along with translations into Greek of the recognised Hebrew Scriptures. It is practically certain that Jesus both knew and cited the Septuagint, and that he must therefore have been acquainted with the Apocryphal books contained in the Septuagint. Yet never, so far as we know, did he quote from these Apocryphal writings or refer to them in any way. In short, Jesus ignored them completely.

So too did all the apostolic writers; yet they, and Jesus himself, quoted frequently from the Hebrew Scriptures now contained in what we call the Old Testament. For example, we read in Luke 24:27 that, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them [the two disciples going to Emmaus] in all the scriptures the things concerning himself". Again, in verse 44, Jesus is recorded as saying to his disciples: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me". It is a legitimate inference that "the law of Moses", "the prophets" and "the psalms" constituted "all the scriptures" that Jesus "expounded" to his disciples.

An argument from silence is usually deemed to be dangerous, but the complete silence of the Son of God and the inspired apostles about the Apocryphal books in the Septuagint can only be explained by their rejection of the authority of these books, seeing they quoted so freely from

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1. This presumably refers to the Thirty-nine Articles. This document defines the beliefs of the Church of England. It was produced by the Canterbury Convocation, an assembly of the clergy of the province of Canterbury, and approved by Elizabeth I in 1571.—*T.B.*
 2. The Westminster Confession was drawn up in the seventeenth century to define the beliefs of the Presbyterian Church. It was adopted by Parliament in 1648 at the time of the Civil War and the overthrow of the monarchy, and lost its official status when the monarchy was reinstated in 1660. It still defines the beliefs of the Church of Scotland, and various Presbyterian and other churches.—*T.B.*

Those are the ten tribes, which were carried away prisoners out of their own land in the time of Osea the king, whom Salmanasar the king of Assyria led away captive, and he carried them over the waters, and so came they into another land. But they took this counsel among themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the heathen, and go forth into a further country, where never mankind dwelt, that they might there keep their statutes, which they never kept in their own land. And they entered into Euphrates by the narrow passages of the river. For the most High then shewed signs for them, and held still the flood, till they were passed over. For through that country there was a great way to go, namely, of a year and a half: and the same region is called Arsareth. Then dwelt they there until the latter time; and now when they shall begin to come, the Highest shall stay the springs of the stream again, that they may go through.

2 Esdras 13:40-47

the Hebrew Scriptures. Indeed, it seems that *all* Palestinian Jews in the first century rigidly excluded all except the books contained in the Hebrew Canon.

Internal evidence

The internal evidence of the Old Testament Apocrypha itself seems to us to be sufficient to condemn the claims now made for it by the Roman Church. There is in it no claim to Divine inspiration, except on the part of the author of The Wisdom of Solomon who, while calling himself Solomon, discloses his imposture by citing passages from Isaiah and Jeremiah! He also represents his countrymen as being already subject to their enemies; see 9:7,8 and 15:14, and contrast with 1 Kings 4:20-25.

Some of the apocryphal writers actually disclaim inspiration; see such passages as 1 Maccabees 4:46 and 9:27, and 2 Maccabees 2:23 and 15:38, and also the prologue to Ecclesiasticus. The first and second books of Maccabees contradict each other and sometimes themselves! According to 1 Maccabees 6:4,16, Antiochus Epiphanes died at Babylon. In 2 Maccabees 1:14-16 he is stated to have been killed and beheaded by Persian priests in the temple of Nanea in Persia. But according to the same writer Antiochus Epiphanes died "in a strange country in the mountains" *after* returning from Persia (9:21,28).

Finally, there seems to be a conflict of statement between certain parts of the Apocrypha and the Old Testament books. For example, in 2 Maccabees 1:18 the building of the altar at Jerusalem after the seventy years' captivity is attributed to Nehemiah, whereas in Ezra 3:2 it is distinctly stated that the altar was built by "Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren".

Stories without foundation

We find in 2 Esdras (Esdras was Ezra, of course) the story which seems to be the basis of the lost ten tribes theory, for which there seems to be no evidence whatsoever in the canonical Scriptures (see box above). This account does not agree with the British-Israelite theory that these Israelites migrated still further, eventually reaching Britain.

Perhaps the most worthless of these strange writings is *Bel and the Dragon*. A perusal of this short story will satisfy any unbiased reader that it cannot be taken seriously as true. By the way, the writer of this book states that Daniel was in the lions' den for seven days, whereas the book of Daniel makes it quite plain that the prophet was in the den for one night only.

And here are the closing words of the Apocrypha:

"And here will I make an end. And if I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired: but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto [he means he had done his best]. For as it is hurtful to drink wine or water alone; and as wine mingled with water is pleasant, and delighteth the taste: even so speech finely framed delighteth the ears of them that read the story. And here shall be an end" (2 Macc. 15:37-39).

We leave the Old Testament Apocrypha with this particular writer giving himself a pat on the back for his "finely framed" words, amused, rather than irritated, by his little display of mock modesty just previously. But this sort of thing, taken together with the generally second-rate quality of the books and their frequent collisions with the Old Testament text, impels us to reject the Apocrypha, despite the anathema thus imposed upon us by the Council of Trent and the modern Roman Catholic Church.