

"CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?"

A. Prayer

B. INTRODUCTION- How many books in the Bible?

1. The Bible consists of 66 books...
 - a. The Older Testament contains 39
 - b. The New Testament contains 27
2. Why these 66 books and not others...?
 - a. What about the additional books in Catholic versions of the Old Testament?
 - b. What about the so-called "lost books of the Bible?"
3. Such questions pertain to the canonicity of the Bible...
 - a. The word "canon" means a rule or standard for anything
 - b. For early Christians, it meant the rule of faith, what is accepted as authoritative Scripture
4. The inclusion of any book into the canon follows two basic steps...
 - a. Inspiration by God - God determined the canon by authoring it
 - b. Recognition by men - Man recognized what God revealed and accepted it as the canon
 - c. *"A book is not the Word of God because it was accepted by the people; it was accepted by the people because it was the Word of God."*

C. THE HEBREW CANON

1. RECOGNIZED BY JESUS...

- a. Anyone who accepts the authority of Jesus will accept what He acknowledged as Scripture
- b. He pointed people to the Scriptures - cf. John 5:39
- c. He spoke of the faithfulness of Scripture - cf. John 10:35
- d. Jesus recognized three major divisions of the OT, which included 39 books - cf. Lk 24:44
 - (1) The Law (Torah) - the five books of Moses (Genesis -Deuteronomy)
 - (2) The Prophets (Nebhiim) - "the former prophets" (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and "the latter prophets" (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and a book containing the 12 minor prophets).
 - (3) The Writings (Kethubhim) - three poetical books (Psalms, Proverbs, and Job), five rolls (the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, and Ecclesiastes), and several historical books (Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles)
- e. Jesus followed the arrangement of the OT books that was customary among the Jews...we see this from His comments in Lk. 11:49-51
 - (1) There He speaks of the persecution of the prophets from the murder of Abel (Gen 4:8) to the slaying of Zechariah (2 Ch. 24:20,21)
 - (2) This arrangement is the one that is followed in the Hebrew OT today also...
- f. Jesus does not quote from every book of the Old Testament, but He does quote from all three of the main divisions, showing that He accepted the entire Old Testament as canonical." - Wilbert R. Gawrisch (How The Canonicity Of The Bible Was Established)

2. RECOGNIZED BY THE APOSTLES...

- a. Paul acknowledged the Hebrew canon
 - (1) As written for our learning - Ro 15:4
 - (2) As written for our admonition - 1 Co 10:11
 - (3) As profitable for doctrine, etc.- 2 Ti 3:14-17
- b. The apostles frequently quoted from those books in the Hebrew canon
 - (1) In their gospels - e.g., Mt 1:22-23; 2:17-18; Jn 12:37-41
 - (2) In their efforts to evangelize - e.g., Ac 17:2-3
 - (3) In their epistles - e.g., Ro 3:9-10; 4:3; 1 Pe 2:6
- 3. It is evident that Jesus and His apostles accepted the authority (canon) of the Hebrew Scriptures which include the 39 books in the Old Testament. But what of the extra books found in the Catholic Old Testament...?

D. THE OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

1. THE APOCRYPHA DESCRIBED...

- a. These books were written after Malachi (400 B.C), prior to the coming of Jesus
- b. These books include:
 - (1) The Wisdom of Solomon (30 B.C.), known as the Book of Wisdom
 - (2) Ecclesiasticus (132 B.C.), also known as Sirach
 - (3) Tobit (200 B.C.)
 - (4) Judith (150 B.C.)
 - (5) 1 Maccabees (110 B.C.)
 - (6) 2 Maccabees (110 B.C.)
 - (7) Prayer of Azariah (100 B.C.) placed at Daniel 3:24-90
 - (8) Susanna (100 B.C.) placed at Daniel 13
 - (9) Bel and the Dragon (100 B.C.), placed at Daniel 14
 - (10) Baruch (150-50 B.C.), placed at Baruch 1-5
 - (11) Letter of Jeremiah (300-100 B.C.) placed at Baruch 6
 - (12) Additions to Esther (140-130 B.C.), placed at Esther 10:4-16:24
 - (13) 1 Esdras (150-100 B.C.), also known as 3 Esdras
 - (14) 2 Esdras (150-100 B.C.), known as 4 Esdras
 - (15) Prayer of Manasseh (100 B.C.)

2. THE APOCRYPHA ACCEPTED...

- a. The Council of Trent accepted the Old Testament Apocrypha as canonical in 1546
- b. With the exception of 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh
- c. While there are 15 total books in the Apocrypha, Roman Catholic Bibles count only 11 because they combine the Letter of Jeremiah with Baruch and omit 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh
- d. The teaching of 2 Esdras 7:105 teaches opposition to prayer for the dead may have led to its exclusion by the Roman Catholic Church
- e. Reasons suggested for the Old Testament Apocrypha as Scripture include:
 - (1) Some church fathers seem to have accepted these books (Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria)...usually they were referring to historical accounts written in them and other journals not necessarily accepting them as canon altogether.
 - (2) The Syriac church accepted them in the fourth century
 - (3) The Eastern Orthodox church accepts them
 - (4) The Roman Catholic Church proclaimed them as canonical in 1546

- (5) The Apocrypha was included in Protestant Bibles, including the original KJV of 1611
- (6) Some have been found among other OT books with the Dead Sea Scrolls

3. THE APOCRYPHA REJECTED...

- a. Jesus and His apostles did not accept these books as part of the Scripture
 - (1) There are no NT references to any of the Apocrypha as being authoritative
 - (2) The NT writers quote not one part of the Apocrypha
- b. Judaism never accepted these books as part of the Scriptures
 - (1) Ancient Jewish leaders specifically rejected the Apocrypha (Josephus, Philo)
 - (2) While included in the Septuagint (Gr. OT), they were never accepted as canonical
 - (3) The New American Bible, the new Catholic translation, in a footnote to the Story of Susanna and Bel and the Dragon frankly admits: "They are excluded from the Jewish canon of Scripture..."
- c. While a few early church leaders appear to take some material from them, most were opposed to the inclusion of the Apocrypha into the canon of Scripture (Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Origen)
- d. The Apocrypha itself recognizes our OT canon as a distinct twenty-four books, which corresponds to the Hebrew Bible as it is known today.
 - (1) In 2 Esd 14:44-48, 70 books are distinguished from 94, leaving 24, or the exact number of the Hebrew canon, which became our 39 OT books
 - (2) Not only does the Apocrypha not claim inspiration for itself, it actually disclaims it when 1 Mac 9:27 describes an existing cessation of prophecy.
- e. They include unbiblical teaching, such as praying for the dead(2 Mac 12:46).
- f. They contain demonstrable errors; for example:
 - (1) Tobit was supposedly alive when Jeroboam led his revolt (931 B.C.)
 - (2) He was still living at the time of the Assyrian captivity (722 B.C.)
 - (3) Yet the Book of Tobit says he lived only 158 years - Tobit 1:3-5; 14:11
- g. The first official adoption of the Apocrypha by the Roman Catholic Church came at the Council of Trent in 1546, over 1,500 years after the books were written.
- h. When the Apocrypha appeared in Protestant Bibles:
 - (1) It was normally placed in a separate section since it was not considered of equal authority
 - (2) Luther included the Apocrypha in his German Bible, but he introduced them with the comment, "*These are books that are not to be considered the same as Holy Scripture, and yet are useful and good to read.*"
- i. No Greek manuscript contains the exact collection of the books of the Apocrypha as accepted by the Council of Trent
- j. While the Syrian church accepted the Apocrypha in the fourth century, the translation of the Bible into Syrian in the second century A.D. did not include it
- k. The Qumran community had hundreds of books in its library beyond the Scriptures:

- (1) While the library had some of the Apocrypha, it did not have commentaries on the Apocrypha it did with OT books
- (2) The OT books had special script and parchment, unlike the Apocrypha
- (3) Qumran clearly considered the Apocrypha as different from Scripture

4. CONCLUSION

- a. While the Apocrypha of the OT may be of historical value and in some ways supplement God's truth, they are not canonical
- b. Those who accept the authority of Jesus and His apostles will be content with those books found in the Hebrew OT
- c. The issue might be regarded as irrelevant...
 - (1) The Apocrypha relates to the Old Testament
 - (2) Christians are under the New Covenant of Christ- Ro 7:6; Ga 5:4
 - (3) Therefore we are to continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine- cf. Acts 2:42

E. THE RECOGNITION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

1. THE EARLY CHURCH ADOPTED APOSTOLIC WRITINGS AS CANONICAL...

- a. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine - Ac 2:42; cf. 2 Peter 3:2; Jude 17
- b. They received their words as the Word of God - 1 Th 2:13; cf. 1 Co 14:37
- c. Paul quoted the gospel of Luke as Scripture - 1 Ti 5:18; cf. Lk 10:7
- d. Paul's letters were designed to be circulated among the churches - Col. 4:16
- e. Peter equated Paul's letters with "Scripture" - 2 Peter 3:15-16
- f. The church accepted the apostles' writings because to accept their teaching was to accept Jesus Himself - cf. Jn 13:20

2. THE CRITERIA FOR ACCEPTING A BOOK AS CANONICAL...

- a. Written by an apostle (e.g., Matthew, John, Paul, Peter)
- b. Written by a close associate of an apostle (Mark, Luke, James, Jude)
- c. Thus the writing had to be "apostolic" in addition to showing evidence of inspiration

3. WHEN AN APOSTOLIC WRITING WAS CONSIDERED AS SCRIPTURE...

- a. It was read publicly - e.g., 1 Th 5:27
- b. It was circulated widely - e.g., Co 4:16; Re 1:11
- c. Copies of it were collected - e.g., 2 Peter 3:15-16
- d. It was often quoted in other writings - e.g., 1 Ti 5:18

4. BOOKS ACCEPTED AS CANONICAL BY ALL CHRISTIANS...

- a. Include the 27 books of our New Testament
- b. Most books were acknowledged from the very beginning
- c. Seven books (Hebrews, James, 2nd Peter, 2nd & 3rd John, Jude, Revelation) were disputed by some at first, but eventually accepted as authentic and apostolic
- d. Thus all professing Christians accept the 27 books of the New Testament as canonical.
- e. But what about other books supposedly written by or about the apostles? Why are they not accepted?

F. THE PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION...

- a. Otherwise called "false writings"
- b. There are over 280 of these writings
- c. More than 50 are accounts of Christ
- d. The more well-known of these are:
 - (1) The Gospel of Thomas
 - (2) The Gospel of Peter
 - (3) The Gospel of Hebrews
 - (4) The Protevangelium of James
- e. Their value is limited, but they do illustrate:
 - (1) Some of the ascetic and Gnostic attitudes opposed by the apostles
 - (2) The popular desire at that time for information beyond the Scriptures
 - (3) The tendency to glorify Christianity by fraudulent means

2. REASONS FOR REJECTION...

- a. They were never considered canonical by respectable leaders
- b. Mainly produced by heretical groups
- c. Containing exaggerated and mythical religious folklore
- d. Most known only through citation or quotation by another author
- e. Thus their historical connection to the apostles is suspect

G. THE NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA- Similar to the Pseudepigrapha

1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION...

- a. Not to be confused with the OT Apocrypha
- b. These were books written after the time of Christ
 - (1) Which were accepted at first by some in the church
 - (2) Which appeared at times in collections and translations of Scripture
 - (3) They had acceptance in some areas for a temporary period of time
 - (4) They never enjoyed acceptance by the Church in general

2. The NT Apocrypha include:

- a. The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (70-79 A.D.)
- b. The Epistle to the Corinthians (96 A.D.)
- c. The Ancient Homily, also known as the Second Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians (120-140 A.D.)
- d. The Shepherd of Hermas (115-140 A.D.)
- e. The Didache, also known as the Teaching of the Twelve (100-120 A.D.)
- f. The Apocalypse of Peter (150 A.D.)
- g. The Acts of Paul and Thecla (170 A.D.)
- h. The Gospel According to the Hebrews (65-100 A.D.)
- i. The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians (108 A.D.)
- j. The Seven Epistles of Ignatius (110 A.D.)

3. These are more valuable than the Pseudepigrapha

- (1) They provide early documentation of the existence of NT books
- (2) They fill in the gap between the teaching of the apostles and the writings of the early church of the third and fourth centuries
- (3) They provide clues to the practices, policies and future teachings of the church

4. REASONS FOR REJECTION...

- a. They never enjoyed more than a temporary and local recognition
- b. Those that advocated their acceptance considered them at best to be "semi-canonical"
- c. No major church council or New Testament collection included them as inspired books
- d. The reason they had some acceptance was because they wrongly attached themselves to references in canonical books (cf. Col. 4:16) or alleged apostolic authorship (e.g. the Acts of Paul)

H. What about interpretation of the Bible? *"That's your interpretation!"*

- 1. Disagreement is nothing new among men and it is not just when the Bible is concerned.
 - a. Think of History- rewriting of political events, purposes for wars, reinterpreting ancient events with modern thinking...
 - b. Man's personal bias influences how he looks at any event. Sin blurs vision. Sin clogs our ears to truth.
- 2. How to respond to *"that your interpretation."*
 - a. Investigate for yourself...never completely depend on the pastor, elder, or other Christians. Be good "Bereans"- Acts 17:11.
 - b. Investigate other scholars and their works...not just contemporary. You will find remarkable agreement between the men of faith like; Augustine, Anselm, Luther, Calvin, Edwards and Spurgeon.
 - c. The Bible interprets itself better than any man can. WCF 1:9- *"The infallible standard for interpretation of the Bible is the Bible itself. And so any question about the true and complete sense of a passage in the Bible (which is a unified whole) can be answered by reference to other passages which speak more plainly."* (John 5:46; Acts 15:15; II Peter 1:20-21)
 - d. The Reformation gave back to each believer the right and responsibility of interpretation. (The Catholic Church said mere men could not handle the secret things of God because they were untrained and didn't have the sanction of the infallible Church. It is interesting at the time these claims were made as much as 70% of the Catholic priests were virtually illiterate.) the Reformers made the point that all believers are priests and therefore are able to handle the Word of God because of the existence of the Spirit within believers. Along with the *"right"* to interpret Scripture comes the *"responsibility"* to interpret it properly. Believers are free to discover the truths of Scripture, but they are not free to fabricate their own truth.
 - e. There is only one correct interpretation- only one truth- not many truths...many applications of the Word.