

“WHAT ABOUT THE APOCRAPHAL BOOKS?”

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Sermon Texts: Colossians 2:6-8; Hebrews 13:7-9a; I Timothy 4:6-7

Introduction.

I have in my library two two-volume sets of books. One two-volume set contains many of the apocryphal and apocalyptic and pseudepigraphal writings from the OT times. The word pseudepigrapha means “false writings.” This refers to writings that circulated under false titles.

The second two-volume set contains many of the apocryphal writing from the NT times. The word apocrypha comes from the Greek word “apokruphos” and means “hidden” or “secret.”

And I also have a couple of Bibles that contain the Apocrypha in the OT such as the Roman Catholic Bible.

Strictly speaking the term Apocrypha refers to the 14 or 15 books from the intertestamental period between 300 BC and 100 AD that were included in some versions of the Bible. They are all of unknown origin and authorship and suspect authority. But the term can be used more broadly to include numerous writings from before Christ to well into the second century AD. During the early centuries of the Christian church various Gnostic, Jewish and secret sects produced dozens of gospels, acts, epistles, and apocalyptic writings.

None of the Apocryphal books were ever part of the Hebrew OT. But later they were included in the Greek translation of the OT called the Septuagint. A couple of centuries later when Jerome translated the Septuagint into Latin he included the Apocrypha, though he made it clear that he distinguished between the canonical Scriptures and these other books. But from that time on the Apocrypha stayed in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Bibles.

At the Council of Trent in Rome on April 8, 1546 the Roman Catholic Church in reaction against the Protestant Reformation declared:

“If any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema.”

We do not condemn the Apocryphal books nor do we say no one should read them. They are not evil or bad. We may read them and receive the same benefit from them we receive from any other ancient piece of literature.

Reading them gives insight into the life and times of Jews between the time of Malachi and Jesus. They contain great examples of heroism, faith, devotion and persistence. But they require discernment as they contain errors, inconsistencies and spurious details. There are also some crazy, impossible things and magic.

What the Belgic Confession Article 6 is contending is that the Apocryphal books are not authoritative, they are not the Word of God, they don't have divine inspiration. Let me give ten reasons supporting this position.

Ten reasons the Apocryphal books are not canonical and not in our Bible.

They were all written after prophecy ceased in the OT in Malachi 4:4-6.

The chief criteria for a book being included in the OT was that it was written by a known prophet of God. From Malachi to Christ there was no voice from heaven. None of the Apocryphal books are of a known origin or a known authorship. Furthermore, none of the Apocryphal books make any claims to the same kind of divine authority that the OT books do.

Several times in the Maccabees there are references to the fact that there were no prophets in the land during this time (see I Mac. 9:27).

I Maccabees 4:45-46 and 9:27 and 14:41 all attest to the cessation of God's voice through an inspired prophet after Malachi.

I Maccabees 14:41 states they were waiting for a faithful prophet to come.

II Maccabees 15:37-38 implies it is only the author's work and not inspired.

The Apocrypha were not written in Hebrew.

Hebrew was considered the prophetic language. None of the Apocrypha has any Hebrew original behind it. They are all of Greek origin.

The Jews of that day rejected the Apocryphal books as canonical.

The Apocryphal books came out of the Jewish context and culture, yet the Jewish people never regarded them as canonical

The great Jewish historian Josephus confirms the widespread knowledge that there had been no voice worthy of equal credit with the OT prophets since Malachi, there were no more words from God since 435BC when Malachi last spoke.

The Jews didn't include those books in their Hebrew OT and the Council of Jamnia in 90AD formally stated they were not canonical.

A more liberal sects of Jews included them in their Greek translation of the OT (Septuagint).

Christ made no statement to correct the judgment of the Jews on this matter.

In the time of Jesus there was no dispute between Jesus and the Jews over the extent of the canon. There was no dispute between the disciples of Jesus and the Jews as well.

None of the NT authors regarded them as Scripture.

Jesus referred only to the three divisions of the OT, the Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

Luke 24:44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

The Apocrypha are never directly quoted in the NT by Jesus or the Apostles.

Jesus and the NT authors quote from the OT about 300 times. They never once cite any other writing as having divine authority. There are about four quotes from extra Biblical sources but they are more for purposes of illustration, not proof, and they never begin with “God says...” or “It is written...” or “Scripture says...”

No book from the Apocrypha is mentioned in the Bible.

One question some people ask is what about Jude 1:14-15.

Jude 1:14-15 It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, 15 to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

Deuteronomy 33:1-2 This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the people of Israel before his death. 2 He said,
“The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us;
he shone forth from Mount Paran;
he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand.

Part of the quote in Jude is very similar to I Enoch 1:9 and 60:8. The quote is also an expansion on Deuteronomy 33:1-2.

I Enoch is not in the Apocrypha, but is one of the pseudepigraphal books. Enoch has never been considered canonical in the church and never accorded any divine authority. Jude is referencing a known writing from his time. His doing so doesn't imply in any way that I Enoch is revelation from God any more than Paul's quoting from a couple of Greek poets in Acts 17:28 implies that they were inspired by God or that everything else they wrote was true.

The Apocrypha contain many errors in fact and things evidently fantastic, beyond belief.

Tobit and Judith contain historical, chronological and geographical errors.

For instance, the book of Judith calls Nebuchadnezzar the king of Nineveh, though Nineveh was destroyed many years before Nebuchadnezzar's time.

The book of Wisdom says the world was created out of pre-existing matter (11:17).

The book Bel and the Dragon has a story of Daniel killing a dragon with indigestible cake.

They do not establish or prove any doctrine necessary to our faith.

In fact they contain teachings that conflict with and are contrary to the Biblical faith.

Ecclesiasticus and Tobit teach salvation by works through giving alms for the atonement of sin.

II Maccabees 12:43-45 speaks of prayers for the dead which gave rise to the doctrine of purgatory.

Baruch also says God hears prayers for the dead (3:4).

Most of the early church fathers rejected them.

The early Christians didn't acknowledge them as having divine authority. Most of the early fathers made a distinction between the canonical books and the other uninspired writings. Even Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate did not consider them genuine.

Several early councils of the early church didn't accept them.

The Reformers would print the Apocrypha at the back of the Bible in a separate section with a disclaimer saying they were not canonical and should not be read publicly in the congregation.

Even the Roman Catholic Church debated the issue up to the time of the Council of Trent in 1546.

Before the Reformation numerous Roman Catholic scholars questioned the authority of the Apocrypha. But during the Reformation when many unbiblical doctrines that had crept into the church were being questioned and challenged the Roman Catholics became defensive.

The Roman Catholic leaders in Rome at its famous fourth session of the Council of Trent on April 8, 1546, pronounced the Apocrypha to be part of the canon of Scripture.

One of the reasons the Roman Catholic church defended the Apocryphal books so strongly was that it's in those books that they get support for their doctrine of purgatory and prayers for the dead and salvation by works.

Application and Conclusion.

The Apocryphal books are human words, not God's Word. They are not God-breathed like the Scriptures are. They never were part of the OT canon and they should not be included as part of the Bible. They have no binding or absolute authority as the Scriptures do.

There are no lost books of the Bible. We can have absolute confidence that what God inspired He also safeguarded for our blessing and benefit. Every single word God wanted in His Bible is in His Bible. Nothing is lost or missing. There are no accidents or mistakes. And there is nothing else out there, no matter how good, that is equal to the Word of God.

But Satan never rests from his lies. He never rests from trying to persuade the saints that the Bible is full of inconsistencies, contradictions and fallacies, that the Bible isn't true. He stirs up all manner of pagans and heretics to write lies.

Books like the Passover Plot the discredit the crucifixion, and The Lost Books of the Bible that make us think our Bible isn't trustworthy and The Da Vinci Code that suggests Jesus was married to Mary.

There has been no end to false prophets and false teachers and there will be no end. They abound today.

Listen to no one who says we need the Bible plus something else to understand truth. Cults do this all the time. The Mormons add the Book of Mormon. The Jehovah's Witnesses have their own translation called the New World Translation of the Scriptures.

The Christian Science add the writings of Mary Baker Eddy.

The Seventh Day Adventists add the writings of Ellen White.

The Cloverdale Bibleway in Surrey, BC adds the teachings of their prophet William Branham.

Paul warned the Christians of his day of the false prophets and apostles. He did that because he loved the sheep and cared about them and did what a good shepherd would do, he tried to protect the sheep from the wolves in sheep's clothing.

Paul named names:

I Timothy 1:19-20 ... holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, 20 among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

II Timothy 2:16-18 But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

II Timothy 4:14-15 Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. 15 Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

Titus 1:11, 13-14 They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. ... 13 ... Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

Can you recognize the wolves in sheep's clothing today? Are you discerning? Would I be a good shepherd if I named some of the false teachers? Would it offend you if I named names?

Many of the people on TBN. Paul and Jan Crouch, Joel Olsteen, Benny Hinn, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, John Hagee, Fred Price, Jack Van Impe, Todd Bentley, Joyce Meyer, Juanita Bynum, Paula White, Creflo Dollar, Jessie Duplantis, Eddie Long, TD Jakes, Marilyn Hickey, Robert Schuller, Harold Camping, Rob Bell, Brian McLaren

You can't just know the difference between true and false and right and wrong. You have to know the difference between right and sort of right or almost right.

The Apocrypha doesn't teach Biblical doctrine and neither do these false teachers.

Galatians 1:8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

There are no lost books of the Bible but what we are in danger of losing is the Bible itself. If we neglect the Scriptures there will be a famine or drought in our land as there was in the time of Amos.

Amos 8:11-12 “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord God,
“when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the Lord.

12 They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east;
they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.

Mega-churches and emergent churches and post-modern churches today are using the Scriptures less and less, turning to contemporary writings, best-selling books, movies and videos. Preaching today is more about entertainment than about truth and grace. In the pursuit of being relevant they are becoming irrelevant.

The only truly relevant things in the universe are that which is from God and eternal. Everything else will burn up in the end.

I Peter 1:23-25 ... you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for

“All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers, and the flower falls,

25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

God’s revelation in His Holy Word is true and perfect, without error. God’s Word is truth and we can trust it and we don’t have to apologize for it.

May we be faithful to the Word of God once delivered to the saints and preserved for us. May we attend to the faithful preaching and teaching of the Word of God. May we read it, memorize it, meditate on it, live according to it and above all love it.