

# Rome's Apocryphal Bible

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Although the Roman Catholic religion accepts all of the same books of the Bible as Biblical Christians do, it also accepts of equal value some of the books called the "Apocrypha." These books, which were officially added to the Catholic Old Testament by the Council of Trent in 1546 A.D., include: Tobias, Judith, Esther 10:4 to chapter 16 inclusive, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Daniel 3:25-90 (treating on the prayer of Azarias), Daniel 13 (which gives the Story of Susanna), Daniel 14 (which treats on Daniel and Bel), and 1 and 2 Maccabees.

The word "apocrypha" comes from the Greek meaning "secret" or "spurious." It was first applied to these writings by Jerome, who was commissioned by the papacy to translate the Latin Vulgate Bible from the Hebrew text (because these writings were not included... in the Hebrew Old Testament which was commonly, accepted by the Jews). At that time, there were other Latin versions of the Bible that had been translated from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament (Septuagint, often abbreviated LXX, is so-called because of the tradition that it was translated into the Greek language by seventy Hebrew scholars). This translation began at Alexandria, in Egypt, about the year 286 B.C., before some of the Apocrypha were even written. Historians indicate that, though these books were included in later versions of the translation, they were not considered to be of equal authority, as the Word of God. It is important to note that the Apocrypha included numerous writings which Romanism also rejected and there is no evidence that any of them were originally included by the translators of the LXX or that they were included even at the time of Christ. They were not found in manuscripts of the Septuagint before the fourth century A.D.

Before any rational mind accepts a collection of writings as final and absolute authority in all matters of faith and life it is important to be certain of the grounds on which that faith rests. For Biblical Christians to accept 66 books without knowing why is no more justifiable than for Romanists to accept 73 books simply because their church leaders tell them to.

## **What is Scripture?**

We accept the fact that there does exist a collection of writings which claim divine inspiration. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:21) But, on what principle can we determine that a certain book written from 1900 to 3400 years ago should be accepted as the Word of God and others not be accepted? These questions are vital to the Christian faith. They must be settled on the ground of evidence. This evidence is derived from three sources:

- I. The testimony of Jewish History
- II. The testimony of the New Testament
- III. The testimony of early Church Fathers

## **Jewish History**

The apostle Paul declared, "Unto them (the Jews) were committed the oracles (Scriptures) of God" (Romans 3:2) – not to the Church of Rome! We know which books the Jews accepted and we have the inspired statement of this apostle of Christ that this collection of books (canon) and no other is the right one. The Jewish Bible is in three main divisions: the law, the prophets, the holy writings. In the Jewish grouping of books they numbered 24, because they combined books which today we count as separate. These 24 books are exactly identical to our 39 books of the Old Testament, which Catholic theologians term protocanonical or "first canon," thereby indicating that their deuterocanon or "second canon" is an addition to this original canon of the Jews. In fact in the definition of proto- and deuterocanonical the Catholic Encyclopedia admits that these terms were not introduced until the sixteenth century. It was not until then that the deuterocanon, or apocrypha, were officially added to the Jewish Old Testament, creating the "Roman Catholic" Bible.

## **Josephus**

As one Catholic writer expressed it, "Josephus...can be relied on when he deals with the affairs of his nation." Josephus, a Jewish historian, born at Jerusalem in 37 A.D. wrote: "We have not tens of thousands of books, discordant and conflicting, but only twenty-two...which have justly been believed to be divine...for though so long a time has now passed, no one has dared either to add anything to them, or to take anything from them, or to alter anything in them. But it is instinctive in all Jews at once from their very birth to regard them as commands of God, and to abide by them and, if need be, willingly to die for them." His numbering of the books as 22 instead of 24 was again due to combining. The testimony of Josephus is that the canon was closed at the time of Artaxerxes, 465-425 B.C., supports the strong Jewish tradition that Ezra made the final collection. It included all the books now in the Jewish canon and no more. In fact he emphatically rejected later writings as "not worthy of like credit with what preceded."

## **The Talmud**

The Talmud, a collection of Jewish traditions also, gives valuable testimony concerning the books accepted by the Jews because it gives the names of the books in detail. It includes precisely the books in our Hebrew Bibles.

## **The New Testament**

As one reads through the New Testament there is no doubt that there existed in the time of Christ an already clearly defined canon of Scripture. There are many references to the "Scriptures," the Holy Scriptures," "the Word of God." To use such terms would be meaningless unless they represented a recognized collection. Jesus, in Luke 24:27, 44, 45 definitely refers to the threefold division of the Hebrew Bible as containing "all the Scriptures." He said, "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me." The only reason they must be fulfilled is because they were the Word of God. If they were merely the words of men there is no reason why they "must be fulfilled." The only threefold division of the Old Testament known to history is

that adopted in the Hebrew Bible and here endorsed by our Lord Jesus Christ as containing "all the Scriptures." What were the books that Jesus Christ accepted? Romanists are compelled to admit that nowhere in the New Testament does Christ or the apostles recognize the apocrypha as Scripture. Jesus said, "He that followeth Me" (not the Church of Rome!) "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Although there are in the New Testament about 263 direct quotations from, and about 370 allusions to, passages in the Old Testament, yet among all these there is not a single reference, either by Christ or His apostles, to any of the Apocryphal writings. It would be strange that if these writings were inspired and were on the same level as the other Old Testament books that they would receive no reference at any time by any apostle or by Jesus.

The Catholic Encyclopedia makes an attempt to claim that the New Testament has some indirect "allusions" and "reminiscences" and "close affinities to the deuterios." But they realize full well that a close examination of the references they give will not support their deuterios.

### **The Church "Fathers"**

Shorn of any evidence from Jewish or New Testament sources, the Romanists turn as a last refuge to the "Fathers" of the early church age. Rome assumes that a quotation from a "Father" of the second or third century can be used as the basis for deducing what they call the unwritten or oral teaching of the apostles. But if mere proximity to the apostles is a guarantee of "apostolic tradition," why not follow the Gnostics, the Encratites, the Montanists and Manicheans, all of whom were condemned by the early church as heretics! But the ground upon which it was decided that those men were heretics was the only reliable source of apostolic doctrine – the New Testament. Every alleged apostolic tradition must in the very nature of the case be tested by the permanent, written apostolic doctrine of the New Testament. Whatever harmonizes with the teachings of the apostles as taught in the New Testament we accept. Whatever is contrary to that record we reject as not being apostolic in any sense. Otherwise we would be faced with the dilemma of believing conflicting statements. This is exactly the dilemma Romanists face when they quote Justin Martyr as "the earliest to intimate...the self-sufficiency of the Church in establishing the canon." That may be the teaching of Justin, but it is not the teaching of Paul who said unto the Jews – not to the church – were committed the oracles of God. Since both cannot be right it is absurd to claim that Justin represents the apostolic tradition.

A mere quotation or allusion to one of the deuterios does not prove that the author considered it as inspired. Some of the Fathers who quoted them explicitly rejected them as apocryphal. Jerome clearly stated, "As therefore the church reads the books of Judith, Tobith and Maccabees but does not receive them among the canonical Scriptures, so is read also these two volumes (Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus) for the edification of the people, but not for authority to prove the doctrines of religion." Athanasius held a similar view.

While some authorities seemed to accept the deuterios, others such as "Pope" Clement VII and the accepted them, Jerome, Rufinus, Hilary, Eusebius, Epiphanius, Cyril, Athanasius, Origen, Tertullian and Melito rejected them. There was no "official attitude" on the canon in the early church.

## **During The Middle Ages**

Cardinal Cajetan said as late as 1534 A.D., "We have chosen the rule of Jerome that we may not err in distinguishing the canonical books. For those which he delivered we receive to be canonical, and those he separated from the canonical books we hold to be out of the canon." It is likely that the writers of the apocrypha were earnest Jews who have done only what other writers on religious themes have done. If the books are read at all, it should be merely as "poetic fiction" and not as sacred Scripture. The books of Tobias and Judith are fast-moving adventures with a gripping climax. The books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus abound in epigrams on life. There is ample evidence, however, that the Apocryphal books contain much error, both historically and geographically and in various places contradict Scripture.

## **The Council of Trent**

The Council of Trent, forced by the Reformers to do something about their slipshod attitude on the deuterocanon, decreed as an anti-Protestant measure without so much as examining the facts in the case, that these books were to be received as Scripture. True to the practical genius of the Latin Church, the Council of Trent based its decision on immemorial traditions...relying on traditional teaching and usage to determine a question of tradition. For obvious reasons they had no interest in reviewing the "fluctuations in the history of the canon." Every available source of historical investigation could only have led any honest scholar to reject the deuterocanon as uncanonical. Driven by the necessities of its conflict with the reformers, Rome ignored historical evidence and added these deuterocanonical books to the Word of God fifteen hundred years after the time of Christ and His apostles. They seek to cover their lack of evidence with a mantle of assumed "infallibility." Even if we could concede this right – in the absence of all evidence – to tell us what was the "oral tradition" given by Christ and the apostles we could only wonder why it took them so long to make up their minds. It is more than strange that a "church" which claims to be endowed with infallibility should take 1500 years to render a decision on such a vital question as What is Scripture? However, if their decision is beyond the permissibility of doubt, obviously it makes no difference what the evidence proves. Like Erasmus, all Catholics have to be prepared to say a thing is true, even though they know it is historically false.

## **The Word of God**

As for Biblical Christians, we choose to follow Christ on the matter of the canon of Scripture rather than "an article of faith" and a Romanist "theological deduction," that admittedly is unsupported by documentary evidence in the New Testament or anywhere else. While the Council of Trent felt that the Latin Vulgate was so perfect and infallible that it ordained and declared that it "shall be held as authentic in all public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions; and that no one shall dare to presume to reject it, under any pretense whatever." Yet, Cardinal Wiseman said, "To call it any longer the Douay or Rhemish version is an abuse of terms. It has been altered and modified, till scarcely any verse remains as originally published." Still Roman Catholic authorities boldly claim that their church is the "Mother" of the Bible and that "Without the interpretation of a divine infallible teaching apostolate, distinct from the Bible, we could never know with divine certainty which books constituted the

inspired Scriptures, or whether the copies we possess today agree with the originals." (The Question Box, page 76)

Biblical Christians do not accept the ecclesiastical pretensions of the Church of Rome. Our faith rests on a more solid basis than the decisions of the 48 bishops and 5 cardinals who met in the Council of Trent in 1546 and arbitrarily decreed that certain ecclesiastical books which had previously been considered uncanonical were henceforth to be accepted as the Word of God.

Biblical Christians believe that the authority, from the beginning, resides in the book itself. It either is the Word of God or it is not. It is not what we think or wish to be fact, but what actually is fact. The opinions of men, whether they be Protestant or Catholic, cannot change the fact or cause a book to be what it is not in itself. We know what the Jewish canon of the Old Testament Scriptures was by historical evidence and we confidently accept it as endorsed by Christ and His Apostles.