

## **What about the Apocryphal Books?**

Many people are aware of the fact that a Catholic Bible contains some extra books that are not found in most other Bibles. The Old Testament portion of a Catholic Bible includes some additional books that are called *the Apocrypha*. Are these additional books inspired of God? Should they be granted a place in a Christian's canon?

The term *apocrypha* literally means "hidden books." Centuries ago the term was used to refer to writings deemed to be esoteric and appropriate reading only for mature believers rather than for the masses. Later, the term came to designate certain writings that some early Christians regarded as part of the Old Testament Scriptures. These works were *Tobit*, *The Letter of Jeremiah*, *Judith*, *1 & 2 Esdras*, *Additions to Esther*, *Sirach*, *Baruch*, *Additions to Daniel*, *The Prayer of Manasseh*, *1 & 2 Maccabees*, and *The Wisdom of Solomon*. All of these apocryphal works were composed between 200 - 30 BC, hundreds of years after the time when the 39 books of the Old Testament were completed.

Some Christians in the early centuries did believe that some of the Apocrypha were inspired. In 1546 the Roman Catholic Church officially gave to most of the Apocryphal books a *deuterocanonical* status (which effectively signified a secondary level of canonicity), and included them thereafter in all Catholic Bibles. *1 & 2 Esdras* and the *Prayer of Manasseh* were the exceptions; the Council of Trent denied these three works any degree of canonicity. Protestants have historically disavowed the inspiration and canonicity of the entire Apocrypha, though up until about 1825 Protestant Bibles still commonly included the Apocrypha in a special section. Today, the New Revised Standard Version and some other English translations include the Apocrypha just after the 39 Old Testament books.

### **Are the Apocrypha Inspired?**

Should the Apocryphal books be regarded as part of the Old Testament canon and therefore God's inspired word? No, because Jesus did not regard them as such. Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the Jewish Scriptures, and the Jewish canon never included the Apocrypha. The writings of Josephus and Philo, as well as the entirety of the Rabbinic Literature all indicate that the ancient Jewish canon comprised the same writings that we know today as the 39 books of the Old Testament. Even *2 Esdras* itself affirms this fact. It distinguishes the truly inspired writings of the Jewish canon from later, uninspired literature (*2 Esdras* 14:44ff).

It is true that a few of the Apocrypha are included in the earliest extant manuscripts of the Septuagint, but that fact doesn't indicate that the people producing these manuscripts necessarily thought of the Apocrypha as part of Scripture, too. It only proves that they deemed them of value. Furthermore, these manuscripts come from the fourth century AD and were transmitted by Christians. That does not prove that Jews during the time of Jesus had included them in their Septuagint, much less that they regarded them as canonical.

The Jewish historian Josephus, about AD 90, had this to say about the makeup of the Jewish Scriptures: "Nothing can be better attested than the writings authorized among us. In fact, they could not be subject to any discord, for only that which the prophets wrote ages ago is approved among us, as they were taught by the very inspiration of God . . . 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 past, 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." (*Against Apion* I. 8)

It is evident from the above words that Josephus was well aware of the Apocryphal writings, but he knew that they were not part of the Jewish canon. Clearly, the Jews of Jesus' day did not include any of the Apocrypha among their inspired, Holy Scriptures. It is certainly significant that while Jesus and the New Testament writers quote extensively from most of the Old Testament books, they never once quote any of the Apocryphal books.

### **A Proper Assessment of These Books**

The Apocrypha are not without value. Some of them (most notably *1 & 2 Maccabees*) provide us with important historical information about events in the lives of Jews of the last few centuries before the time of Christ. Other books of the Apocrypha record motivational stories of Jewish faith in God (e.g., *Tobit* and *Judith*). *Sirach* and the *Wisdom of Solomon* advocate some very good

practical lessons about wise daily living. When one reads the Apocrypha, it becomes quite understandable why they enjoyed a measure of popularity among Jewish and early Christian audiences.

But we must realize that the Apocrypha are human compositions and nothing more. There is no ground for thinking that any of them were part of the Jewish Scriptures that Jesus affirmed as the inspired word of God.

- by **Martin Pickup**  
(edited for length)

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## ***The Bible versus Human Creeds***

Twenty five years ago in the Presbyterian Survey (published by the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.), John C. Purdy dealt with the following question: "Should women be elders or deacons in the church, and is there a Scripture on this?"

This, of course, is allowed in that denomination and Purdy wrote in defense of the practice. He cited their Book of Order, Articles of Agreement, #9, noting that they "did not begin the practice until well into the 20th century ... the General Assemblies debated this matter and altered their constitutions to permit women to be ordained to these offices ..."

Don't you wonder how these men decided, after nearly 2000 years, that it was okay to have women serve as elders and deacons? Who gave them the right to legislate such things? Were they able to change something which was formerly wrong into something that is now right by a simple vote of the "General Assemblies"?

The answers to our questions are found by looking deeper into Purdy's response. He said, "The Scriptures are not a book of rules to which we can go for direct guidance on such matters. The Book of Order is such a book of rules". Do you see it? He admitted that they do not regard the Bible as a complete and perfect guide but their own human creed book is! Little wonder then that they feel free to change the rules to fit their own fancy. This problem is common throughout the denominational religious world.

Purdy concluded: "If it is not proper for women to be ordained to these offices, then the Presbyterian Church has a lot to answer for!" We agree!

AND, one final question: Are you at all surprised that this same denomination voted in their General Assembly just last year to recognize and endorse same-sex marriage (by an overwhelming vote of 429 – 175)? No, we are not surprised. Once there is a departure from God's Word as the absolute standard for our faith and practice, there is no stopping place. Think!

- by **Greg Gwin**