

The Apocrypha—Part Three

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Arguments for the Protestant Canon. Evidence indicates that the Protestant canon, consisting of the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Bible and excluding the *Apocrypha*, is the true canon. The only difference between the Protestant and ancient Palestinian Canon lies in organization. The ancient Bible lists twenty-four books. Combined into one each are 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah (reducing the number by four). The twelve Minor Prophets are counted as one book (reducing the number by eleven). The Palestinian Jews represented Jewish orthodoxy. Therefore, their canon was recognized as the orthodox one. It was the canon of Jesus (Geisler, *General Introduction*, chap. 5), Josephus, and Jerome. It was the canon of many early church fathers, among them Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Athanasius.

Arguments in support of the Protestant Canon can be divided into two categories: historical and doctrinal.

Historical Arguments.

The test of canonicity. Contrary to the Roman Catholic argument from Christian usage, the true test of canonicity is propheticity. God determined which books would be in the Bible by giving their message to a prophet. So only books written by a prophet or accredited spokesperson for God are inspired and belong in the canon of Scripture.

Of course, while God *determined* canonicity by propheticity; the people of God had to *discover* which of these books were prophetic. The people of God to whom the prophet wrote knew what prophets fulfilled the biblical tests for God's representatives, and they authenticated them by accepting the writings as from God. Moses' books were accepted immediately and stored in a holy place (Deut. 31:26). Joshua's writing was immediately accepted and preserved along with Moses' Law (Josh. 24:26). Samuel added to the collection (1 Sam. 10:25). Daniel already had a copy of his prophetic contemporary Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2) and the law (Dan. 9:11, 13). While Jeremiah's message may have been rejected by much of his generation, the remnant must have accepted and spread it speedily. Paul encouraged the churches to circulate his inspired Epistles (Col. 4:16). Peter already had a collection of Paul's writings, equating them with the Old Testament as "Scripture" (2 Peter 3:15-16).

There were a number of ways for immediate contemporaries to confirm whether someone was a prophet of God. Some were confirmed supernaturally (Exodus 3:1; Acts 2:22; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-1). Sometimes this came as immediate confirmation of their authority over nature or the accuracy of their predictive prophecy. Indeed, false prophets were weeded out if their predictions did not come true (Deut. 18:20-22). Alleged revelations that contradicted previously revealed truths were rejected as well (Deut. 13:1-3).

Evidence that each prophet's contemporaries authenticated and added his books to a growing canon comes through citations from subsequent writings. Moses' writings are cited through the Old Testament, beginning with his immediate successor, Joshua (Josh. 1:7; 1

Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chron. 17:9; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1; Jer. 8:8; Mal. 4:4). Later prophets cite earlier ones (e.g., Jer. 26:18; Ezek. 14:14, 20; Dan. 9:2; Jonah 2:2-9; Micah 4:1-3). In the New Testament, Paul cites Luke (1 Tim. 5:18); Peter recognizes Paul's Epistles (2 Peter 3:15-16), and Jude (4-12) cites 2 Peter. The Revelation is filled with images and ideas from previous Scripture, especially Daniel (see, for example, Revelation 13).

The entire Jewish/Protestant Old Testament was considered prophetic. Moses, who wrote the first five books, was a prophet (Deut. 18:15). The rest of the Old Testament books were known for centuries as "The Prophets" (Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27). Eventually these books were divided into The Prophets and The Writings. Some believe this division was based on whether the author was a prophet by office or by gift. Others believe the separation was for topical use at Jewish festivals, or that books were arranged chronologically in descending order of size (Geisler, *General Introduction*, 244-45). Whatever the reason, it is clear that the original (cf. 7:12) and continual way to refer to the entire Old Testament up to the time of Christ was the twofold division of the "The Law and The Prophets." The "apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:5) composed the New Testament. Hence, the whole Bible is a prophetic book, including the last book (for example, Revelation 20); this cannot be said for the *Apocryphal* books.

Nonauthenticated prophecy. There is strong evidence that the apocryphal books are not prophetic, and since propheticity is the test for canonicity, this fact alone eliminates them from the canon. No apocryphal books claim to be written by a prophet. Indeed, Maccabees disclaims being prophetic (1 Macc. 9:27). Nor is there supernatural confirmation of any of the writers of the apocryphal books, as there is for prophets who wrote canonical books. There is no predictive prophecy in the *Apocrypha*, as there is in some canonical books (e.g., Isaiah 53; Daniel 9; Micah 5:2). There is no new Messianic truth in the *Apocrypha*. Even the Jewish community, whose books these were, acknowledged that the prophetic gifts had ceased in Israel before the *Apocrypha* was written (see quotes above). Apocryphal books were never listed in the Jewish Bible with the Prophets or in any other section. Not once is an apocryphal book cited authoritatively by a prophetic book written after it. Taken together all of this provides overwhelming evidence that the Apocrypha was not prophetic and, therefore, should not be part of the canon of Scripture.

Jewish Rejection. In addition to the evidence for the propheticity of only the books of the Jewish and Protestant Old Testament, there is an unbroken line of rejection of the Apocrypha as canon by Jewish and Christian teachers.

Philo, an Alexandrian Jewish teacher (20 B.C.-A.D. 40), quoted the Old Testament prolifically from virtually every canonical book. However, he never once quoted from the Apocrypha as inspired.

Josephus (A.D. 30-100), a Jewish historian, explicitly excludes the Apocrypha, numbering the Old Testament as twenty two books (= thirty-nine books in Protestant Old Testament). Neither does he ever quote an *Apocryphal* book as Scripture, though he was familiar with them. In *Against Apion* (1.8) he wrote:

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 are justly believed to be divine; and of them, five belong to Moses, which contain his law, 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 at Xerxes, *the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what*

was done in their times in *thirteen books*. The remaining *four books contain hymns to God*, and precepts for the conduct of human life. [Josephus, 1.8 emphasis added]

These correspond exactly to the Jewish and Protestant Old Testament, which excludes the *Apocrypha*.

The Jewish teachers acknowledged that their prophetic line ended in the fourth century B.C. Yet, as even Catholics acknowledge, all apocryphal books were written after this time. Josephus wrote: "From Artaxerxes until our time everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased" (Josephus). Additional rabbinical statements on the cessation of prophecy support this (see Beckwith, 370). Seder Olam Rabbah 30 declares "Until then [the coming of Alexander the Great] the prophets prophesied through the Holy Spirit. From then on, 'Incline thine ear and hear the words of the wise.'" Baba Bathra 12b declares: "Since the day when the Temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the wise." Rabbi Samuel bar Inia said, "The Second Temple lacked five things which the First Temple possessed, namely, the fire, the ark, the Urim and Thummin, the oil of anointing and the Holy Spirit [of prophecy]." Thus, the Jewish fathers (rabbis) acknowledged that the time period during which their *Apocrypha* was written was not a time when God was giving inspired writings.

Jesus and the New Testament writers never quoted from the *Apocrypha* as Scripture, even though they were aware of these writings and alluded to them at times (e.g., Heb. 11:35 may allude to 2 Maccabees 7, 12, though this may be a reference to the canonical book of Kings; see I Kings 17:22). Yet hundreds of quotations in the New Testament cite the Old Testament canon. The authority with which they are cited indicates that the New Testament writers believed them to be part of the "Law and Prophets" [i.e., whole Old Testament] which was believed to be the inspired and infallible Word of God (Matt. 5:17-18; cf. John 10:35). Jesus quoted from throughout the Old Testament "Law and Prophets," which he called "all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27).

The Jewish Scholars at Jamnia (ca. A.D. 90) did not accept the *Apocrypha* as part of the divinely inspired Jewish Canon (see Beckwith, 276-77). Since the New Testament explicitly states that Israel was entrusted with the oracles of God and was the recipient of the covenants and the law (Rom. 3:2), the Jews should be considered the custodians of the limits of their own canon. As such they have always rejected the *Apocrypha*.

(to be continued)