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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

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WHAT ABOUT THE APOCRYPHA?*

BY DR. R. LAIRD HARRIS

In the period between Malachi and Matthew, the Jews in Palestine passed through an era of great troubles and brilliant victories.

A literature sprang up among the Jews during this period, some of which is of value while some is quite fantastic. Some books in this literature became widely known and were incorporated along with inspired books in the great early Greek manuscripts of the Bible used by Christians about 350 A.D. From these manuscripts the books referred to found their way into the Roman Catholic Bible.

Protestants and Jews unite in calling these books *uninspired* and no proper part of the Holy Bible. The Protestants call them "apocrypha", a word which refers to those books found in the Catholic Bible, but not in the Bible of the Protestants. Only in this particular is there an important distinction between the Catholic and the Protestant Bibles. (There are other books accepted by no one as Scripture. These are called *pseudepigrapha* which means false writings.)

A list of apocryphal books may be of value. There is one extra of Ezra called I Esdras. Some copies include still another II Esdras. The latter book, however, is not officially accepted by Catholics. There follow two books of Tobit and Judith, both of which describe the fortunes of their two chief characters in the days of the captivity under Nebuchadnezzar. The next large book is the Wisdom of Solmon, a philosophical discourse purporting to be by the great king. This is followed by Ecclesiasticus, another book of wisdom, sometimes called Sirach, or Ben Sirach, or the Wisdom of Sirach. There are several smaller books which are really additions to the canonical books of the Old Testament and are sometimes printed so. They are a few chapters added to Esther, six chapters called Baruch evidently a kind of addition to Jeremiah, three short additions to Daniel, and a very short prayer purporting to be by king Manasseh in his captivity (mentioned in II Chronicles 33:11). The last two large books of

* Read in conjunction with Mr. Bruce's article, page 59 will enable the BIBLE STUDENT to understand better the background of the apocryphal books. We are indebted to the Inter-Varsity Fellowship *His* (U.S.A.) for this paper.—Ed.

the Apocrypha are the best known and in some respects the most important, the books of I and II Maccabees. All of these books are of interest to Christians and might be more widely read for their historical material. Most Christians will readily agree, however, that they greatly suffer by comparison with the real books of the Old and New Testaments and will be easily convinced after reading them that they are not a part of the inspired Word.

Why do not Protestants accept the Apocrypha as inspired?

Christ and the apostles did not regard them as inspired even though they were well known, and some had been written about two centuries before. For us this is decisive. It is important to reject the books Christ rejected just as it is vital to accept what He accepted.

Evidence for His rejection of them lies in the fact that He repeatedly referred to the Old Testament books as "the Law and the Prophets", or "Moses and the Prophets", once calling the sacred collection "the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms." We can be quite sure what was in this collection, for Josephus, the learned Jewish historian of about 90 A.D., says, "For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us . . . but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times, which are justly believed to be divine. And of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws, 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 after 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. It is true our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our fore-fathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time. . ."

According to the custom of his day Josephus counts the twelve Minor Prophets as one book, also counting I and II Samuel, Judges and Ruth, Jeremiah and Lamentations, each as one book. It is agreed by all that Josephus' twenty-two books are the same as our thirty-nine. Of course we do not take Josephus' testimony as the final word, but it is excellent witness for the Old Testament canon as held by the Jews of Jesus' day and is in full agreement with

all the other evidence we have both in and out of the New Testament. The Jews to this day accept only the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament as found in the Protestant Bibles.

The New Testament evidence against the Apocrypha is almost as decisive as is that of Josephus. It consists not only in the mention of the three parts of the Old Testament as stated above, but also in the matter of quotations. To appreciate the evidence, it should be stated that the Old Testament collection when including the Apocrypha is not divided into three parts as is done by Josephus and by Christ Himself (Luke 24:44), but the Hebrew canon without the Apocrypha is regularly so divided. As to the quotations from the Old Testament, the New Testament contains over one hundred and sixty specific citations and four hundred or more direct allusions to the Old Testament books. All of the thirty-nine books are quoted thus except the four short books of Ruth, Ezra, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. The books of the Apocrypha are not once quoted. There are certain allusions to the material found in apocryphal books in Hebrews 11:35 ff, but these are at most general references to history, not quotations. It is not conceivable that the one hundred and fifty-seven chapters of the Apocrypha should have been in the Bible of Christ and the Apostles and should have been thus omitted in their references.

As has been said, the Apocrypha is contained in the great fourth century manuscripts of the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. This does not appear strange when we remember that about half of the books were composed in Greek, and the Hebrew originals of the others have for the most part perished. They were most popular especially among the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria in Egypt. It should be added that these same great Greek manuscripts which preserve the Apocrypha include two or three Christian writings which no one accepts into the New Testament. It would seem from a comparison of all the evidence that these books and others were used freely among Christians in this later age. These manuscripts included popular books rather than rigidly following a canon. At least it is sure that Christian as well as Jewish scholars of this time and before did not accept the Apocrypha as canonical.

For Christian witnesses to the Old Testament canon we may turn first to Melito, bishop of Sardis at about 180 A.D. He writes: (Quoted by Wilson *Studies in the Book of Daniel*, Second Series, page 18) "Since thou hast often, in thy zeal for the word,

expressed a wish to have extracts made from the Law and the Prophets, concerning the Saviour, and concerning our entire faith, and hast also desired to have an accurate statement of the ancient books, as regards their number and order, I have endeavored to perform the task. . . . Accordingly, when I went East and came to the place where these things were preached and done, I learned accurately the books of the Old Testament, and send them to thee as written below." Here follows a list of our thirty-nine books except that Esther is omitted probably through in-advertence. The order differs considerably from that given by Josephus.

The next great Christian witness is Origen, the noted Christian scholar of about 250 A.D. Much of his voluminous writing remains to us. Even more has perished. He gives us a list (cited by Wilson on page 24) of the Old Testament books saying there are twenty-two but naming our thirty-nine and adding "and beside these (Greek *hexo*, outside of) is the Maccabees."

A number of other important witnesses could be quoted, but we may close with Jerome of about 400 A.D. He was the author of the Latin translation of the Bible called the Vulgate which is now sanctioned by the Catholic Church. Personally he did not accept the Apocrypha as inspired. In his prologue to the translation of Samuel and Kings he gives the number of the books of the Old Testament as twenty-two (equal to our thirty-nine as explained above) and remarks "anything outside of these must be placed within the Apocrypha." He definitely states that the books of Tobit, Judith, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom of Solomon, and Maccabees are profitable for reading but not canonical. (See the full discussion in Green's *Introduction to the Old Testament Canon*, pages 15-17.)

In view of these ancient authorities we should conclude that the presence of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament and the extra-canonical Christian books in the great fourth century manuscripts of the Bible cannot mean too much for our view of the canon. The Catholic position on these apocryphal books is particularly difficult to maintain because they did not appear in the polyglot Bible printed by Cardinal Ximenes and approved by Pope Leo X in the early sixteenth century.

However the Catholic Council of Trent in 1546 officially adopted the Apocrypha as inspired and on a par with all the other books. Catholics have been bound by this judgment ever since. It is rather clear that the Roman Catholic Church decided thus because of the attacks of the Reformers and because they found

certain proof texts in the Apocrypha supporting the practice of praying for the dead and dogma of intercession of angels and departed saints. (See Lange's *Commentary on the Apocrypha*, page 54.)

The material contained in the Apocrypha is quite varied and, on the whole, instructive. We can only give the briefest survey of it. I Esdras is simply a retelling of the events given in Ezra and Nehemiah. One interesting incident is found in chapters three and four which tell how three young men, guards of King Darius, offer three wise sayings one of which is accepted with favor by the king. The lucky one was Zerubbabel, who was granted leave by the king to return and build the temple and Jerusalem in Darius' second year. A difficulty arises here because Ezra puts the return under Zerubbabel in the first year of Cyrus, i.e. 537 B.C., and the second year of Darius was about 520. How then was Zerubbabel still a "young man" and officer of King Darius as I Esdras pictures him?

The story of Tobit is one of the strangest in the Apocrypha. A godly man, Tobit, is blinded in an almost laughable way and his son goes to Media to recover an old family fund. On his trip Tobit's son takes as a guide an angel in disguise who when questioned by Tobit says he is "Azarias, the son of Ananias the great, and of thy brethren" (Tobit 5:12). Tobit says he knows his family well, and everything is all right (except the angel's standard of honesty). On the trip Tobit's son catches a fish and the angel advises him to keep the heart, liver, and gall for later use. He also tells him that at Media is his relative Sara who has had five husbands betrothed, but each killed by a demon before marriage. After varied experiences he marries Sara and at the angel's direction burns the heart and liver making a smell which drives away the demon, and at last he anoints his father's eyes with the gall, curing his blindness. Needless to say, the story is on a very low plane. There are no true miracles—only works of magic. And the picture of the demon and the angel is really beyond belief. It cannot be inspired.

The scene of Judith is also laid in the time of the Babylonian captivity, but tells of the deliverance of a city in Palestine by the wiles of the woman Judith.

The Wisdom of Solomon somewhat imitates the thought of the book of Proverbs, but not the style. Much is said in praise of Wisdom, even personifying her as the spirit of God, following

out the thought of Proverbs 8. The claim is clearly made that the author was Solomon himself (. . . a king of thy people . . . to build a temple upon thy holy mount. Wisdom 9:7, 8), but most agree that the book was originally written in Greek and certainly no Hebrew original has been found, which is strange indeed if Solomon really were the author. If Solomon is not the author, there is the further difficulty of the falsity of the claim!

The book of Ecclesiasticus is of the same general sort. It is the only one of the Apocrypha clearly giving its date. It was written in Hebrew by an unknown man about 180 B.C. and translated by his grandson, Jesus Ben Sirach, in the year 132 B.C. The book advances a high practical ethic and exhorts to a true worship of God. The style is rather like the book of Proverbs in places.

The various additions to the canonical books may be outlined very briefly. The seven chapters added to Esther elaborate on her history and the events of her deliverance of the Jews. Incidentally, the name of God which is not found in Esther is found profusely in the additions. The book of Baruch, who is presented in Jeremiah 45 as the scribe of Jeremiah, confesses the sins of the nation for which it was sent into captivity and ends with a letter claiming to be from Jeremiah casting scorn on the idols of the heathen.

The three additions to Daniel are of more interest. The first, the Song of the Three Holy Children, is their prayer from the midst of the fiery furnace and is a general song of praise. The second, the History of Susanna, tells how this virtuous lady was falsely accused of unchastity by two high Jewish officials who both loved her and then agreed in their false accusations. The people and her husband were about ready to stone her when Daniel, a mere youth, interrupted and asked that the witnesses be cross-examined separately. Of course their witness did not agree so they were killed instead. The chapter is the one Shakespeare had in mind when he has Shylock exclaim "A Daniel is come to judgement." Daniel's fame as a judge is not mentioned in the canonical book. The last of the additions to Daniel, Bel and the Dragon, further praises Daniel's wisdom. Daniel mocks the image of Bel and volunteers to show the king that it is dead and does not eat the offerings spread out before it. He does this by having the temple floor sprinkled with ashes just before the king seals the door shut for the night. During the night

the priests of Bel come to eat the food and are caught next morning by their footprints. But the king asks Daniel to worship a dragon in Babylon which is alive and eats. Daniel shows that it too is not worthy of devotion by feeding it a mixture of "fat, pitch, and hair" and as a consequence "the dragon burst in sunder." We may perhaps be pardoned for some scepticism about the reality of all this, although the moral of the story is good enough. The short prayer of Manasseh is only half a page long and is very general in its contents.

The First Book of the Maccabees is a very valuable and accurate history of the Jews from about 170 to 130 B.C. It tells of the vicious excesses of the Seleucids of Syria, and particularly of the terrible treatment the Jews received at the hand of Antiochus Epiphanes, that earlier Nero who finally desecrated the temple in 168 B.C. and methodically sought to exterminate the Jewish faith. The heroic record is given of the family of the Hasmoneans—the father Mattathias and his five sons who fought gloriously and won the independence of their people against overwhelming odds. Judas, called Maccabeus, was the greatest warrior among them. All met violent deaths either in battle or from treachery. Their work, however, was well done and resulted in prosperity for the Jews until later intrigues and foul dissensions prepared the way for the coming of the Romans a while before the time of Christ.

This book is of special interest because of its view of Scripture. In three places it mentions that it had been some time since there had been a prophet in the land and some difficult decisions were delayed until one should arise. The conclusion is that the nearly contemporary authors of apocryphal books were not recognized by their fellows as inspired.

II Maccabees traverses some of the same ground as the first book, but includes earlier matter. It is far inferior both in its history and its religion. It refers to the Law and the Prophets in 15:9 as a well known collection, just as the New Testament mentions it. In 2:13 he ascribes to Nehemiah the "founding of a library" and gathering the acts of kings and writings of prophets. The book itself does not claim to be Scripture, and the religious tone of the book is far from satisfactory. In 1:19ff it records a queer story of faithful priests who took fire from the altar at the beginning of the Babylonian captivity and hid it in a pit. At the end of the seventy years there was no fire left there, but only thick water which they sprinkled on the new altar and

when the sun came out it burst into flame. This is typical of the picture of the supernatural found in the book. It does not speak of true miracles, but rather of magic. Of more importance is the passage in 12:40-45, which tells how they went out to bury their dead after a battle. They found that all the dead had idols under their coats, and this explained why they had fallen in battle. But Judas Maccabees with the others prayed that this sin of the dead should be forgiven, and sent money to Jerusalem for a sin offering for these. It is said that he "made a reconciliation for the dead."

It should be added that this is no statement of purgatory, but is presented as a strong argument for the resurrection without apparent reflection on its meaning for the state of the dead. Of course the Catholics lay great stress upon this passage. Appearing where it does, we wonder!

It would be interesting for Protestants to pay more attention to these apocryphal books. There would result a better knowledge of the time between the Testaments, and an appreciation of the struggles of the Jews at that time. Besides this, however, we should be strengthened in our appreciation of the true canonical books in their contrast with these which are clearly shown to be uninspired, both by their history and their content.

THAT LAST WEEK

Even a casual reader of the Gospels is impressed with the large proportion of space devoted to one week, *the last week, of our Lord's life*. This is true of all four of the Gospels, though the fourth in many other respects is very different from the other three.

The traditional belief has been that the ministry of Jesus lasted about three years. All incidents and teachings in this ministry are very significant. But all the Gospel writers emphasize by the principle of proportion the incidents and teachings of *the last week*.

Of the sixteen chapters of Mark, *six* are devoted to this week; ten chapters to three years, and six to one week. In Matthew the proportion is *eight* out of twenty-eight, not so large a proportion, yet highly significant. In Luke, *six* out of twenty-four, or twenty-five per cent to one week and seventy-five per cent to three years. In John, *nine*, out of twenty, or nearly half are devoted to this one week; and in addition there is the twenty-first, post-resurrection chapter, or epilogue.

—DR. J. WILLARD KRECKER, in *The Evangelical-Messenger*.