

THE CANONICITY OF THE BIBLE

Evangelicals believe that not only is the original text of the Bible faithfully and accurately reproduced in the standard English translations, but neither are there books missing from the original Bible. (This is true of both Old and New Testaments.) Evangelicals also hold that the canon (or normative collection) of Scripture, finished by the end of the first century, is closed; that is, we possess in the sixty-six books of the Bible all that God intended to be there, from both Old and New Testament times. Further, we maintain that God never intended any more books to be added to the Bible.

THE COMMON CANON

The word *canon* means rule or norm, and as used of the Bible it means which books are the normative books for Christian faith and practice. Those considered canonical are the ones held to be inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16); they were the books written by the prophets or the apostles (2 Peter 1:20–21; Eph. 2:20; 2 Peter 3:15–17). Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism agree over the common Old Testament (Jewish) canon, which consists of thirty-nine books (numbered twenty-four in Jewish Bibles). This can be called the *common canon*.

However, a crucial difference in Christendom emerges over eleven pieces of Old Testament literature (seven books and four parts of books) that the Roman Catholic Church “infallibly” pronounced to be part of the Canon in A.D. 1546 at the Council of Trent. These books are known by Protestants as the Apocrypha and by Catholics as the deuterocanonical (lit: “second canon”) books. After enumerating the books (see below), including the eleven apocryphal books, the Council of Trent stated,

If anyone, however, should not accept the said books as sacred and canonical, entire with all their parts ... and if both knowingly and deliberately he should condemn the aforesaid tradition let him be anathema [forever cursed]. (Denzinger, *SCD*, number 784.) Vatican II repeats the same language affirming the Apocrypha to be part of the inspired Word of God.

THE DEBATE ABOUT THE APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

Since the time of the Reformation, there has been a serious debate about whether a collection of books known as the Apocrypha belongs in the Bible. Jews and Protestants unanimously reject them as noncanonical, and Roman Catholics pronounced them canonical at the Council of Trent (1546).

The Names of the Apocryphal Books:

The Apocrypha includes eleven books.¹ These include all the fourteen (or fifteen) books in the Protestant Apocrypha, minus the Prayer of Manasseh and 1 and 2 Esdras (called 3 and 4 Esdras by Roman Catholics, since the Protestant Ezra and Nehemiah are called 1 and 2 Esdras by Catholics).

	<i>Revised Standard Version—Apocrypha</i>	<i>New American Bible</i>
1.	The Wisdom of Solomon (c. 30 B.C.)	Book of Wisdom
2.	Ecclesiasticus (<i>Sirach</i> , 132 B.C.)	Sirach
3.	Tobit (c. 200 B.C.)	Tobit
4.	Judith (c. 150 B.C.)	Judith
5.	1 Esdras (c. 150–100 B.C.)	3 Esdras*
6.	1 Maccabees (c. 110 B.C.)	1 Maccabees
7.	2 Maccabees (c. 110–70 B.C.)	2 Maccabees
8.	Baruch (c. 150–50 B.C.)	Baruch 1–5
9.	Letter of Jeremiah (c. 300–100 B.C.)	Baruch 6
10.	2 Esdras (c. A.D. 100)	4 Esdras*
11.	Additions to Esther (140–130 B.C.)	Esther 10:4–16:24
12.	Prayer of Azariah (first century B.C.)	Daniel 3:24–90 (Song of Three Young Men)
13.	Susanna (second or first century B.C.)	Daniel 13
14.	Bel and the Dragon (c. 100 B.C.)	Daniel 14
15.	Prayer of Manasseh (2nd–1st century B.C.)	Prayer of Manasseh*

Although the Roman Catholic canon has eleven more books than the Protestant Bible, only seven extra books appear in the table of contents of Roman Catholic Bibles (e.g., *The New American Bible*), making the total forty-six.² The four books or pieces of literature that do not appear in the table of contents are the Additions to Esther, added at the end of the book of Esther (Esther 10:4f.); the Prayer of Azariah, inserted between the Hebrew Daniel 3:23 and 24 (making it Daniel 3:24–90 in Roman Catholic Bibles); Susanna, placed at the end of the twelfth chapter in the

¹ Or twelve books, depending on whether Baruch (1–6) is split into two books, consisting of Baruch 1–5 and the Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch 6).

* These books were rejected by the Council of Trent.

² The thirty-nine in the Protestant and Jewish Old Testament, plus seven more complete books.

Protestant and Jewish book of Daniel (as chapter 13); and Bel and the Dragon (chapter 14 of Daniel).

Reasons Advanced for Accepting the Apocrypha

The larger canon is sometimes referred to as the “Alexandrian canon,” as opposed to the “Palestinian canon” (which does not contain the Apocrypha) because the extra books are alleged to have been a part of the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint, or “Seventy” [LXX]), which originated in Alexandria, Egypt, beginning the third century B.C. The reasons generally advanced in favor of this broader Alexandrian list accepted by Roman Catholics, which includes the apocryphal books, are as follows:³

- (1) The New Testament reflects the thought of the Apocrypha, and even refers to events contained in them (cf. Heb. 11:35 with 2 Macc. 7, 12).
- (2) The New Testament quotes mostly from the Greek Old Testament (LXX), which contained the Apocrypha. This gives tacit approval of the whole text, including the Apocrypha.
- (3) Some of the early church fathers quoted and used the Apocrypha as Scripture in public worship.
- (4) Some of the early church fathers—for example, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria—accepted all of the books of the Apocrypha as canonical.
- (5) Early Christian catacomb scenes depict episodes from the Apocrypha, showing that they were part of the early Christian’s religious life. If not for their inspiration, this at least reveals a great regard for the Apocrypha.
- (6) The great Greek manuscripts interpose the Apocrypha among the Old Testament books. This reveals that they were part of the Jewish-Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX).
- (7) Several early church councils accepted the Apocrypha: for instance, the Council of Rome (a.d. 382), the Council of Hippo (393), and the Council of Carthage (397).
- (8) The Eastern Orthodox Church accepts the Apocrypha, revealing that they are a common Christian belief, not simply a Catholic dogma.
- (9) The Roman Catholic Church proclaimed the Apocrypha canonical at the Council of Trent (1546). This was in accord with pronouncements at early Councils (see point 7 above) as well as the Council of Florence not long before the Reformation (c. 1442).

³ The discussion here follows that in Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, chapter 15.

- (10) The apocryphal books continued in the Protestant Bible as late as the nineteenth century. This indicates that even Protestants accepted the Apocrypha until very recently.
- (11) Some apocryphal books written in Hebrew have been found among canonical Old Testament books in the Dead Sea community at Qumran. This shows that they were originally part of the Hebrew Canon.

THE PROTESTANT VIEW OF THE APOCRYPHA

In response to the alleged support for considering the apocryphal books as canonical, we will do two things. *First*, we will respond to each of the Roman Catholic arguments in favor of the Apocrypha, showing that they fail to prove their point. *Second*, we will build a positive case in favor of the Jewish and Protestant canons, which exclude the apocryphal books.

A Response to Catholic Arguments in Favor of the Apocrypha

Our response will follow the order of the arguments given by Roman Catholics discussed above, corresponding point by point.

(1) There may be New Testament allusions to the Apocrypha, but there are no clear New Testament quotations from them—*not once* is there a definite quotation from any apocryphal book accepted by the Roman Catholic Church. There are, of course, allusions to pseudepigraphal⁴ works that are rejected by Roman Catholics as well as Protestants, such as the Book of Enoch (Jude 14–15) and the Bodily Assumption of Moses (Jude 9). There are also citations from pagan poets and philosophers (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12; 1 Cor. 15:33), but none of these are cited as Scripture. The New Testament simply refers to a truth contained in these books, which otherwise may (and do) contain errors. *Roman Catholics agree*. Further, the New Testament never refers to any of the fourteen (or fifteen) apocryphal books as authoritative or canonical; for example, they are never cited with introductory phrases like “thus says the Lord” or “as it is written” or “the Scriptures say,” such as are found when canonical books are quoted.

(2) The fact that the New Testament often quotes from the Greek Old Testament in no way proves that the apocryphal books contained in Greek manuscripts of the Old Testament are inspired. First of all, it is not certain that the Greek Old Testament (LXX) of the first century A.D.

⁴ The “Pseudepigraphica” are “false writings.” Neither Roman Catholics nor Protestants accept them as inspired.

contained the Apocrypha; the earliest Greek manuscripts that include these books date from the fourth century A.D. Further, even if these books were in the LXX of the apostolic era, Jesus and the apostles never once quoted them, although they are supposed to have been included in the very version of the Old Testament (the LXX) that they usually cited. Finally, even the notes in the current Roman Catholic Bible (NAB) make the revealing admission that the Apocrypha are “religious books used by both Jews and Christians which were not included in the collection of inspired writings.” Instead, they “were introduced rather late into the collection of the Bible. Catholics call them ‘deutero-canonical’ (second canon) books” (see *St. Joseph Edition of The New American Bible*, 413).

(3) Citations by the church fathers in support of the canonicity of the Apocrypha are selective and misleading. While some Fathers seemed to accept their inspiration, other Fathers used them only for devotional or homiletical (preaching) purposes but did not accept them as canonical. As a recent authority on the Apocrypha, Roger Beckwith observes,

When one examines the passages in the early Fathers which are supposed to establish the canonicity of the Apocrypha, one finds that some of them are taken from the alternative Greek text of Ezra (1 Esdras) or from additions or appendices to Daniel, Jeremiah or some other canonical book, which ... are not really relevant; that others of them are not quotations from the Apocrypha at all; and that, of those which are, many do not give any indication that the book is regarded as Scripture. (*OTCNTC*, 387.)

For instance, the *Epistle of Barnabas* 6.7 and Tertullian (see, *Against Marcion* 3.22.5, are not quoting [Wisd. 2:12](#) but [Isa. 3:10](#) LXX, and Tertullian, *On the Soul* 15, is not quoting [Wisd. 1:6](#) but [Ps. 139:23](#), as a comparison of the passages shows. Similarly, Justin Martyr (see), *Dialogue with Trypho* 129, is quite clearly not quoting Wisdom but [Prov. 8:21–5](#) LXX. The fact that he calls Proverbs “Wisdom” is in accordance with the common nomenclature of the earlier Fathers (*ibid.*, 427).

So the Roman Catholic appeal to the use of the Apocrypha is without basis. In many cases the Fathers were not claiming divine authority for one or more of the eleven books canonized by the Council of Trent; rather, they were either citing a book that was part of the Hebrew canon or they were not quoting the Apocryphal books as Scripture.⁵

(4) Although some individuals in the early church had a high esteem for the Apocrypha, there were many individuals who vehemently opposed it. For example,

⁵ The Bible quotes many such works as well, but this does not claim they are God-breathed and thus canonical.

Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Origen, and the great Roman Catholic biblical scholar and translator of the Latin Vulgate, Jerome, all opposed the Apocrypha. Even the early Syrian church did not accept the Apocrypha; in the second century A.D. the Syrian Bible (Peshitta) did not contain it (Geisler and Nix, *GI/B*, chapters 27–28).

(5) As even many Catholic scholars will admit, scenes from the catacombs do not prove the canonicity of the books whose events they depict. Such scenes indicate little more than the religious significance that the portrayed events had for early Christians; at best, they show only a respect for the books containing these events, not a recognition that they are inspired.

(6) None of the great Greek manuscripts contains all of the apocryphal books. In fact, only four—Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, and Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)—are found in all of them, and the oldest manuscripts totally exclude the books of the Maccabees. Yet Catholics appeal to these manuscripts for proof of their deutero-canonical books that include the Apocrypha. What is more, no Greek manuscript has the same list of apocryphal books accepted by the Council of Trent (Beckwith, *OTCNTC*, 194, 382–83).

(7) There are some important reasons why citing these church councils does not prove the Apocrypha belonged in the canon of the church.

First, these were only local councils, not binding on the whole church, and local councils have often erred in their decisions and have been later overruled by the universal church. Some Catholic apologists do argue that even though a council was not ecumenical, its results can be binding if confirmed by a pope; however, they acknowledge that there is no infallible way to know which statements by popes are infallible and which are not. Indeed, these apologists admit that other statements by popes were even heretical, such as the teaching of the monothelite heresy⁶ by Pope Honorius I.

Second, these books were not part of the Christian (New Testament period) writings and, hence, they were not under the province of the Christian church to decide. They were the province of the Jewish community, which wrote them and which had centuries before rejected them as part of the Canon.

Third, the books accepted by these Christian councils may not have been the same ones in each case; hence, they cannot be used as proof of the exact canon later proclaimed by the Roman Catholic church (at Trent).

Fourth, the local councils of Hippo and Carthage in North Africa were influenced by Augustine, who is the most significant antiquated voice that accepted the same apocryphal books later canonized by the Council of Trent.

⁶ The view that there was only one will in Christ, not both a divine will and a human will as Jesus manifested (cf. Matt. 26:39).

However, Augustine's position is ill-founded for several reasons:

A. His contemporary, Jerome, a greater biblical authority than Augustine, rejected the Apocrypha (see page 526).

B. Augustine himself recognized that the Jews did not accept these books as part of their canon (CG, 19.36–38).

C. Augustine erroneously reasoned that these books should be in the Bible because of their mention "of extreme and wonderful suffering of certain martyrs" (ibid., 18.36). But on that ground *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* should also be in the Canon.

D. Augustine was inconsistent, since he rejected books not written by prophets, yet he accepted a book that appears to deny being prophetic (1 Mac. 9:27).

E. Augustine's mistaken acceptance of the Apocrypha seems to be connected with his mistaken belief in the inspiration of the Septuagint (LXX), whose later Greek manuscripts contained them. However, Augustine's later acknowledgment of the superiority of Jerome's Hebrew text over the Septuagint's Greek text should have led him to accept the superiority of Jerome's Hebrew canon as well, which did not have the Apocrypha.

The later Council of Rome (A.D. 382), which accepted apocryphal books, did not list the same books accepted by Hippo and Carthage; it does not list Baruch, thus listing only six, not seven, of the apocryphal books later pronounced canonical by the Roman Catholic Church. Even Trent lists Baruch as a separate book (Denzinger, SCD, number 84).

(8) The Greek Orthodox Church has not always accepted the Apocrypha, nor is its present position unequivocal. At the synods of Constantinople (A.D. 1638), Jaffa (1642), and Jerusalem (1672), these books were declared canonical. But even as late as 1839 their Larger Catechism expressly omitted the Apocrypha on the grounds that its books did not exist in the Hebrew Bible.

(9) At the Council of Trent the infallible proclamation was made accepting the Apocrypha as part of the inspired Word of God. Some Catholic scholars claim that the earlier Council of Florence (1442) made the same pronouncement; however, this was not infallible and it does not have any real basis in Jewish history, the New Testament, or in early Christian history. Unfortunately, the "infallible" decision at Trent came a millennium and a half after the books were written and in an obvious polemic against Protestantism and the Reformation. Even before Martin Luther, the Council of Florence had proclaimed the Apocrypha inspired, which helped to bolster the doctrine of purgatory that had already blossomed in Catholicism. However, the manifestations of this belief in the sale of indulgences came to full bloom in Luther's day, and Trent's proclamation of the Apocrypha was a clear reaction against Luther's teaching. Furthermore, the

official addition of books that support prayers for the dead is highly suspect, coming as it did only a few years after Luther protested against this very doctrine. The decision of the Council of Trent has all the appearance of an attempt to provide infallible support for Roman Catholic doctrines that lack any real biblical basis.

(10) Apocryphal books appeared in Protestant Bibles prior to the Council of Trent, and they were generally placed in a separate section because they were not considered of equal authority. While Anglicans and some other non-Roman Catholic groups had a high regard for the inspirational and historical value of the Apocrypha, they did not consider it inspired and of equal authority with Scripture. Even Roman Catholic scholars through the Reformation period made the distinction between the Apocrypha and the Canon. Cardinal Ximenes made this distinction in his *Complutensian Polyglot* (A.D. 1514–1517) on the very eve of the Reformation; Cardinal Cajetan, who later opposed Luther at Augsburg in 1518, published a *Commentary on All the Authentic Historical Books of the Old Testament* (1532) many years after the Reformation began. Neither did this contain the Apocrypha. Luther spoke against the Apocrypha in 1543, placing its books at the back of his Bible (Metzger, *IA*, 181f.).

(11) The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran included not only the community's Bible (the Old Testament) but also their library, with fragments of hundreds of different books. Among these were some Old Testament apocryphal books, but the fact that no commentaries were found on an apocryphal book and that only canonical books, not the Apocrypha, were found in the special parchment and script, indicates that the apocryphal books were not viewed as canonical by the Qumran community. Menahem Mansoor lists the following fragments of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: Tobit, in Hebrew and Aramaic; Enoch, in Aramaic; Jubilees, in Hebrew; The Testament of Levi and Naphtali, in Aramaic; apocryphal Daniel literature, in Hebrew and Aramaic; and the Psalms of Joshua (*DSS*, 203). Millar Burrows, noted scholar on the Dead Sea Scrolls, concluded, "There is no reason to think that any of these works were venerated as Sacred Scripture" (*MLDSS*, 178).

At best, all that the arguments urged in favor of the canonicity of the apocryphal books prove is that various apocryphal books were given varied degrees of esteem by different persons within the Christian church, usually falling short of a statement of canonicity. Only after Augustine and the local councils he dominated mistakenly pronounced them inspired, did they gain wider usage and eventual "infallible" acceptance by the Roman Catholic Church at Trent. This falls far short of the kind of initial, continual, and full recognition of the canonical books of the Protestant Old Testament and Jewish Torah (which exclude the Apocrypha) by the Christian church.

This is but another example of how the teaching Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church proclaims infallible one tradition to the neglect of strong evidence in favor of an opposing tradition because it supports a doctrine that lacks any substantial support in the canonical books. The real (*proto*) canonical books were received *immediately* by the people of God into the growing canon of Scripture (Geisler and Nix, *GIB*, chapter 13). The *subsequent* debate was by those who were not in a position, as was the immediate audience, to know whether they were from an accredited apostle or prophet. Hence, this subsequent debate over the antilegomena⁷ was directly over its *authenticity*, not canonicity. These books were *already* in the Canon; what some individuals in subsequent generations questioned was whether they rightfully belonged there. Eventually, all of the antilegomena were retained in the Canon, which is not true of the Apocrypha, for Protestants reject all of the apocryphal works, and even Roman Catholics reject some (e.g., 3 & 4 Esdras and The Prayer of Manasseh).

Arguments in Favor of the Jewish/Protestant Old Testament Canon

The evidence indicates that the Jewish/Protestant canon, consisting of thirty-nine books identical to the Hebrew Bible (Protestant Old Testament) and excluding the Apocrypha, is the true Canon.⁸ The Palestinian Jews represented Jewish orthodoxy; therefore, their canon was recognized as the orthodox one. It was the canon of Jesus (Geisler and Nix, *GIB*, chapter 5), Josephus, and Jerome, and for that matter it was the canon of many of the early church Fathers, including Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Athanasius. The arguments in support of the Protestant canon can be divided into two categories: historical and doctrinal.

The True Test of Canonicity

Contrary to the Roman Catholic argument from Christian usage, the true test of canonicity is propheticity. That is, propheticity determines canonicity: God determined which books would be in the Bible by giving their message to a prophet. So only books written by a prophet or an accredited spokesperson for God are inspired and belong in the canon of Scripture.

⁷ Gk., meaning “to speak against”; viz. the books challenged by some for a time but eventually accepted by all.

⁸ In the Jewish Bible, the numbering of thirty-nine books is reduced to twenty-four by combining the following two books into one each: 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra–Nehemiah (thus reducing the number by four), and counting the twelve Minor Prophets as one book (thus reducing the number by eleven). Thus the total of fifteen (four plus eleven) from thirty-nine leaves twenty-four.

Of course, while God *determined* canonicity by propheticity, the people of God had to *discover* which of these books were prophetic. This was done immediately by the people of God to whom the prophet wrote, not centuries later by those who had no access to him or any way to verify his prophetic credentials. For example, Moses’ books were accepted immediately and stored in a holy place (Deut. 31:26); likewise, Joshua’s books were immediately accepted and preserved along with Moses’ law (Josh. 24:26). Samuel wrote a book and added it to the collection (1 Sam. 10:25); Daniel already had a copy of his prophetic contemporary Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2, 11, 13); Paul encouraged the churches to circulate his inspired epistles (Col. 4:16); and Peter had a collection of Paul’s writings, calling them “Scripture” along with the Old Testament (2 Peter 3:15–16).

There were a number of ways for immediate contemporaries to confirm whether someone was a prophet of God; among these were supernatural confirmations (cf. Ex. 3:1f; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3–4; 2 Cor. 12:12). Sometimes this came in the form of feats of nature, and other times in terms of predictive prophecy. Indeed, false prophets were weeded out if their predictions did not come true (Deut. 18:22). Of course, alleged revelations that contradicted previously revealed truths were rejected as well (Deut. 13:1–3).

The evidence that there was a growing canon of books accepted immediately by contemporaries who could confirm its prophetic authenticity is that succeeding books cited preceding ones. Moses’ writings are cited through the Old Testament beginning with his immediate successor, Joshua (Josh. 1:7; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chron. 17:9; Jer. 8:8; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1; Mal. 4:4). Likewise, later prophets cited earlier ones (e.g., Jer. 26:18; Ezek. 14:14, 20; Dan. 9:2; Jonah 2:2–9; Mic. 4:1–3). In the New Testament Paul cites Luke (1 Tim. 5:18); Peter recognizes Paul’s epistles (2 Peter 3:15–16), and Jude (4–12) cites 2 Peter. And the book of Revelation is filled with images and ideas taken from previous Scripture, especially Daniel (cf. Rev. 13).

In fact, the entire Jewish Bible/Protestant Old Testament was considered prophetic. Moses, who wrote the first five books, was a prophet (Deut. 18:15), and the rest of the Old Testament books were known as “the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27). “The Prophets” were later divided into Prophets and Writings. The reasons are not clear, but some believe this division was based on whether the author was a prophet by office or only by gift, while others claim it was for topical use at Jewish festivals. Some say they were arranged chronologically in descending order of size (Geisler and Nix, *GIB*, 244–45), but whatever the reason, it is clear that the original (cf. Zech. 7:12; Dan. 9:2) and continual way to refer to the entire Old Testament up to the time of Christ was the

twofold division of the “Law and Prophets.” In the same way, the “apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20; cf. 3:5) composed the entire New Testament; hence, the whole Bible is a prophetic book, including the last book (cf. Rev. 22:7, 9–10, 19). But, as we will see, this cannot be said for the apocryphal books.

There is strong evidence that the apocryphal books are not prophetic. Since propheticity is the test for canonicity, this would eliminate them from the Canon.

First, no apocryphal book claims to be written by a prophet. Indeed, as already noted, one apocryphal book even disclaims being prophetic (1 Mac. 9:27).

Second, there is no supernatural confirmation of any of the writers of the apocryphal books, as there is for the prophets who wrote canonical books.

Third, there is no predictive prophecy (see “P, PB” in BECA) in the Apocrypha, such as we have in the canonical books (e.g., Isa. 53; Dan. 9; Mic. 5:2), which is a clear indication of their propheticity.

Fourth, there is no new messianic truth in the Apocrypha; thus, it adds nothing to the messianic truths of the Old Testament.

Fifth, even the Jewish community, whose books they were, acknowledged that the prophetic gifts had ceased in Israel before the Apocrypha was written.

Sixth, the apocryphal books were never listed in the Jewish Bible along with the “Prophets,” or any other section for that matter.

Seventh, never once is any apocryphal book cited authoritatively by a prophetic book written after it. Taken together, this provides overwhelming evidence that the Apocrypha was not prophetic and, therefore, should not be part of the canon of Scripture.

The Continuous Testimony From Antiquity

In addition to the evidence for the propheticity of only the books of the Jewish Bible/Protestant Old Testament (which exclude the Apocrypha), there is a virtually unbroken line of support from ancient to modern times for rejecting the Apocrypha as part of the Canon. This is true both for Jewish rabbis and for Christian Fathers.

(1) Philo (20 B.C.–A.D. 40), an Alexandrian Jewish teacher, quoted the Old Testament prolifically from virtually every canonical book. However, he never once quoted from the Apocrypha as inspired.

(2) Josephus (A.D. 30–100), a Jewish historian, explicitly excludes the Apocrypha, numbering the Old Testament as twenty-two books (the thirty-nine books of the Protestant Old Testament). Neither does Josephus ever quote apocryphal books as Scripture, though he was familiar with them. In “Against Apion” (1.8) he wrote,

For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have,] but only twenty-two books, which are justly believed to be divine; and of them, five belong to

Moses, which contain his law, 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 as 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, (emphasis added)

These correspond exactly to the present Jewish and Protestant Old Testament.

(3) The Jewish teachers acknowledged that their prophetic line ended in the fourth century B.C. Yet, as even Catholics acknowledge, the apocryphal books were written after this time. Josephus wrote,

From Artaxerxes until our time everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased (ibid).

Additional rabbinical statements on the cessation of prophecy support these (see Beckwith, *OTCNTC*, 370). Seder Olam Rabbah 30 declares,

Until then [the coming of Alexander the Great] the prophets prophesied through the Holy Spirit. From then on, “Incline thine ear and hear the words of the wise.” Baba Bathra 12b asserts,

Since the day when the Temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the wise.

Rabbi Samuel bar Inia said,

The Second Temple lacked five things which the First Temple possessed, namely, the fire, the ark, the Urim and Thummin, the oil of anointing and the Holy Spirit [of prophecy].

Thus, the Jewish fathers (rabbis) acknowledged that the time period during which the Apocrypha was written was not a time when God was giving inspired writings.

(4) Jesus and the New Testament writers never once quoted the Apocrypha as Scripture, even though they were aware of them and alluded to them at times (e.g., Heb. 11:35 may allude to 2 Mac. 7, 12, though this may be a reference to the canonical book of Kings—see 1 Kings 17:22). Yet the New Testament writers have *hundreds* of citations from all but a few canonical books in the Old Testament, and the manner in which they are cited with authority indicates that they believed them to be part of the “Law and Prophets” [i.e., whole Old Testament], which was believed to be the inspired and infallible Word of God (Matt. 5:17–18; cf. John 10:35). In fact, Jesus specifically quoted books from each of the parts of the Old Testament—“Law and Prophets,” which He called “all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). There was also a threefold division of the Old Testament into Law, Prophets, and Writings, but this simply divided the “prophets” into two

sections called “prophets and writings” (Geisler and Nix, *GIB*, chapter 14).

(5) The Jewish Scholars at Jamnia (c. A.D. 90) did not accept the Apocrypha as part of the divinely inspired Jewish canon (see Beckwith, *OTCNTC*, 276–277). Since the New Testament explicitly states that Israel was entrusted with the oracles of God and was the recipient of the covenants and the law (Rom. 3:2), the Jews should be considered the custodians of the limits of their own canon. And they have *always* rejected the Apocrypha.

(6) No canonical list or council of the Christian church accepted the Apocrypha as inspired for nearly the first four centuries. This is especially significant since all of the lists available and most of the Fathers of this period rejected the Apocrypha. The first councils to accept the Apocrypha were local ones without ecumenical⁹ force. The Catholic contention that the Council of Rome (A.D. 382), though not an ecumenical council, was all-inclusive because Pope Damasus (c. 305–384) ratified it, is without grounds.

First, this begs the question, making the assumption that Damasus was a pope with infallible authority.

Second, even Catholics acknowledge this council was not an ecumenical one.

Third, not all Catholics agree that statements like this by popes are infallible. There are no infallible lists of infallible statements by popes, nor are there any universally agreed-upon criteria that yield conclusions on issues like this that even all Catholics confirm.

Fourth, appealing to a pope to make infallible a statement by a local council is a double-edged sword. Catholic scholars admit that some popes taught error and were even heretical at times (see Geisler and McKenzie, *RCE*, chapter 11).

(7) Many of the early Fathers of the Christian church spoke out against the Apocrypha. This included Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, and the great Roman Catholic Bible translator Jerome.

(8) Jerome (340–420), the greatest biblical scholar of the early medieval period and the translator of the Latin Vulgate, explicitly rejected the Apocrypha as not part of the Canon. He said the church reads them “for example and instruction of manners” but does not “apply them to establish any doctrine” (Beckwith, *OTCNTC*, 343, citing Jerome’s preface to his Vulgate version of the Book of Solomon). In fact, he disputed Augustine’s unjustified acceptance of these books. At first, Jerome even refused to translate the Apocrypha into Latin but later made a hurried translation of a few books. After listing the exact books of the Jewish and Protestant Old Testament (which excludes the Apocrypha), Jerome concluded,

And thus altogether there come to be 22 books of the old Law [according to the letters of the Jewish alphabet],

that is, five of Moses, eight of the Prophets, and nine of the Hagiographa [holy writings]. Although some set down ... Ruth and Kinoth among the Hagiographa, and think that these books ought to be counted (separately) in their computation, and that there are thus 24 books of the old Law; which the Apocalypse of John represents as adoring the Lamb in the number of the 24 elders.

He added,

This prologue can fitly serve as a Helmed (i.e. equipped with a helmet, against assailants) *introduction to all the biblical books*, which have been translated from Hebrew into Latin, so that we may know that *whatever is not included in these is to be placed among the Apocrypha* (ibid).

In his preface to Daniel, Jerome clearly rejected the apocryphal additions to Daniel (Bel and the Dragon, and Susanna) and argued only for the canonicity of those books found in the Hebrew Bible:

The stories of Susanna and of Bel and the Dragon are not contained in the Hebrew.... For this same reason when I was translating Daniel many years ago, I noted these visions with a critical symbol, showing that they were not included in the Hebrew.... After all, both Origen, Eusebius and Appolinarius, and other outstanding churchmen and teachers of Greece acknowledge that, as I have said, these visions are not found amongst the Hebrews, *and therefore they are not obliged to answer to Porphyry for these portions which exhibit no authority as Holy Scripture* (ibid).

The suggestion that Jerome really favored the apocryphal books but was only arguing that the Jews rejected them is groundless. For one thing, he said clearly in the above quotation, “*these portions which exhibit no authority as Holy Scripture.*” In addition, he never retracted his rejection of the Apocrypha; further, he stated (in *Against Rufinius*, 33) that he had “followed the judgment of the churches” on this matter, and his statement “I was not following my own personal views” appears to refer to “the remarks that they [the enemies of Christianity] are wont to make against us.” In any event, he nowhere retracted his many statements against the Apocrypha.

Finally, the fact that Jerome cited apocryphal books is no proof that he accepted them, for this was a common practice by many church fathers. What is important is that he never retracted his statement that the church reads them “for example and instruction of manners” but does not “apply them to establish any doctrine.”

(9) The Apocrypha was even rejected by noted Roman Catholic scholars during the Reformation period, such as Cardinal Cajetan, who opposed Martin Luther. As already noted, Cajetan wrote *Commentary on All the Authentic Historical Books of the Old Testament* (1532), which excluded the Apocrypha. If he believed they were

⁹ Meaning, the inclusion of all segments of orthodox Christianity.

authentic, they certainly would have been included in a book on “all the authentic” books of the Old Testament.

(10) Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the other Reformers rejected the canonicity of the Apocrypha. Lutherans and Anglicans used it only for ethical/devotional matters but did not consider it authoritative in matters of faith. Reformed churches followed *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), which states,

The Books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are not part of the canon of the Scriptures; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than any other human writings.

In short, the universal Christian church has not accepted the apocryphal books as part of the Canon to this date. The church rejects the Apocrypha because it lacks the primary determining factor of canonicity, which is propheticity; that is, the apocryphal books lack evidence that they were written by accredited prophets of God. Further evidence is found in the fact that the apocryphal books are never cited as authoritative in Scripture in the New Testament; the Apocrypha was never part of the Jewish canon, whose books they are, and the early church never accepted the Apocrypha as inspired.

The Mistake of the Council of Trent

The “infallible” pronouncement by the Council of Trent that the apocryphal books are part of the inspired Word of God is unjustified for many reasons. This statement actually reveals how fallible an allegedly infallible statement can be, since it is historically unfounded, being a polemical over-reaction and an arbitrary decision that involved a dogmatic exclusion.

Prophetically Unverified

Again, the true test of canonicity is propheticity, and, as just observed, there is no evidence that the apocryphal books were prophetic. They lack prophetic authorship, prophetic content, and prophetic confirmation.

Historically Unfounded

As also noted, the pronouncement at Trent went against a continuous line of teaching from ancient to modern times, including both noted Jewish and Christian Fathers such as Philo, Josephus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, and Jerome.

A Polemical Overreaction

The occasion of Trent’s pronouncement on the Apocrypha was part of a polemical action against Luther, supporting teaching he had attacked (such as prayers for the dead—cf. 2 Mac. 12:45–46, which reads, “Thus he

made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from his sin”).

An Arbitrary Decision

Not all of the Apocrypha was accepted by Rome at Trent. In fact, the Council arbitrarily accepted a book favoring its belief in prayers for the dead (2 Mac.) and rejected one opposed to prayers for the dead (2 [or 4] Esdras; cf. 7:105).¹⁰ There were fourteen books, and yet they selected only eleven for their canon.

A Dogmatic Exclusion

In fact, the very history of this section of 2 (4) Esdras reveals the arbitrariness of the Trent decision. Second (4) Esdras was written in Aramaic by an unknown Jewish author (c. A.D. 100) and circulated in Old Latin versions (c. A.D. 200). The Latin Vulgate printed it as an appendix to the New Testament (c. A.D. 400), and it disappeared from Bibles until Protestants, beginning with Johann Haug (1726–1742), began to print it in the Apocrypha based on Aramaic texts, since it was not in Latin manuscripts of the time. However, in 1874 a long section in Latin (seventy verses of chapter 7) was found by Robert Bendy in a library in Amiens, France. Bruce Metzger notes,

It is probable that the lost section was deliberately cut out of an ancestor of most extant Latin Manuscripts, because of dogmatic reasons, for the passage contains an emphatic denial of the value of prayers for the dead. (*IA.*)

Some Catholics argue that this non-selection was not arbitrary because

- (1) Second (4) Esdras was not part of earlier deutero-canonical lists.
- (2) It was written after the time of Christ.
- (3) It was relegated to an inferior position in the Vulgate.
- (4) It was only included among the Apocrypha by Protestants in the eighteenth century.

This argument is unconvincing.

First, 2 (4) Esdras was part of earlier lists of books not considered fully canonical, as even Catholics acknowledge.

Second, according to the Catholic criterion the date of the book has nothing to do with whether it should be in the Jewish Apocrypha but whether it was used by early Christians. And it was used, just as the other apocryphal books were.

Third, 2 (4) Esdras should not have been rejected simply because it was reduced to an inferior position in the Vulgate. Otherwise, Catholics would have to reject all the

¹⁰ As we have seen, Protestants call this book 2 Esdras and Catholics 4 Esdras. Since Catholics call the books of Ezra and Nehemiah by the names of 1 and 2 Esdras, they then call 1 and 2 Esdras, 3 and 4 Esdras, respectively.

Apocrypha, since Jerome, who translated the Vulgate, relegated all the Apocrypha to an inferior position.

Fourth, the reason it did not reappear in Latin until the eighteenth century is apparently that early on some Catholic monk cut out the section against praying for the dead.

In spite of the testimony of antiquity against them, in A.D. 1546, just twenty-nine years after Luther posted his *Ninety-five Theses*, in an attempt to counteract his attack on the sale of indulgences, which eventually led to a rejection of prayers for the dead and purgatory, the Roman Catholic Church proclaimed that these apocryphal books were on the same level as Scripture, declaring,

The Synod ... receives and venerates ... all the books [including the Apocrypha] both of the Old and the New Testaments—seeing that one God is the Author of both ... as having been dictated, either by Christ's own word of mouth or by the Holy Ghost ... if anyone receives 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 ... let him be anathema. (Schaff, *CC*, 2:81.)

The Wrong Test for Canonicity

When all is said and done, the Roman Catholic Church uses the wrong test for canonicity. The correct test of what determines canonicity can be contrasted with the incorrect as follows (see Geisler and Nix, *GIB*, 221):

Incorrect View of Canon	Correct View of Canon
Church Determines Canon	Church Discovers Canon
Church Is Mother of Canon	Church Is Child of Canon
Church Is Magistrate of Canon	Church Is Minister of Canon
Church Regulates Canon	Church Recognizes Canon
Church Is Judge of Canon	Church Is Witness of Canon
Church Is Master of Canon	Church Is Servant of Canon

In spite of the fact that Catholic sources can be cited supporting what looks very much like the “correct view” above, Catholic apologists often equivocate on this issue. Peter Kreeft, for example, argues that the church must be infallible if the Bible is, since the effect cannot be greater than the cause and since the church caused the Canon. But if the church is regulated by the Canon, not ruler over it, then the church is not the cause of the Canon.

Other defenders of Catholicism make the same mistake, giving lip service on the one hand to the fact that the church only discovers the Canon, yet on the other

hand constructing an argument that makes the church the determiner of the Canon. They neglect the fact that it is God who caused (by inspiration) the canonical Scriptures, not the church.

This misunderstanding is sometimes evident in the equivocal use of the word *witness*. When we speak of the church as being a witness to the Canon (after the time it was written) we do not mean in the sense of being an eyewitness (i.e., firsthand evidence itself). Only the people of God contemporary to the events were firsthand witnesses. Rather, the later church is a witness *to* the evidence in the sense that it has reviewed the historical evidence for the authenticity of the canonical books as coming from prophets and apostles. The church is not evidence itself; it merely reviews the evidence. Yet when Roman Catholics speak of the role of the church in determining the Canon, they endow it with an evidential role it does not have. Several points will help clarify the proper role of the Christian church in discovering which books belong in the Canon.

First, only the people of God contemporary to the writing of the biblical books could be actual eyewitnesses to the evidence. They alone were witnesses to the Canon as it was developing, and only they can testify to the evidence of the propheticity of the biblical books, which is the determinative factor of canonicity.

Second, the later church is not an evidential witness for the Canon; it does not create or constitute evidence for the Canon. It is only a discoverer and observer of the evidence that remains for the original confirmation of the propheticity of the canonical books. Assuming that the church is evidence in and of itself is the mistake behind the Roman Catholic view favoring the canonicity of the Apocrypha.

Third, neither the earlier nor later church is the judge of the Canon. The church is not, as judges are, the final authority for the criteria of what will be admitted as evidence; that is, it does not determine the rules of canonicity. Since the Bible is the Word of God, only God can determine the criteria for our discovery of what is His Word. Or, to put it another way, what is of God will have His fingerprints on it, and only God is the determiner of what His fingerprints are like.

Fourth, both the earlier and later church is more like a jury than a judge. The role of a jury is to

- (1) listen to the evidence, not create it or try to be it;
- (2) weigh the evidence, not make it or constitute it, and
- (3) render a verdict in accordance with the evidence.

This, as we have shown, is precisely what the Christian church has done in rendering its verdict that the Apocrypha is not part of Sacred Scripture. The contemporary (first-century) church looked at the firsthand evidence for the *propheticity* (miracles, etc.), and the historical church has reviewed the evidence for the

authenticity of these books, which were directly confirmed by God when they were written.

There is, of course, a certain sense in which the church is a “judge” of the Canon, namely, it is called upon, as all juries are, to engage in an active use of its mind in sifting and weighing the evidence and in rendering a verdict. But this is a far cry from what Roman Catholics believe, in practice, if not in theory, that the church plays a magisterial role in determining the Canon. After all, this is what is meant by the “teaching magisterium” of the church. The Roman Catholic hierarchy is not merely ministerial; it is magisterial—it has a judicial role, not only an administrative one. It is not only a jury looking at evidence; it is a judge determining what counts as evidence and what does not. And therein is the problem.

In exercising its magisterial role, the Roman Catholic Church chose the wrong course in rendering its decision about the Apocrypha, thus showing its fallibility.

First, it chose to follow the wrong criterion: Christian usage rather than propheticity.

Second, it used secondhand evidence of later writers rather than the only firsthand evidence for canonicity (divine confirmation of the author’s propheticity).

Third, it did not use immediate confirmation by contemporaries of the events but later statements by people often separated from the events by generations or centuries.

All of these mistakes arose out of a misconception of the very role of the church as judge rather than jury, as magistrate rather than minister, a sovereign *over* rather than servant *of* the canon. By contrast, the Protestant rejection of the Apocrypha was based on a proper understanding of the role of the contemporary eyewitness to the evidence of propheticity and the succeeding church as being possessor of historical evidence for the authenticity of these prophetic books.

Differences over the Apocrypha are crucial to the doctrinal differences of Roman Catholics and Protestants, such as purgatory and prayers for the dead. In answering questions regarding these differences, as shown above, there is no evidence that the apocryphal books are inspired and, therefore, should be part of the canon of inspired Scripture. They do not claim to be inspired, nor does the Jewish community that produced them claim this. Indeed, they are never quoted as Scripture in the New Testament, and many early Fathers, including the great Roman Catholic biblical scholar Jerome, categorically rejected them. Adding them to the Bible in an infallible decree at the Council of Trent has all the air of a polemical pronouncement, calculated to bolster support for doctrines for which there is no clear support in any of the sixty-six canonical books.

In view of the strong evidence against the Apocrypha, the decision by the Roman Catholic Church to pronounce

them canonical is both unfounded and rejected by orthodox Protestants. Further, it is a serious error to admit nonrevelational material into the written Word of God, since it corrupts the revelation of God and thereby undermines the divine authority of Scripture (see Ramm, *PRA*, 65).

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON IS COMPLETE

The New Testament was written between about A.D. 50 and 90, and all major branches of Christianity accept its twenty-seven books as inspired and canonical. There are several lines of evidence that support the evangelical belief that the New Testament canon is closed. Primarily, Jesus promised a closed canon by limiting teaching authority to the apostles, who all died before the end of the first century.

The Evidence for the Completeness of the New Testament Canon

The reasons for believing that the twenty-seven books of the current New Testament, and those alone, belong in the Christian canon are very strong. The evidence includes the promise of Jesus, the providence of God, the preservation by the people of God, and the proclamation of the church.

The Promise of Jesus

There are clear indications in the New Testament that the Spirit of Christ’s revelation to the apostles would complete the biblical revelation.

First, Jesus was the full and complete revelation of the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17). Indeed, Hebrews teaches that Jesus is the full and final revelation of God in “the last days” (Heb. 1:1–2). Further, it refers to Christ as “better than” the angels (Heb. 1:4), “better than” the law (Heb. 7:19), and “better than” the Old Testament law and priesthood (Heb. 9:23). Indeed, His revelation and redemption is said to be “eternal” (Heb. 5:9; 9:12, 15) and “once for all” (9:28; 10:12–14). So Jesus was the full and final revelation of God to humankind; He alone could say, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), and of Him alone could it be said that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col. 2:9).

Second, Jesus chose, commissioned, and credentialed twelve apostles (cf. Heb. 2:3–4) to teach this full and final revelation that He gave them (Matt. 10:1f.), and before He left this world He promised these apostles to guide them into all truth, saying, “the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things and will remind you of *everything I have said to you*” (John 14:26). And, “When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into *all truth*” (John 16:13). This is why it is said the church is “built on the

foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20) and the earliest church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42 NKJV). If the apostles of Jesus did not teach this completed revelation of God, then Jesus was wrong. But as the Son of God He could not be wrong in what He taught; therefore, the full and final revelation of God in Christ was given by the apostles.

Third, the apostles of Christ lived and died in the first century; consequently, the record of this full and final revelation of Christ to the apostles was completed in the first century. Indeed, one of the qualifications of an apostle was that he was an eyewitness of the resurrection of Christ, which occurred in the first century (Acts 1:22). When Paul's credentials as an apostle were challenged, he replied, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). Indeed, he is listed with the other apostles as the "last" to have "seen" the resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 15:6–8).

Fourth, so that there would be no doubt as to who was authorized to teach this full and final revelation of God in Christ, God gave special supernatural powers to the apostles (who in turn gave them to their associates—Acts 6:6; 8:15–18; 2 Tim. 1:6). That these powers were unique to the apostles is clear from the fact that they were called "the signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12) and that certain things could only occur through the "laying on of the apostles' hands" (Acts 8:18; cf. 19:6). Further, this "power" was promised to the apostles (Acts 1:1, 8), and after Jesus' ministry (cf. John 14:12) they exercised special apostolic functions and powers, including striking people dead who lied to the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 5:9–11) and performing special signs and wonders (Acts 5:12; Heb. 2:4; 2 Cor. 12:12), which included even raising the dead on command (Matt. 10:8; Acts 20:7–12).

Fifth, there is only one authentic record of apostolic teaching in existence, and that is the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. All other books that claim inspiration come from the second century or later; these are known as the New Testament Apocrypha and are clearly not written by apostles, since the apostles all died before the end of the first century. Since we know the New Testament books have been copied accurately from the very beginning (see chapter 26), the only remaining question is whether all of the apostolic writings from the first century have been preserved. If they have, then these twenty-seven books complete the canon of Scripture, and anything written after them cannot be a revelation of God to the church.

There are two lines of evidence that all the inspired writings of the apostles and their associates were preserved and are found in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The first reason is based on the character of God and the second on the care and the testimony of the church.

The Providence of God

Since the God of the Bible is all-knowing (Ps. 139:1–6; 147:5), all-loving (Matt. 5:48; 1 John 4:16), and all-powerful (Gen. 1:1; Matt. 19:26), it follows that He would not inspire books for the faith and practice of believers down through the centuries that He did not preserve. Lost inspired books would be a lapse in God's providence. The God who cares for the sparrows will certainly care for His Scriptures, and the God who has preserved His general revelation in nature (Rom. 1:19–20) will certainly not fail to preserve His special revelation in Scripture (Rom. 3:2). In short, if God inspired them (2 Tim. 3:16), God will preserve them.

The Preservation by the Church

Not only does the providence of God promise the preservation of all inspired books, but the preservation of these books by the church confirms it. This preservation is manifest in a number of ways.

First, a collection of these books was made from the earliest times; even within the New Testament itself this preservation process was put into action. Luke refers to other written records of the life of Christ (Luke 1:1–4), possibly Matthew and Mark. In Paul's epistle of 1 Timothy (5:18) the gospel of Luke (10:7) is quoted. Peter refers to a collection of Paul's epistles (2 Peter 3:15–16). Paul charged that his epistle of 1 Thessalonians "be read to all the brethren" (1 Thess. 5:27), and he commanded the church at Colosse: "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans" (Col. 4:16). Jude (6–7, 17) apparently had access to 2 Peter (2 Peter 2:4–6), and John's book of Revelation was circulated to the churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 1:4). So the apostolic church itself was involved by divine imperative in the preservation of the apostolic writings.

Second, the contemporaries of the apostles show a concerned awareness of their mentors' writings, quoting from them prolifically (see chapter 17). Following them the Fathers of the second to fourth centuries made some 36,289 citations from the New Testament, including all verses except eleven! This includes 19,368 citations from the Gospels, 1,352 from Acts, 14,035 from Paul's epistles, 870 from the General Epistles, and 664 from Revelation (see Geisler and Nix, *GIB*, chapter 24). The Fathers of the second century alone cited from every book of the New Testament except one (3 John), which they simply may have had no occasion to cite. This reveals not only their great respect for the writings of the apostles but also their ardent desire to preserve their written words.

Third, when challenged by heretical teaching, such as that of Marcion the Gnostic (c. 85–c. 160), who rejected all but part of Luke and ten of Paul's epistles (all but the Pastoral Epistles—1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), the church

responded by officially defining the extent of the Canon. Lists of apostolic books and collections of their writings were made from early times, beginning with the second century. These include the Muratorian canon (A.D. 170), Apostolic canon (c. 300), Cheltenham canon (c. 360), and Athanasian canon (c. 367), as well as the Old Latin translation (c. 200). This process culminated in the late fourth and early fifth centuries at the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (410), which listed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as the complete Canon. Every major section of Christendom has accepted this as the permanent verdict of the church. Evangelical Protestants agree that the Canon is closed.

The Proclamation of the Church

While there was some debate about the books that had initially been accepted into the New Testament church, eventually the universal Christian church came to pronounce unanimously on the twenty-seven books of the present New Testament canon. There has been no significant debate on this since around A.D. 400.¹

THE DEBATE ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

Unlike the Old Testament, additional books have never been accepted into the New Testament canon long after they were written. Furthermore, there have never been any serious long-term debates over the books that were accepted into the Canon. Nonetheless, there were some questions about some books for some time; these books will be called the New Testament Apocrypha.

The List of New Testament Apocrypha

The New Testament Apocrypha includes the Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (c. A.D. 70–79); the Epistle to the Corinthians (c. 96); The Gospel According to the Hebrews (65–100); the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians (c. 108); the Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve (c. 100–120); The seven Epistles of Ignatius (c. 110); the Ancient Homily, or the Second Epistle of Clement (c. 120–140); the Shepherd of Hermas (c. 115–140); the Apocalypse of Peter (c. 150); and the Epistle to the Laodiceans (fourth century?).

Sometimes a number of books known as the New Testament Pseudepigrapha (lit: “false writings”) are sometimes also called apocryphal. These books have been and are universally rejected by the Christian church. They include second-century books like the Gospel of Thomas (a Gnostic work), the Gospel of Peter (containing Docetic heresies), the Protevangelium of James

(containing early devotion to Mary), the Gospel of the Hebrews, and the Gospel of the Egyptians, as well as others (see Geisler and Nix, *GIB*, chapter 17).

Reasons for Rejecting the New Testament Apocrypha

There are several reasons for rejecting these books as noncanonical.

First, none of them experienced any more than a local or temporary acceptance.

Second, most of them had at best a quasi-canonical status, being merely appended to various manuscripts or listed in tables of contents.

Third, no major canon or church council accepted them as part of the inspired Word of God (see “B, IO” in *BECA*).

Fourth, their limited and temporal acceptance is explainable on the grounds that they were believed wrongly (1) to have been written by an apostle, or (2) to have been referred to in an inspired book (e.g., Col. 4:16). Once this was known to be false they were completely and permanently rejected by the Christian church.

THE COMPLETENESS OF THE BIBLICAL CANON

There is no evidence that any inspired book has been lost. This is confirmed by

- (1) the providence of God,
- (2) the immediate and careful preservation of the church, and
- (3) the absence of any evidence of any other prophetic or apostolic book.

Alleged contrary examples are easily explained as either

- (4) uninspired works to which the biblical author made reference, or
- (5) inspired works contained in the sixty-six inspired books but with another name.

The list on the next page illustrates the point.

The Confirmation of the Canon

Unlike other holy books, including the Qur’an (see Geisler and Saleeb, *AI*, chapter 9) and the *Book of Mormon* (see Geisler, *CGM*), the Bible alone has been supernaturally confirmed to be the Word of God. Only the Scriptures were written by prophets who were supernaturally confirmed by signs and wonders. When Moses questioned how his message would be accepted, God performed miracles through him “that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you” (Ex. 4:5). Later when Korah rose up to challenge Moses, God again miraculously intervened to vindicate His prophet (Num. 16). Likewise, Elijah was

¹Geisler, Norman L.: *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN : Bethany House Publishers, 2002, S. 514

verified to be a prophet of God by supernatural intervention on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18).

In the Gospels, even the Jewish teacher Nicodemus said to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2; cf. Luke 7:22). Luke recorded, “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him” (Acts 2:22). Hebrews affirms that “God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Heb. 2:3–4). And the apostle Paul proved his apostleship by affirming that “the things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance” (2 Cor. 12:12).

No other book in the world has authors who were confirmed in this miraculous manner. Of all the world’s religious leaders, not Confucius, not Buddha, not Muhammad, and not Joseph Smith were endorsed by miracles that were verified by contemporary and credible witnesses.¹¹ *The Bible alone proves to be the Word of God written by prophets and apostles of God who were confirmed by special acts (miracles) of God* (see chapter 29).

CONCLUSION

The Bible is the only infallible written revelation of God to man. It is complete, since both Old and New Testaments contain all the books God inspired for the faith and practice of future generations. This is confirmed by the promise of Christ, the providence of God, the preservation by the people of God, and the proclamation of the early church. Further, the Bible is sufficient for faith and practice; nothing more is needed; the spiritual guide to life needs no new chapters. The Author inspired a complete manual from the beginning and has preserved all of it, intact.²

Miscellaneous Exerts

The Extent of the Old Testament Scriptures

There is some dispute as to which books are to be included in the Old Testament canon of Scripture. Some claim that the so-called apocryphal books written between 250 B.C. and the time of Christ are also part of the Old Testament canon. Hence, we must turn our attention from

¹¹ See Geisler and Saleeb, *AI*, chapter 8.

²Geisler, Norman L.: *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible*. Minneapolis, MN : Bethany House Publishers, 2002, S. 536

the nature of the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God to the *extent* of those inspired writings.⁸

Arguments Advanced in Support of the Apocrypha Examined. The basic debate is between the Roman Catholic position that the books of the so-called Alexandrian Canon should be included in the Old Testament and the Protestant position that only the books of the so-called Jewish Palestinian Canon are inspired. The books involved in the dispute are named as follows by Protestants (and Catholics):

1. Esdras (III Esdras)
2. II Esdras (IV Esdras)
3. Tobit
4. Judith
5. Addition to Esther (Esther 10:4–16:24)
6. The Wisdom of Solomon
7. Ecclesiasticus or Sirach
8. Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch)
9. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (Dan. 3:24–90)
10. Susanna (Dan. 13)
11. Bel and the Dragon (Dan. 14)
12. The Prayer of Manasseh
13. I Maccabees
14. II Maccabees

In favor of the acceptance of the Apocrypha the following arguments have been advanced:⁹ (1) The New Testament makes direct quotes from the book of Enoch (Jude 14) and alludes to II Maccabees (Heb. 11:35); (2) Some apocryphal books were found in the first century Jewish community at Qumran; (3) Many early Christian Fathers including Origen (A.D. 185–253), Athanasius (A.D. 293–373), and Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 315–386) quoted some apocryphal books; (4) Many early Greek manuscripts of the Old Testament such as Codex Vaticanus (A.D. 325) and Codex Sinaiticus (A.D. 350) contained the Apocrypha; (5) Augustine accepted all the apocryphal books later proclaimed canonical by Trent (in 1546); (6) Many early church synods, such as the Synod by Pope Damasus (A.D. 382), Synod of Hippo (A.D. 393), and three synods at Carthage (A.D. 393, 397, 419), accepted the Apocrypha; (7) Some later bishops and councils between the ninth and fifteenth centuries listed the apocryphal books as inspired; (8) This long line of Christian usage culminated in the official pronouncement of the Council of Trent (A.D. 1546) that the Apocrypha (or “deutero-canonical” books, as Roman Catholics call them) is part of canonical Scripture.

⁸ For a fuller treatment of the canonicity of Scripture see my *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Chapters 10–15, or my *From God to Us*, Chapters 6–10.

⁹ For a fuller discussion of this point see my article “The Extent of the Old Testament Canon,” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Studies*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, pp. 31–46.

Despite the long list of names and churches associated with the apocryphal books, these arguments must be rejected in view of the following considerations: (1) No apocryphal book is quoted as Scripture in the New Testament. The New Testament writers allude to and even cite pagan poets whose books were not considered inspired Scripture (see Acts 17:28). (2) The Qumran community was not an orthodox Jewish community and, hence, is not an official voice of Judaism. (3) Many of the early Christian Fathers including Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, and all important Fathers before Augustine clearly rejected the Apocrypha. Some of these men made presumable or occasional reference to one or more apocryphal books in a homiletical way but none of the major early Fathers accepted the apocryphal books into the Christian canon. (4) Augustine's acceptance of the Apocrypha is refuted by his contemporary Jerome who was the greatest Biblical scholar of his day. (5) No local synod or canonical listing included these apocryphal books for almost the first four hundred years of the church's existence. Neither early church synods nor Augustine listed the apocryphal books as inspired until after the appearance of the Greek translations of the Old Testament containing these books (i.e., after A.D. 325). These local listings are based on a Greek Alexandrian tradition where the Hebrew Old Testament was translated (250 B.C. following) and not a Jewish Palestinian tradition where the Old Testament was actually written and accepted by Jewish people. (6) Even up to and through the time of the Reformation (A.D. 1517) some Roman Catholic Scholars, including Cardinal Cajetan who opposed Luther, did not accept the Apocrypha as authentic Old Testament books. (7) Furthermore, Christian usage of the Apocrypha has varied greatly down through the years. Fathers before Augustine accepted only a fraction of the Apocrypha, sometimes only one or two books. Many Fathers would "quote" and even "read" some apocryphal books in church but excluded them from their canonical lists. The best explanation seems to be that they had two groupings: one a doctrinal canon which determined matters of faith and the other a broader homiletical collection which they used to illustrate and expand on their beliefs. (8) Trent was inconsistent in accepting only eleven of the fourteen apocryphal books. They rejected the Prayer of Manesseh, I Esdras (III Esdras), and II Esdras (IV Esdras) which contains a strong verse against praying for the dead (viz., 7:105) and accepted a book with a verse supporting prayer for the dead (viz., II Macc. 12:45 [46]). Proclaiming this book canonical some twenty-nine years after Luther lashed out against prayers for the dead is highly suspect, especially since the book disclaiming the efficacy of such prayers was rejected.

The Extent of the Jewish Canon of Jesus' Day. The mistake in the broader canon theory is that it employs Christian usage as the determinative factor in deciding the Jewish canon. This is wrong for two reasons: first, these were Jewish books written by Jewish writers for Jewish people and rejected by the Old Testament Jewish community. It is presumptuous for Christians hundreds of years after the fact to inform Jews which books belong in their sacred writings. Second, the New Testament clearly informs Christians that the Old Testament was given into the custodianship of the Jews. Paul wrote, "The Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). In view of this it behooves us to ask. What is the extent of the Old Testament canon according to the Jews? To this question there is only one answer, as even Roman Catholic scholars readily admit, namely, the twenty-four (thirty-nine) books of the Jewish and Protestant Bibles of today comprise the Jewish Old Testament canon.

There is an even more decisive argument than Jewish custodianship against the Apocrypha, namely, the authoritative testimony of Christ. Which books were included in the Old Testament of which Jesus spoke when he proclaimed it the unbreakable and authoritative Word of God? The answer to this question seems clear: there were no more (and no less) than twenty-four (thirty-nine) books of the Jewish Old Testament to which Christ attested.

a. The Jewish Scriptures of the Time of Christ

The best authority for the Jewish canon of the time of Christ is the Jewish historian Josephus. Josephus lists twenty-two books, "five belonging to Moses ... the prophets, who were after Moses ... in thirteen books. The remaining four books containing hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life."¹⁰Ruth was no doubt appended to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah, thus accounting for the difference between the numbering of twenty-four and twenty-two. Job was probably listed among the historical books, since Josephus cites it in his writings and since there would be only twelve historical books without it. This would leave Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon in the last category. With this arrangement we have the identical books of the thirty-nine now in the Protestant Old Testament, since by counting I and II Samuel as one book, I and II Kings as one book, I and II Chronicles as one book, Ezra-Nehemiah as one book, and the twelve (minor) prophets as one book, the difference between the numbering of thirty-nine and twenty-four is accounted for. That Josephus considered this to be the complete and final Jewish canon is made clear by his declaration that the succession of Jewish prophets ended in the fourth century B.C. Likewise the Talmud teaches that "after the latter

¹⁰ Josephus, *Against Apion* I, 83.

prophets Haggai, Zechariah ... and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel.¹¹ Since all the apocryphal books were written after the fourth century (viz., from 250 B.C. to the time of Christ), it is clear that they were not in the Jewish Old Testament. This fact is supported by the apocryphal books themselves, for not only do they lack the claim to any divine inspiration, but they are devoid of any predictive or messianic prophecy, and do in fact disclaim inspiration. I Maccabees says that in those days “there was great distress in Israel, such as has not been since the time the prophets ceased to appear among them” (9:27). b. The Old Testament Canon of Jesus and the Apostles

The best evidence for the extent of the Jewish canon of the time of Christ is found in the New Testament. Both Jesus and the apostles affirm only the canon containing the thirty-nine (twenty-four) books of the Protestant Old Testament. This is supported by several lines of evidence. First, no apocryphal book is ever cited as Scripture by either Jesus or the New Testament writers, despite the fact that they obviously possessed them and even made allusions to them. Coupled with the fact that Jesus and the apostles did have occasion to quote from some eighteen of the twenty-two (twenty-four) books in the Jewish Old Testament, the omission of any quotations from the Apocrypha actually entails a rejection of these books. Second, the New Testament makes at least a dozen references to the whole Old Testament under the phrase “law and prophets” (cf. Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27); and yet the apocryphal books are admitted by both friend and foe to have never been in the section of the canon known as “the prophets.” Their late date would automatically have placed them in the “writings” or so-called third section of the Old Testament. Even during the intertestamental period (see II Macc. 15:9) and in the Qumran literature (*Manual of Discipline*. I, 3; VIII, 15), the Old Testament is referred to under the standard phrase “the law and the prophets.” The threefold division that emerged by the time of Christ and is reflected in Philo, Josephus, and possibly in the introduction to Sirach was apparently an alternate way of subdividing “the prophets” into “prophets” and “writings” for festal or literary reasons. Jesus’ possible allusion to a threefold division that emerged by the time of Christ and is reflected in prophets and the psalms” (Luke 24:44) is used in direct parallel with the phrase “Moses and all the prophets” earlier in the same chapter (v. 27).

According to New Testament usage the phrase “law and the prophets” includes “all the scripture” (Luke 24:27) and “all the prophets [who] prophesied until John [the Baptist]” (Mark 13:31). Paul the apostle staked his complete orthodoxy on the grounds that he believed “everything laid down in the law or written in the prophets”

¹¹ *Babylonian Talmud*, “Sanhedrin,” VII–VIII, 24.

(Acts 24:14). Jesus said he had come to fulfill “all” according to what was predicted in the “law and prophets” (Matt. 5:17).

We cannot avoid the conclusion that the phrase “law and prophets” referred to all divine written revelation from Moses to Jesus.¹² This being the case, the fact that neither the first century Jews, Jesus himself, nor the apostles accepted or quoted the apocryphal books as inspired is sufficient evidence that these books were not part of their canon of Scripture. This conclusion has been the uniform testimony of Judaism throughout the centuries. The extent of the Old Testament canon is limited, by both the Jews who wrote it and by Jesus about whom it is written, to the thirty-nine (twenty-four) books listed in Protestant Old Testament Bibles today.

Conclusion

Jesus taught emphatically that the Jewish Old Testament was the very inspired and written revelation of God. In this teaching he neither accommodated himself to false tradition nor was limited in his knowledge of the matters of which he spoke. His teaching was with all authority in heaven and on earth. And since Christ has been verified to be the unique Son of God, whatever he teaches is the very truth of God. Hence, on the testimony and authority of Christ it is established as true that the Old Testament, with all of its historical and miraculous events, is an inscripturated revelation of God.

There are many other evidences that the Bible is the Word of God— for example, its supernatural predictive prophecy, its amazing unity, its superior moral quality, its world-wide publicity, and its dynamic power.¹³ It is sufficient evidence, however, that Jesus verified the Old Testament to be God’s Word. Since Jesus is confirmed to be the Son of God, his testimony that the Bible is the Word of God is more than adequate. Either a person accepts the authority of Scripture or he must impugn the integrity of the Son of God; they stand together.³

¹² For further support of this point see Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*.

¹³ See Bernard Ramm’s *Protestant Christian Evidences* for an elaboration of some of these arguments.

³ Geisler, Norman L.: *Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids : Baker Book House, 1976, S. 363