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## Outline for a History of the Old Testament Canon

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## **Outline of the History of the Old Testament Canon**

**By RUDOLPH GEHLE**

*(Concluded)*

### **IV. THE EXTENT OF THE CANON**

There is one final question which is of importance in this study. The question is this: What Books Belong to the Canon, and How Are They Identified and Distinguished From All Others? This question will be discussed in three sections, namely: 1. The Canon of the Jews. 2. The Canon of Christ and the Apostles. 3. The Canon of the Christian Churches.

#### **1. THE CANON OF THE JEWS**

The Jews in all parts of the world accepted the same canon which is found without variation in all copies of the Hebrew Bible. This unanimity among the Jews exists as far back as the history of the Old Testament can be traced.

A catalog of the books of the Old Testament is found in the Talmudic tract "Baba Bathra," attributed to Judas Hakadosh in the second century A.D. He divides the books into the three divisions we have in the modern Hebrew Bibles: Five Books of the Law, eight Prophets, and eleven Ketubim, making a total of 24. In the last two divisions the books are arranged somewhat differently than in the Hebrew Bible. We have here this order:

#### **PROPHETS**

1. Joshua
2. Judges
3. Samuel
4. Kings

#### **KETUBIM**

1. Ruth
2. Psalms
3. Job
4. Proverbs



## PROPHETS

5. Jeremiah
6. Ezekiel
7. Isaiah
8. The Twelve  
(Minor Prophets)

## KETUBIM

5. Ecclesiastes
6. Song of Solomon
7. Lamentations
8. Daniel
9. Esther
10. Ezra-Nehemiah
11. Chronicles

Josephus also gives testimony to this same canon, although he says there are a total of 22 books. However, he joins Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah. His classification also is somewhat different, but it is to be remembered that he adopts a classification suited to his own immediate purpose. He arranges the books from a historical point of view. He names five books of Moses, thirteen Prophets from the death of Moses to Artaxerxes, and four hymns to God and counsels for men. The four hymns to God and counsels for men are: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. The thirteen Prophets: Joshua, Judges-Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah-Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, The Twelve.

Was this canon universally acknowledged by the Jews? Some have tried to prove that it was not. The Samaritans admitted only the Pentateuch, but they were not, strictly speaking, Jews; and, as we have seen, they could recognize no book which sanctioned a place of worship other than Mount Gerizim. Some of the early Christian fathers state that the Sadducees admitted only the Books of Moses, but the scholars feel that they confounded the Sadducees with the Samaritans.

Some of the critics, chiefly Semler and Corrodi, have affirmed that the Alexandrian Jews had a more extensive canon than did the Jews of Palestine. These critics appeal to the LXX, which contains books not found in the Hebrew Bible. But the conservative scholars have found no satisfactory evidence that the supernumerary books were regarded as canonical in either place. And here is one point which we must not forget in this connection: Josephus wrote a treatise against Apion, a grammarian of Alexandria, defending the sacred books of the Jews; and if the canon of the Jews in Egypt had been different, then it is, as Green says (*General Introduction to the O. T. Canon*, p. 125), "unaccountable that he should have made no allusion to that circumstance."



Philo (ca. 40 A. D.), another prominent Alexandrian Jew, makes repeated references to the Old Testament books. Unfortunately, he left no list of the books he esteemed sacred. Nevertheless, his canon can be pretty well reconstructed from his references to the various books. A few of them are not quoted by Philo, but other testimony shows that they were accepted in Alexandria. At the same time he does *not* quote from the Apocrypha, although there are indications that he was acquainted with them. Again, Green's conclusion (p. 126) seems reasonable: "So total a silence on his part is not consistent with his classing them among the sacred books." And Eichhorn remarks (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 126): "He does not even show them the respect which he shows to Plato, Philologus, Solon, Hippocrates, Heraclitus, and others, from whose writing he often addresses passages."

It is urged by some that the presence of books in the LXX which are not found in the Hebrew Bible proves that these were accepted as part of the canon in Egypt, where this version was prepared. This is the most plausible argument which is advanced, and yet it is only an argument addressed to our ignorance. We note these points:

1. The origin and early history of the LXX, even its original compass, is involved in great obscurity. It is evident that it was *not* prepared at *one time* or by the *same group* of translators. No one can tell definitely when the translation was finished or how these other writings became associated with it. Cozin quotes Cyril of Jerusalem (315—386) as follows: "Read the divine Scriptures, namely, the 22 books of the Old Testament, which the 72 interpreters translated" (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 127). This indicates that the LXX version in its original form contained only the 22 books of the Hebrew Bible.

2. Wildeboer, p. 35, says: "All the manuscripts of the LXX which we possess are of Christian origin, so that in some even the Magnificat of Mary appears among the hymns. On this account we cannot always say positively whether we have before us the views of the Alexandrians.—In the various Mss. the number of the apocryphal books varies, hence no established list existed." (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 127.) Ryle, p. 169, says: "The Mss. of the LXX are, all of them, of Christian origin; and, moreover, differ from one another in



the arrangement as well as in the selection of the books. There is no uniform Alexandrian list. The Christian Church derived their Old Testament Scriptures from the Jews; but whether they found the books of the Apocrypha in the Jewish copies, or added them afterwards, we have no means of judging." (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 127.)

3. It seems most probable that these books were gradually attached to the Septuagint as an appendix of books not canonical, but because of their intimate relation to the Scriptures and their suggestions of devout meditations separate from profane literature.

It is known that as late as the second century it was customary in Palestine to write each book of the Old Testament on a separate manuscript. If the same practice was followed in Alexandria, it is easy to see how these related but uncanonical books were laid beside the books of the Scriptures for safekeeping. Later, when several books were written in one manuscript, these were copied along and joined to those books of the Bible most nearly related to them.

The critics also like to point to the questionings and debates of the doctors about certain books, and they argue that this proves that only a certain part of the Old Testament was fixed among the Jews, while other parts long stood in doubt. They say that the strife was not finally settled until 100 years after the Christian Era. But we present these points in rebuttal:

1. The question which the doctors debated never was whether a certain book should be *admitted* into the canon, but whether a book long received had a rightful place there.

2. The objections to the books were not raised on the ground of authorship or genuineness, but on that of contents. This implies a high and well-established standard of canonical fitness to which every book was expected to conform. And it is to be noted that no book previously admitted was excluded from the canon because of these objections. Instead of proving an unsettled canon these disputations prove that the canon was firmly established. Strack, p. 429, says: "The debates often make the impression that the doubts were only raised to be contradicted; — to demonstrate the authority of the sacred books as absolutely assured." (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 134.)



3. The objections were not limited to what the critics call the disputed portions of the canon, but were also raised against the unquestioned portions, *e. g.*, Ezekiel and Proverbs.

4. The idea of an unsettled canon in the first century A. D. is inadmissible in the face of the testimony of Josephus. He certainly knew in what esteem the people of his day held the sacred books. He could not possibly have said that nothing was added or taken away or altered since the time of Artaxerxes if the true limits of the canon were still in doubt or if books had been added within ten years of the writing of his treatise.

It has been alleged that Baruch and Ecclesiasticus are accorded canonical authority in certain passages of the Talmud. But Strack, who is an authority on post-Biblical Jewish literature, declares that not a *single* proof can be adduced from the entire range of Jewish writings, whether of Palestine or Babylonia, that Baruch or Ecclesiasticus was held in such high esteem. In a few instances it *seems* that the latter is quoted as though it were Scripture, when the quotation begins with: "It is written." But Strack assures us that in a number of passages it can be shown that the correct text is: "It is written in the Book of Sirach." No Jewish writer ever reckoned Ecclesiasticus in the canon. It is rather expressly excluded.

So once more the critics have no ground upon which to stand. History shows that the canon of the Jews was the same as that found in our Hebrew Bibles today and that this canon was accepted by all Jews, everywhere and at all times.

## 2. THE CANON OF CHRIST AND THE APOSTLES

The problem before us now will be to determine what books were recognized as belonging to the Old Testament Scriptures by Jesus and the inspired writers of the New Testament. They have left us no list of those books, but they have nevertheless clearly indicated their mind in the matter. They give infallible and authoritative sanction to the canon as it existed among the Jews. And they do this both negatively and positively.

They give this sanction negatively by never charging the Jews with mutilating or corrupting the Word of God. Jesus rebukes them sharply for making the Word of God void by their traditions. He corrects their false interpretations. He



certainly could not have remained silent if they had excluded from the canon, books which belonged there or if they had admitted such as deserved no place there.

Positively they give their sanction to the canon of the Jews by

1. Express statements: Rom. 3:2: "Unto them were committed the oracles of God." 2 Tim. 3:16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

2. General references to the sacred books by their familiar designations: Matt. 22:29: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures." Luke 24:44: "Written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms." V. 45: "That they might understand the Scriptures." John 1:45: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write." John 5:39: "Search the Scriptures." John 10:35: "The Scripture cannot be broken." Acts 24:14: "All things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets." Rom. 3:21: "Witnessed by the Law and the Prophets."

3. Abundant citation of passages from the Old Testament as the Word of God, the language of the Holy Ghost, the utterances of inspired men. All the books of the Old Testament, except Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, are thus quoted in the New Testament. Three Minor Prophets — Obadiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah — are not separately quoted, but they were included in the one book known as The Twelve.

Every quotation made as the Word of God certainly sanctions the canonicity of the book quoted. But if a few are not quoted, that does not immediately justify the suspicion that these were excluded. They are not quoted, simply because the New Testament writers found no occasion to quote them. They quote appropriate passages to illustrate the point they are making. Furthermore, their citations are of such a nature and range that it may be fairly claimed that their sanction extends over the entire collection in which the quoted books are found. Every quoted passage is put forth as possessing divine authority. And Christ's recognition of the Jewish canon as the Word of God is His affirmation that in this respect the Jews had made no mistake. The canon contains those books which were designed of God to form the rule of



faith and life for the Jewish Church and to be transmitted by it to the Church of all time.

And now we are told with a triumphant air that the writers of the New Testament used the LXX in quoting Old Testament passages, and so this must be regarded as sanctioning all the books as canonical which are found in that version. But let us keep these points in mind:

1. In quoting the LXX the Apostles do not sanction the inaccuracies of text or translation, nor the spurious additions, even if it is admitted that the Apocrypha were already added — of which there is no certain proof. Wildeboer, p. 50: "It must be remembered that scarcely anyone in those days possessed a complete collection of the Holy Scriptures; most of the synagogues even were not so rich. And if anyone had them all, the rolls were all separate." (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 145.) The Apostles employ the familiar words of the LXX without correcting each inaccuracy from the Hebrew text that does not affect their line of remark. They are responsible only for the inherent truthfulness of each passage in the form which they adopt.

2. In this matter of quoting, the Apostles were not likely to be misunderstood. Unless they made a declaration to the contrary, they were regarded as accepting the canon currently received by the Jews. And the Jews admitted only those books found in the Hebrew Bible.

3. The Apostles quote freely from the canonical books, but never from the apocryphal. Attempts have been made to point out quotations in the New Testament taken from the Apocrypha, but without success.

Bleek wrote an elaborate article to justify the retention of the Apocrypha as an appendix to the Old Testament. But in the end his argument amounts to about this: The New Testament writers were aware of the Apocrypha and approved certain sentiments expressed in them. — This is still a long way from ascribing divine authority to them. Stier, who goes much farther than Bleek in tracing the connection between the New Testament and the Apocrypha, remarks: "It is unconditionally limited to bare allusion, and never passes over to actual citation." (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 146.)

Let us compare a few of the alleged quotations. 2 Macc.



6:18 — 7:42 gives a detailed account of the torture some of the Jews were forced to suffer when they refused to obey the orders of Antiochus to eat swine flesh and chose rather to die than disobey the laws of their God, even though great rewards were offered them. Heb. 11:35 states: "And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance." This may be a recognition of the historical truth of the fact recorded in Second Maccabees, but it does not imply the canonicity of the book in which the story is written. Jude 14-15 gives a prophecy, uttered by Enoch, which is supposed to have been quoted from the apocryphal book of Enoch. But what Jude records may be a natural inference from Genesis 5, and Jude certainly does not give canonical status to the uncanonical account whose language he has seen fit to adopt in this instance. — Paul cited some of the Greek poets, but he does not attribute any sacred character to them. Green (*op. cit.*, p. 153) states quite to the point: "Historical facts may be attested by profane as well as by sacred sources." And Wildeboer, p. 51, has no reason whatever for asserting: "A number of reminiscences and quotations from the apocryphal writings prove very certainly that New Testament writers recognized no canon of the Old Testament agreeing with ours." (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 152.)

The evident fact is that at the time of Jesus the limits of the canon were fixed and that Christ and the Apostles did give their attestation to this canon, which was commonly received among the Jews. However, they did distinguish between the temporary and the enduring elements in what was prescribed in the Old Testament writings. We are all well aware of the fact that some things in the Old Testament were only temporary, *e. g.*, circumcision (Acts 15:24); the sacrifices; the permission to divorce granted by Moses (Matt. 19:8). The Apostle Paul points out that the Old Testament was elementary when compared with the New Testament (Gal. 4:9). The Old Testament was adapted to prepare the people for the coming and the work of Christ (Acts 26:22; Rom. 3:21). It had a peculiar mission to perform before Christ came, and it still has a mission to all people of the world through all time. For that reason this Old Testament canon, approved by Christ and the Apostles, is of importance also today for our Christian faith and life.



### 3. THE CANON OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

We know that today there is a question between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants as to the extent of the canon approved by Christ. The Romanists assert that certain books besides those found in the Hebrew Bible have a rightful place in the canon. These books are: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, First and Second Maccabees, and certain chapters added to Esther and Daniel. These are not found in the Hebrew Bible, but have been added in the Greek and Latin Bibles. (First and Second Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh are not accounted canonical by the Romanists.) The Romanists argue that these books were accepted as inspired of God by the Christian Church at the direction and by the authority of the Apostles. So let us investigate the question: What canon did the Christian Church accept?

When all the evidence is properly and impartially sifted, we can conclude that the ancient Christian Church accepted the same canon which the Jews and Jesus accepted. But suppose we should have to come to a different conclusion. Even that should not unduly disturb us. The Christian Church fell into error in other matters, and we are no more bound by her position in this than in any other case.

To begin this investigation, it is necessary to remember that by the Christian writers of the first centuries the word *canonical* is sometimes used in a *wider* sense of "books commended to Christian people." The term *apocryphal* was used of such writings as were preserved by secret transmission; the Christian teachers regarded them as "counterfeit, patched-up productions of heretical content." So the idea of counterfeit was associated with apocryphal. And we might note here, too, that in the first century the term *apocryphal* was *not* used in connection with those books to which we apply the term today.

In settling our present question the testimony of the early Christian Church to the Old Testament Canon is most satisfactorily given by the catalogs. Several of them have been preserved. The oldest of them is that of Melito, Bishop of Sardis after 170 A. D. His list is this: "Five of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 4 of Kingdoms, 2 of Chronicles, Psalms of David,



Proverbs of Solomon, which is also Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Job; the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, The Twelve in one book, Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra."

After Proverbs are the words ἡ καὶ σοφία. On the basis of these words attempts have been made to argue for the apocryphal book of Wisdom of Solomon. But the only possible translation is: "The Proverbs of Solomon, which is also Wisdom," i. e., Wisdom is another name for Proverbs. In this list Lamentations is joined with Jeremiah, and Nehemiah with Ezra. But there is more diversity of opinion on the omission of Esther. Some think it was a slip on the part of Melito or of a subsequent transcriber. But this is not so likely, for the book is missing in some other catalogs also. Some think Esther, being of the same period of history, is included in Ezra and Nehemiah, but there is no confirmation of this. What is *quite probable* is that Melito was betrayed into rejecting this book because the Greek Esther begins with an apocryphal section which is not found in the canon of the Jews. Apart from this omission the catalog of Melito corresponds exactly with the books of the Old Testament as acknowledged by the Protestants and contains not a single book added by the Romanists. This list is the only one we have from the second century.

Justin Martyr (d. 164) quotes freely from the canonical books, but not once from the Apocrypha. In his *Dialog with Trypho*, a Jew in Ephesus, the difference between the Jewish and Christian religion is discussed at length, but not once is a difference in the canon mentioned. Also, in the opinion of the ablest critics, in this century was made the old Syriac Version, which originally contained only the canonical and none of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament.

Going on to the third century, we have the catalog of Origen, preserved by Eusebius. He counts 22 books in the canon, and gives the Greek and Hebrew name of each. Then he says (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 163): "And *apart* from these are the books of Maccabees." In this list of Origen the Minor Prophets are left out, but this is evidently an omission of a later scribe, for while the number is given as 22, only 21 are named. Furthermore, in the ancient Latin translation of this passage by Rufinus the Minor Prophets are mentioned in their proper place. It is true that, in connection with Jeremiah, Origen



mentions the Epistle of Jeremiah. He was very likely betrayed into believing that this letter, which is found in the Vulgate as the last chapter of Baruch, was genuine. But this mistake is easily corrected, for Origen, by his own profession, followed the Hebrew Canon, and this letter never had a place in that canon.

Tertullian (b. ca. 150), the first of the Latin fathers, mentions that there are 24 books in the Old Testament. This is the number stated in the Talmud and in ancient catalogs and corresponds with the Jewish Canon. His canon is the same as the Jewish and leaves no room for the admission of any of the Apocrypha.

So in the second and third centuries we have testimony from the Eastern Church in Melito and the old Syriac Version, from the Greek Church in Origen, and from the Latin Church in Tertullian. And all of these witnesses combine to sanction the Protestant canon and exclude the Apocrypha.

The fourth century brings more abundant testimony, and again the same thing is corroborated from all parts of the Church. In this century the fathers of the Greek and Latin churches give us catalogs which show that they followed the Jewish Canon. Some of these catalogs mention various apocryphal books and omit Esther, but these differences and exceptions can be easily explained. When that is done, all of them sustain the present Protestant Canon. The testimony of Jerome (d. 420) especially is important on account of his eminent scholarship. He definitely refuses to have the apocryphal books regarded as canonical. Cf. Keil, *Introduction to the O. T.*, Vol. II, pp. 361 ff. (Eng. Tr.).

Hence the Church of the first four centuries, Greek and Latin, Eastern and Western, in Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Alexandria, Cyprus, Constantinople, Carthage, Italy, and France, testifies in favor of the same canon which prevailed among the Jews, which was sanctioned by Jesus and the Apostles, and which the Protestants now embrace.

Augustine (b. 354) and the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (419) are often referred to as sanctioning the canonicity of the Apocrypha. The catalogs of Augustine and these Councils contain the books of the Hebrew Canon, and also most of those additional books which are reckoned as canonical by Rome. However, the scholars assure us that though



Augustine was distinguished as a theologian, he possessed little ability as a critic. And we should observe the following points:

1. The above three catalogs do not coincide *exactly* with the canon of Rome. Baruch is not mentioned, but the two books of Esdras are.

2. These catalogs are not *three* independent testimonies. Augustine was bishop of Hippo, and his influence *controlled* both Councils.

3. There is good reason to believe that Augustine and the Councils spoke of "canonical" books in the wider, rather than in the strict sense. It is quite clear from Augustin's writings that he understood the word in this lax sense; for what he calls "canonical books" are not all of the same grade in his estimation. He could not possibly speak of them in this way if he regarded them all as inspired of God. He uses expressions which show that he ranked the Hebrew Canon above the other books that are associated with it in his catalog. Here are a few samples of those expressions (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 171 f.): "Those things which are not written in the canon of the Jews cannot be adduced with so much confidence against opposers." — "What is written in the book of Judith the Jews are truly said not to have received into the Canon of Scripture." — "The Jews do not have this Scripture which is called Maccabees, as they do the Law and the Prophets, to which the Lord bears testimony as to His witnesses. But it is received by the Church not without advantage if it be read and heard soberly."

So, when we permit Augustine himself to be the judge in this case, these catalogs also do not conflict with the general voice of the Church regarding the Canon of the Old Testament. We can say that in the first four centuries the fathers *and* the Councils sustain the Protestant Canon, for the one testimony which seems to differ harmonizes, too, when it is fairly examined.

From the fourth century on, the leading authorities in the Greek Church reject the Apocrypha in their lists of the Old Testament books. In the Western Church the sentiment was divided. Some followed the strict canon of Jerome, while others took the enlarged canon of Augustine without taking note of the conditions which he had added, until finally



all of the books in Augustine's list were reckoned as on the same level.

Nevertheless, a number of distinguished men of the Western Church from the fourth century to the Council of Trent have testified in favor of the Hebrew Canon, against the Apocrypha. Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome (d. 604), in quoting from 1 Macc., says: "We adduce a testimony from books [which] though not canonical, yet are published for edification of the Church." (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 176.) And even in the sixteenth century just shortly before the Council of Trent, Cardinal Ximenes, archbishop of Toledo in Spain, in the preface to the Complutensian Polyglott, (1522), which was dedicated to Pope Leo X and approved by him, states that Judith, Tobit, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Maccabees, and the additions to Esther and Daniel were *not in the canon*, but were received by the Church for the edification of the people rather than for confirming the authority of ecclesiastical doctrines. Cardinal Cajetan (1469—1534) was of the same mind, and it is thought that he would have been chosen Pope if he had outlived Clement VII.

We are all acquainted with the fact that the Council of Trent (1545—1563) is regarded by Catholics as authoritative in all its decrees. This Council in its fourth session, held April 8, 1546, adopted the following decree: "The Synod doth receive and venerate all the books as well of the Old as of the New Testament, since one God is the Author of both, also the unwritten traditions pertaining to faith and morals, as proceeding from the mouth of Christ or dictated by the Holy Ghost, with an equal feeling of piety and reverence." Then follows a list of the sacred books including Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two Maccabees. Then the decree concludes with these words: "If anyone does not receive these books entire, with all their parts [intended to cover the apocryphal portions of Esther and Daniel], as they are accustomed to be read in the Catholic Church, and knowingly and intelligently despises the traditions aforesaid, let him be anathema."

Let us look at a few of the novel features of this decree. The Apocrypha and the *unwritten* traditions are placed on a par with the canonical books, and an anathema is pronounced on all who hold a contrary view. Yet there was great diver-



sity of opinion in the Council itself as to what would be the best method of dealing with the subject of the canon. The final decision in this matter did not turn on a thorough examination of the question on its own merits, but upon existing usage in the Romish Church, which had selected lessons from the Apocrypha, and upon a desire to make an issue with the Protestant Church, which had planted itself upon the Hebrew Canon as sanctioned by Jesus and the Apostles.

Up to the time of the Council of Trent all the scholarship of the Church favors the strict Protestant view of the canon. But it is not so strange that in the course of the years the Apocrypha came to be classed with the sacred literature as opposed to pagan and heretical productions. And in ordinary usage the distinction of these books from the canon was sometimes obscured. But whenever the question of the relative value of the several books was raised, the distinction between the canonical and the apocryphal was clearly marked. Nevertheless it is urged that this popular usage shows that the early Church believed the Apocrypha to be canonical. Three points are advanced to prove this contention, namely: 1. The Apocrypha were included in the early versions of the Scriptures; 2. They were read in the churches in public worship; 3. They were quoted by the fathers as divinely authoritative.

Just how much weight do these arguments carry? Let us briefly examine them.

Point 1: The Apocrypha were included in the early versions of Scripture. As to this argument we urge the following considerations:

a. The Apocrypha were *not* included in *all* the early versions of Scripture. One notable and weighty exception is the Syriac Peshito. Also, it was not Jerome's original intention to take them into the Vulgate. He was persuaded to change his mind on Tobit and Judith, and the rest were taken over from the earlier version called the Itala, or, more correctly, the Old Latin.

b. They appear in the LXX, but this does not necessarily mean that they were of equal authority with the other books.

c. The Romanists' argument inverts the order of the facts. It was not the canonicity of these books that led to their inclusion in the versions, but it was their incorporation into the versions that led to their admission into the canon. The fathers



that read Greek and Latin but not Hebrew could easily attribute divine authority to them, not knowing that they were excluded from the Hebrew Canon.

d. In modern versions the Apocrypha may be included without regarding them as part of the inspired Word. In Luther's translation they appear with this notation: "These are books which are not esteemed like the Holy Scripture, and yet are useful and good to read." Similarly, they were originally inserted in the King James Version, though the translators did not consider them a part of the canon.

e. The argument of the Romanists will prove more than they are willing to admit. Some of the books which they reject are contained in the ancient versions. The LXX has 3 Esdras and 3 Maccabees; the Vulgate, pronounced authentic by the Council of Trent, has 3 and 4 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh; the old Ethiopic Version has the Book of Enoch, the Ascension of Isaiah, the Book of Jubilees, and others. Why are these not in the Roman Catholic Canon if their existence in old versions is sufficient to prove that they have a rightful place in the canon?

Point 2: They were read in the churches in public worship. Note here:

a. The weight of the argument depends on the intention with which this was done. We must judge its validity by the idea of the early Church.

b. In the early Church a clear distinction is made between the canonical and other books. Jerome: "As therefore the Church reads the books of Judith, Tobit, and Maccabees, but does not receive them among the canonical Scriptures, so it also reads these two volumes (Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus) for the edification of the people, but not for authority to prove the doctrines of religion." (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 183.) — Rufinus, a contemporary of Jerome, says that the fathers would have the Apocrypha "read in the churches, but not adduced for confirming the authority of the faith." (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 184.) — Athanasius mentions the Apocrypha and says: "These are not canonical."

c. The Church of England directs lessons from the Apocrypha to be read in the public worship "for example of life and instruction of manners." But at the same time these books are declared to be *not* canonical. It may be of interest



also to note that these lessons are read on days other than the "Sabbath."

d. In the ancient Church also such books as Esdras and Hermas were admitted to be read, and yet they are not accounted canonical by Rome. Why not?

Point 3: They were quoted by the fathers as divinely authoritative. — This is by far the most plausible argument of the opponents. But before it holds water, it must be shown that the alleged quotation is really a *quotation* from the Apocrypha. Many alleged citations turn out, upon examination, to be no citations at all, but just bear a remote resemblance to some statement in the Apocrypha. And if it is a *real quotation*, then proof must be brought that it is quoted in such a way as to indicate that the writer held it to be the inspired Word of God; for it is *possible* that he may have quoted it as he would have quoted any other human production. Scholars assure us that in the Apostolic Fathers quotations from the Apocrypha are *very doubtful*. From the second century on, the Apocrypha are quoted freely, but so are such writers as Homer, Virgil, Cicero, etc. A bare citation shows nothing except that the book was known and contained something pertinent to the subject at hand.

To clinch the argument, we are told that the fathers, when quoting the Apocrypha, use the same formula as when quoting Scripture, namely, "It is written." And we are also informed that they apply to the Apocrypha such names as "Scripture," "sacred Scripture," "holy Scripture," "divine Scripture." But, before we become alarmed at this, let us remember the following considerations:

a. The term γραφή, "writing," "scripture," may be applied to any composition. Eusebius speaks of the scripture of Josephus, the scriptures of Aristas. So, too, "divine scripture" or "sacred scripture" *need* mean no more than a composition on a sacred subject — a religious book. The fathers *may* simply have meant to distinguish them from profane books by giving the Apocrypha these titles. And we must not forget that these books were regarded with a respect and veneration which was not felt for other human productions.

b. The same writers who *distinctly exclude* these Books from the canon cite them under the titles mentioned above.

c. The Homilies of the Church of England cite the book



of Wisdom as Scripture and the Word of God; and yet this book forms no part of the canon of that Church.

Since the Council of Trent the Apocrypha have been canonical in the Roman Catholic Church. And yet there have been a few learned Romanists, as Dupin and Bernard Lamy, who have tried to reconcile the decree of the Council of Trent with the testimony of the primitive Church by distinguishing between protocanonical and deuterocanonical books. The idea is that the deuterocanonical books are inferior to the others. But the decree of Trent places them all on the same level. So today the doctrine is universally accepted in the Catholic Church which gives to the Apocrypha equal authority with the other books in their canon.—In the Greek Church the Hebrew Canon is sanctioned; and in the Protestant Church there has been unanimity from the first in adhering to the Hebrew Canon.

Coming to the end of this section, we can draw only one conclusion: The canon which the Jews accepted, the canon which Jesus and the Apostles approved, and the canon of the Christian Church are identical; and we today possess that same Canon of the Old Testament. All the evidence of history supports this conclusion.

## V. A FEW MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS OF INTEREST

### 1. THE PROTESTANT OPINION OF THE APOCRYPHA

Although the Protestant Church has been unanimous in its opinion on the Canon of the Old Testament, there has been some diversity of opinion as to the esteem in which the Apocrypha are to be held. The Articles of Faith of the Church of England repeat with approval the sentiment of Jerome: "The church doth read" (the Apocrypha) "for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine." (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 192.) The Westminster Confession (chap. I, par. 3) states: "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are not part of the canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings." The Lutheran Confessions make no direct statement on the value of the Apocrypha, but we are probably safe in saying that in general in the Lutheran Church the opinion of Luther is endorsed



that they are "Buecher, die der Heiligen Schrift nicht gleich-zuhalten und doch nuetzlich und gut zu lesen sind." Cf. Formula of Concord, par. 1. *Trigl.*, p. 777.

The diversity of opinion in the Reformed Churches in England finally culminated in the famous controversy which disturbed the British and Foreign Bible Society for a number of years. The Society at first purchased and used the Canstein Bible to circulate in Germany. It contained Luther's version of the Apocrypha. This was brought to the attention of the Society in 1811, and it was resolved that the auxiliaries on the Continent should leave the Apocrypha out of the Bibles they distributed. This resolution met with so much opposition that it was rescinded in 1813. But in 1819 the strife broke out anew when the Society undertook to print the Catholic Bible in Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. In these Bibles the Apocrypha were mingled indiscriminately among the other books. In 1822 it was proposed that the Society use its money only for printing the canonical Scriptures; and if the auxiliaries chose to publish the Apocrypha, they must do it at their own expense. But the agitation continued until it was resolved on May 3, 1827, "that no association or individual circulating the apocryphal books should receive aid from the Society; that none but bound books should be distributed to the auxiliaries and that the auxiliaries should circulate them as received; and that all societies printing the apocryphal books should place the amount granted them for Bibles at the disposal of the parent Society." Since that time almost all of our English Bibles have been printed *without* the Apocrypha.

## 2. THE APOCRYPHA CONDEMNED BY INTERNAL EVIDENCE

The question of the extent of the canon, namely, what books were committed to the Church and received by her as the rule of faith and life, is, of course, a purely historical question and must therefore be determined on the grounds of historical or external evidence. At the same time a negative value attaches to internal evidence, which may be quite decisive. Green (*op. cit.*, p. 195) says: "A book which contains what is false in fact or erroneous in doctrine, or which is unworthy of God, cannot have been inspired by Him. If these books (the Apocrypha) be tried by this evident test, they will be found wanting." Let us give the Apocrypha a brief survey. The following summaries were gleaned from Green:



**Tobit and Judith** abound in geographical, chronological, and historical mistakes which so vitiate the truth of the narratives that it is doubtful even whether they are based on fact. They promote superstition (Tobit 6:7, 17; 8:3), justify falsehood and deception, and make salvation dependent on works (Tob. 4:10). As for the events recorded in Judith no period in which they fit can be found in Jewish history. The language and conduct approve falsehood and deception. There is even a prayer to God to help her in her scheme (9:10, 13). But breaking the Ceremonial Law is held to be a deadly sin (Jud. 11:10 ff.). Compare also Gen. 49:5 ff. and Jud. 9:2.

**Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus** contain many excellent maxims, but their morality is defective and is based mainly on expediency, without regard for the holiness of God or the requirements of the Law. (Wisdom 8:19-20; 9:15; 10:15-20; 11:17; 14:15. Cf. Rom. 1:21-23; Ecclus. 3:30; 12:4-7; 42:5; 50:25-26.)

**Baruch** claims to be written by Baruch, the helper of Jeremiah, but the book was probably written in Greek and much later than the time of Jeremiah. The author also mentions (1:14) that this book is to be read on "feasts and solemn days," but there is no trace of such a custom among the Jews.

**First Maccabees** contains many historical and geographical errors, but it is more reliable than **Second Maccabees**, which is filled with legends and fables; *e. g.*, the preservation of the sacred fire (1:19 ff.) or Jeremiah's hiding the Tabernacle and the Ark (2:4 ff.). Cf. also 2 Macc. 12:41-45 (praying for the dead) and 14:41-46.

The genuine **Esther** is written in Hebrew, while the additions are only in Greek. Someone evidently tried to supply the conversations of the different persons but thereby interrupted the connection and contradicted the genuine chapters in various particulars and added other things that are evidently untrue.

The additions to **Daniel** are in three parts: 1. The prayer of the three men in the fiery furnace. This is a devout meditation, but hardly adapted to the occasion or their situation. 2. The Story of **Susannah**, which has a play on words that shows that it must have been written in Greek. 3. The legend of **Bel and the Dragon**, which is absurd and ridiculous fiction.

The **Apocrypha** are thus condemned by their own testi-



mony. They are not worthy of God, contain falsehoods and false doctrines, and promote superstition. Hence they could not have been inspired by God. They deserve no place in the canon, even though we may wish to preserve and read them "for example of life and instruction of manners" — properly understood.

### 3. THE ORDER OF THE CANONICAL BOOKS

Although the order in which the books of the canon are given is not so important in this study, it is nevertheless interesting to see how this matter has been handled by different men at different times.

Eccl. 12:12-14 we read: "And, further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." — To some critics these words prove that Ecclesiastes was the last book in the canon. But there is no good reason to consider these words anything more than a fitting conclusion to the book itself.

Matt. 23:35: "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the Temple and the altar." Luke 11:51: "From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias." These passages are proof to some that the books of the Old Testament were arranged in the time of Christ as they are in the Hebrew Bible at the present time. For we read 2 Chron. 24:20-21: "And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, . . . and they stoned him with stones . . . in the court of the house of the Lord."

The argument is that since one example is taken from Genesis and one from Chronicles, Chronicles must be the last book in the canon. But this argument is not conclusive, for the time intervening between (1) Genesis and Chronicles, the earliest and the latest of the historical books, would be equal regardless of the position of these books in the canon; (2) it is not absolutely certain that Zacharias, the son of Barachiah, in Matthew is the same as the Zachariah, the son of Jehoiada, in Chronicles.



**Luke 24:44:** "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms, concerning Me." — This does not *prove* that the Book of Psalms was the first book in the third division. It is conceivable that the Psalms were singled out because they contain the fullest information concerning Christ of all the books in that division of the canon.

In all of the early lists the Books of Moses and the historical books (former Prophets) preserve one unvarying order, which is determined by the chronological order of their composition and is found in our English Bibles today. The latter Prophets, the strictly prophetical books, and the Hagiographa are variously arranged.

The Talmudic tract "Baba Bathra" arranges the latter Prophets in this order: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, The Twelve; the Hagiographa, thus: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Esther, Ezra, Chronicles.

Various reasons, which are of no special importance, are given for the position of Isaiah. But it is to be remembered that at this time the Jews were not in the habit of writing all of the books of the canon in one volume. According to Marx (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 205), Baba Bathra inquires: "Whether it is allowable to combine Law with the Prophets and the Hagiographa in one volume" and "whether it is proper to lay books of the Prophets on the volume of the Law." And he proceeds: "We cannot expect to find in the Talmud a legally required and anciently established order, but only what certain doctors thought true and right." In its arrangement of the Hagiographa the Talmud places Ruth first. Why not Job, which is the oldest? Probably because Ruth contains the genealogy of David, who wrote so many of the Psalms, the book which comes second; then Job; then the three books of Solomon: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon; then, in chronological order, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, and finally Chronicles, attributed to Ezra. This Talmudic arrangement is followed in only a very limited number of Hebrew Mss.

The Masoretes arranged the Prophets in this order: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve; the Hagiographa, thus: Chronicles, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra. Here Isaiah is in



his proper chronological place. Chronicles stands first in the Hagiographa because of the genealogies which it contains, and Ruth is placed with the smaller Ketubim.

The German Mss., which are followed by the printed Hebrew Bible, has a different order still in the Hagiographa. First the three large books: Psalms, Proverbs, Job; then the five Megilloth in the order in which they were used at the respective festivals: Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther; then Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah; finally Chronicles as a suitable appendix to the whole volume of Scripture.

The Jewish authorities joined Ruth with Judges and Lamentations with Jeremiah and arranged the Hagiographa thus: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Daniel, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther.

The LXX adopted a fourfold division of the canon, arranged in this order:

Law	Historical	Poetical	Prophetical
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Hosea
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Amos
Leviticus	Ruth	Proverbs	Micah
Numbers	4 Kings	Ecclesiastes	Joel
Deuteronomy	2 Chronicles	Song of Solomon	Obadiah
	Ezra		Jonah
	Nehemiah		Nahum
	Esther		Habakkuk
			Zephaniah
			Haggai
			Zechariah
			Malachi
			Isaiah
			Jeremiah
			Lamentations
			Ezekiel
			Daniel

Our German and English Bibles have a somewhat different order of arrangement, with which we are all familiar.

#### 4. THE NUMBER OF THE CANONICAL BOOKS

We also find a great difference in the enumeration of the books, which, however, does not effect any real difference in the extent of the canon. The difference lies entirely in the different grouping of the books.

It was customary to count as one book the following: Samuel, Kings, The 12 Minor Prophets, Chronicles, Ezra-



**Nehemiah.** Now, if besides these combinations Ruth is joined to Judges and Lamentations is united with Jeremiah, then the number of books is 22. If Ruth and Lamentations are each counted separately, the number of books is 24.

Sometimes the books were placed in four groups of five each:

Moses	History	Poetical	Prophets
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Isaiah
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Jeremiah
Leviticus	Samuel	Proverbs	Ezekiel
Numbers	Kings	Ecclesiastes	Daniel
Deuteronomy	Chronicles	Song of Solomon	The Twelve

In this arrangement Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther were supernumeraries.

Epiphanius and Jerome say that sometimes the number was 27. As there are five letters in the Hebrew alphabet that have double forms, so there are five double books in the canon: Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Jeremiah-Lamentations. If these are separated and counted as two books each, the number will be 27. If Ruth also is separated from Judges, there are 28.

Again, they are counted 33. This number is gotten by uniting all of the double books but counting the Minor Prophets separately. These 33 with the 27 of the New Testament make a total of 60. This total is said to be suggested by the "threescore queens" (S. of Sol. 6:8).

Finally, by separating all of the double books and counting each of the Minor Prophets separately, we get 39 books in the Old Testament canon. This is the number of books we count in our English Bibles today.

This concludes our study of this important subject. We have weighed in the balances the arguments of the enemies of the Old Testament and of the unbelieving critics and have found them wanting, for all the available evidence of history disproves their arguments. We have learned that the Canon of the Old Testament, as given to the Jews by inspiration of God, grew gradually as each succeeding book appeared. And as these individual books appeared, they were immediately received as possessing divine authority. Finally, when the last book had been written, they were all carefully gathered and classified according to a definite principle. This important work was very probably done by Ezra and Nehemiah. The



canon which was thus collected and preserved was accepted by the Jews as the Word of God, rule of faith and life. This canon was approved by Jesus and the Apostles. And after the time of the Apostles the Christian Church adhered to that canon, so that it has been preserved for us to the present time.

The study just completed should serve to reassure us that our Old Testament canon is complete in every detail. We need not fear to rely fully on every part of it, for those to whom God gave the responsibility of transmitting His Word to future generations have done so faithfully. No books have been allowed to creep into the canon of the Old Testament which do not belong there, and none have been lost. Glaring ads in newspapers and magazines, the decrees and claims of the Romanists, the skeptical and cynical remarks of infidels, the unfounded arguments and assertions of unbelieving higher critics, need make no impression on us at all. We know that in the Old Testament we have God's Word, and God's Word only, a true and trustworthy foundation for our faith; Holy Scripture, "given by inspiration of God," which "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

