

REVELATION



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APPLICATION



COMMUNICATION

THE WRITTEN WORD

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, August 23, 2009

Non-Canonical Books (Old Testament)

The fact that there are books that were judged to be authoritative--by the nature of the case--means that there must also be books associated with Scripture that do not possess the same distinguishing stamp of divine authority as Scripture possesses.

I. THE TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES MAKES PASSING REFERENCE TO OTHER, 'NON-SCRIPTURAL' BOOKS.

A. These are books that were recognized to exist, and to which the reader of Scripture was even invited to consult. Many of them were mentioned to support the accuracy of some of the historical affirmations that are made in Scripture. But though they had value at the time, the Holy Spirit did not see fit to preserve them for us or to lead that they be included in the canon of Scripture. In mentioning these extra-biblical books, the Bible gives no indication that they possess divine authority as a word from God for us today.

B. Some examples of these books (in no particular order) are *The Chronicles of David* (1 Chronicles 27:24), *The Book of Jehu the Son of Hanani* (2 Chronicles 20:34; see also 1 Kings 16:1, 7), *The Book of Samuel the Seer*, *The Book of Gad the Seer* and *The Book of Nathan the Prophet* (1 Chronicles 29:29, 2 Chronicles 9:29), *The Annals of the Prophet Iddo* (2 Chronicles 13:22), *The Vision of Iddo the Seer* (2 Chronicles 9:29), *The Book of Jasher* (2 Samuel 1:17-27), *The Sayings of Hozai* (2 Chronicles 33:19), a record of the acts of King Uzziah written by the prophet Isaiah (2 Chronicles 26:22), and *The Book of the Wars of the LORD* (Numbers 21:14).

II. SOME BOOKS WERE READ ALONG WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES, BUT WERE NOT CONSIDERED AUTHORITATIVE.

A. The name we most often give to the collection of these books is *The Apocrypha*. This name itself means "hidden", and intended to communicate that these books were to be handled in a manner distinct from the Scriptures. They were written between 300 B.C. and 100 A.D. Though not included in the Hebrew Bible (see the quote from Josephus in the notes for "Collection #3: The Old Testament Canon, Pt. 2"), they were nevertheless found in *the Septuagint* (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). Catholic teaching holds that these books were recognized as authoritative in the Alexandrian Canon, but not in the Palestinian Canon (though there is no evidence that they were ever so recognized by the Jews either in or out of Palestine). It appears that they were first given canonical status by Greek-speaking Christians because the Alexandrian Jews had placed these books alongside the Scriptures. But the Jews didn't associate them with Scripture in the sense of their being equally authoritative with Scripture. They are found, even today, mixed-together with recognize Scripture in modern editions of *the Septuagint* and in editions of the Latin translation of the Bible.

B. What are these books like? Some of them are historical in nature: *I Esdras* (a continuation of some of the material in Ezra); and *I, II, III, and IV Maccabees* (describing the persecutions, martyrdom and conquests of the Hasmosian revolt; with *III and IV Maccabees* appearing to have been written after the beginning of the Christian era, and are not included in all collections of *the Apocrypha*). Others of these books are "Haggadah" (religious fiction): *Tobit* (the story of a pious Jew who was carried away captive to Assyria); *Judith* (the story of a Jewish woman who charmed a foreign general . . . and then cut off his head); *The Additions to The*

Book of Esther (which contains popular expansions on the story of Queen Esther); and three books that add to the story of Daniel (*Susanna*, *Bel and The Dragon*, and *Song of the Three Children*). Some of them are wisdom literature: *Ecclesiasticus* (also called *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*); *The Wisdom of Solomon* (which is an attack on idolatry); *Baruch* (supposedly written by the associate of Jeremiah the prophet; which also sometimes includes *The Letter of Jeremiah*, which was another attack on idolatry); and *The Prayer of Manassah* (a supposed account of the confession of the king of Judah). One is apocalyptic in nature: *II Esdras* (which puts prophetic utterances in Ezra's mouth; and in which the Jews are rejected and the Christian church is favored).

C. Why are these books found in some versions of the Bible even today? The early Greek-speaking church adopted the use of the Septuagint (which included these books) from Greek-speaking Jews; and--like them--did not consider the books to be authoritative (as testified by some of the early church fathers). But though they didn't consider these books authoritative, they also didn't distinguish them from books that *were* authoritative. They quoted from them and used them as books suitable to be read in church and for edification; but not as books from which to build doctrine. (Remember that "books", in those days, were collections of scrolls in a bucket!) During the counter-reformation, the Catholic Church took a different attitude toward these books. At the Council of Trent, many of these books--which supported particular Catholic doctrines--were given canonical status; and more of them were given canonical status at the Vatican Council of 1870.

D. The reason that they are not to be considered authoritative is "that they were not regarded as canonical by the Jews, either of Palestine or Alexandria; and that our Lord and his apostles accepted the Jewish canon and confirmed its authority by the use they made of it, whereas there is no evidence to show that they regarded the apocryphal literature (or as much of it as has appeared in their time) as similarly authoritative".¹ They were clearly distinguished from Scripture in the Westminster Confession of 1647. They were separated from the Old Testament in English translations such as *Cloverdale's Bible* of 1535, *the Great Bible* of 1541, *the Geneva Bible* of 1560, *the Bishop's Bible* of 1568, and *the King James Bible* of 1611. The 1599 edition of *the Geneva Bible* was the first to omit it unofficially (as a decision of the binder); but later officially in the 1640 edition. (It was included, however, in *the Jerusalem Bible* of 1966 and *the New English Bible* of 1970.)

III. SOME BOOKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT ERA ARE CALLED 'PSEUDEPIGRAPHA' (FALSE WRITINGS).

A. The number of these books is quite large. The New Testament mentions some of them: Jude 14-15, for example, quotes both Enoch 1:9 and The Assumption of Moses 1:19; and 2 Timothy 3:8 refers to *The Penitence of Jannes and Jambres*.

B. But this is no indication of 'divine authority'. After all, the New Testament also quotes from pagan poets such as Aratus (see Acts 17:28), Menander (see 1 Corinthians 15:33) and Epimenides (see Titus 1:12); yet does not treat the works of these writers as, in any way, authoritative. "Truth is truth no matter where it is found, whether uttered by a heathen poet, a pagan prophet (Num. 24:17), or even a dumb animal (22:28)."²

¹F.F. Bruce, *The Books and The Parchments* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1984); p. 161.

²Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), p. 268.