

Introduction

1. What is history and how did we get it? Ancient written records are compared and archeological discoveries are analyzed and studied vis-à-vis the written records of antiquity.

1.1 To determine what is history versus fiction the following tests are used for written records: oldest documents take precedence (those nearest the event, the number of documents available, the number of mistakes in the various manuscripts and the substance of the errors and the time interval between the event and the document.

1.2 In summary, various external evidences such as established contemporaneous events, rulers, names of cities, civilizations known to exist at the time and archaeological records are compared and analyzed and conclusions drawn and codified.

1.3 Although the Bible is not a history book, the historical facts found in the Bible are remarkably accurate.

2. The Old Testament *was written* describing events taking place over a long period of time—c. 1450 B.C. to c. 450 B.C. The New Testament *was written* over a not so long period – c. 4 B.C. to c. A.D. 96; there was an intertestamental period of some 400 years in which there was no Scripture written. We have a great deal of history about events taking place during the intertestamental period known as 1st and 2nd Maccabee; as we will later see these books are classified by many as “Apocrypha.”

2.1 Bible teachers know of the events taking place in the intertestamental period from not only the Apocrypha but they also find records of these events described prophetically by Daniel. Particularly in Daniel Chapters 2, 4, 7 and 8. I hope to show later how there is a remarkable coalescence between history and prophecy. This will all be developed later in this categorical study of Canonicity.

3. Let's first review the Old Testament and how it compares with ancient history.

3.1 Until the recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which is the oldest extant Hebrew manuscript, our oldest Old Testament manuscript was dated A.D. 900.

3.1.1 Keep in mind a manuscript as used in this doctrine may be only a small portion of an entire Book inscribed on a vellum, parchment, scroll, papyrus, etc. The Dead Sea Scrolls contains parts of several Old Testament Books and the scrolls date back to the 1st century B.C.

3.2 Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947-54 there was an approximate gap of some 1300 years between the event and the oldest Old Testament manuscript:

The Old Testament being completed in about 425 B.C. and the oldest copy being 900 A.D.; we therefore had a 1325 year hiatus.

3.3 With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls a number of Old Testament manuscripts were found which were dated before the time of Christ, and when experts compared what we formerly had versus the newly discovered scrolls, there were remarkably only a few minor errors and most involved only punctuation. More concerning this comparison will be provided later.

3.4 The Christian can now take the Old Testament and say without fear, "this is the Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation." As we will see later the New Testament has been studied and experts determined its accuracy is just a little short of miraculous." The Bible takes a back-seat to no other document when objectively compared.

3.4.1 All the more remarkable is the fact that more than 40 men, in three languages, spanning 60 generations and 1600 years have written the Bible from three different continents. This is an astounding feat.

3.5 We will look at the accuracy factor of the numerous copies in great detail later but for now it suffices to simply state that the accuracy of the Bible is "nothing short of phenomenal."

3.6 To understand the accuracy of the Old Testament copies, it is necessary to examine the extreme care in which copyists transcribed the Old Testament from year to year from many and varied manuscripts.

3.7 The Talmudists (A.D. 100-500) spent a great deal of time cataloging Hebrew civil and canonical law. They had quite an intricate system for transcribing synagogue scrolls. For example:

3.7.1 Each copy had to be written on a skin of animal classified as clean.

3.7.2 The skin had to be prepared in a special way.

3.7.3 Every skin had to contain a certain number of columns.

3.7.4 The length of each column had to extend over at least 48 but no more than 60 lines. Each line had to have at least 30 letters.

3.7.5 The ink must be black and prepared according to a certain recipe.

3.7.6 No word or letter could be written from memory.

3.7.7 Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene.

3.7.8 Between every Book there must be three lines.

3.7.9 The copyist must sit in full Jewish dress.

3.7.10 Before beginning the copyist must take a bath.

3.7.11 Before writing the name of God he must use a new pen dipped in a new bottle of ink.

3.8 The existence of the many ancient copies of the Scripture is even the more remarkable given the repeated persecutions to the Jews and the large-scale destruction of their property--certainly to include their books, manuscripts, etc.

3.9 That any remain at all is a tribute to God's intervention. This is especially evident given the Philistine, Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Turkish, German, Spanish and Russian pogroms.

3.10 The **Masorites (A.D. 500-900)** accepted the laborious job of editing the text and standardizing it.

3.10.1 They added vowel points under the consonants to help with pronunciation.

3.10.2 They were well disciplined and treated the texts with the greatest imaginable reverence and devised a complicated system of safeguards against scribal error.

3.10.3 They counted the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurred in each book: pointed out the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the whole Hebrew Bible, and made even more detailed calculations to verify accuracy.

3.10.4 They counted everything countable and came up with a system of mnemonics by which the various totals might be readily remembered.

4. I think we are now ready to review the *Doctrine of Canonicity*.

1. Canonicity

1.1 A tremendous mass of literature appeared in the first three or four centuries, all of which claimed to be authoritative and inspired.

1.2 Something had to be done to determine which books were "in" and which were "out" of the Canon.

1.2.1 There was little if any controversy regarding the content of the New Testament; the controversy related only to the Old Testament.

1.3 The early Church fathers agreed upon five criteria to determine what books were to be included. These were:

1.3.1 Was the Book of Divine Origin? - Does the book itself purport to be divinely inspired?

1.3.2 Was its claim to inspiration adequately sustained by the awareness of the writer that this was indeed a sacred Scripture?

1.3.3 Documentation by quotation; for example, the New Testament contains numerous quotations from the Old Testament made by not only Jesus Christ but by virtually every writer of Scripture.

1.3.4 The law of public or official action as in the Old Testament a priest, a prophet, a king or in the New Testament, our Lord would read from it in public.

1.3.5 External evidence was used in the sense that the Masoretic copyist only preserved for us that which all of Israel seem to know was the Canon.

1.4 From the *Grolier Encyclopedia* and the *World Book* we find an unbiased description of what is known as the pseudepigrapha and the apocrypha:

"Pseudepigrapha - The word pseudepigrapha meaning "books with false titles," refers to books similar in type to those of the Bible whose authors gave them the names of persons of a much earlier period in order to enhance their authority. The best known are:

"Three and *Four Edras* and the *Prayer of Manasses*, which are included in the *Apocrypha*. The term is applied to many Jewish and Jewish-Christian books written in the period 200 BC-AD 200 ... Fragments of the *Damascus Document* have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls ... The pseudepigrapha are important for they throw light on Judaism and early Christianity ... There is no evidence (internal or external) of divine authorship or inspiration, i.e., canonicity claimed.

"Apocrypha - "The Apocrypha are books of the Old Testament included in Roman and Orthodox Catholic Bibles as deutero canonical (added to the earlier canon) but excluded from the Hebrew Bible and from most protestant Bibles. It is not certain, why the term Apocrypha (hidden things) was originally applied to them but they were considered less authoritative than the other biblical books because of the relatively late origin (300 BC-100 AD) ..."

From the *World Book* - "The Apocrypha includes the first and second books of *Edras*, *Tobit*, additions to the book of *Esther*, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the *Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*, *Judith*, *Baruch*, the *Song of the Three Children*, *Susanna* and the *Elders*, *Bel and the Dragon*, the *Prayer of Manasses* and the *1st and 2nd books of Maccabees* ...

The apocrypha are important sources for Jewish history and religious developments in the 1st and 2nd centuries BC.

1.5 There are many other pseudepigrapha books such as the *Book of Mormons* and devotional/prayer books of the Christian Science Denomination which are accepted by some as biblical. There are also other Orthodox Catholic books accepted in their faith as supplemental to the Bible although rejected by the Roman Catholic Church.

1.6 If you consider the copies available, age and accuracy of the documents it becomes quite obvious that we have the inspired Word of God preserved for us and need no extra-biblical revelation.

1.7 Flavius Josephus was an unbeliever who in *Contra Apion* describes the sacred "books of the Jew" for you see canonicity was an accepted part of Jewish History. Not surprisingly he tells us (without any axe to grind) that the Old Testament is the Canon and has no need for added pseudepigrapha.

1.8 R. B. Thieme in his book *Canonicity* writes concerning the Apocrypha under the heading "The Rejection of the Apocrypha."

"The Apocrypha was never in the Hebrew Canon. Every card-indexing of the Canon of Scripture in the ancient world listed only ... the Old Testament, but it excluded the Apocrypha.

"Neither Jesus Christ nor any of the New Testament writers ever quoted from the Apocrypha. Never even once. Josephus expressly excluded them from his list of Sacred Scripture in his book. He explained that these books were excluded from the Canon because they were spurious.

"No mention of the Apocrypha was made in any catalogue of canonical books in the first four centuries AD. It was not until the 5th century AD that a well-known organization slipped them into the catalogue!

"These Apocryphal books were never asserted to be divinely inspired or to possess Divine authority in their contents!

"No Prophets were connected with these writings! Each Old Testament book was written by a man who was a prophet either by office or by gift or both.

"The Apocrypha contained many historical, geographical and chronological errors. They so distorted and contradicted Old Testament narratives that in order to accept the Apocrypha one had to reject the Old Testament.

"The Apocrypha teaches doctrines and upholds practices which are contrary to the Canon of Scriptures! Documentation regarding the false doctrines found in the Apocrypha is as follows:

“a. Prayers and offerings for the dead. In 2Ma 12:41-46, not only are prayers offered for the dead, but monetary offerings are brought on their behalf and even recommended! I am quoting from the Douay version ... of the Old Testament, which is a revised version of the Vulgate: ‘It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sin’ ...

“b. Suicide Justified. 2Ma 14:41-46 deals with a revolt against the "Syrians", led by the Maccabean brothers ... the Apocrypha justifies this suicide and calls it a noble death.

“c. Atonement and salvation by almsgiving. At least two of the books of the Apocrypha state that sins may be atoned for and salvation may be obtained by giving large donations. Tobit 4:11 "For alms deliver from all sin, and from death and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness."

“d. Cruelty to Slaves Justified. In Ecclesiasticus 33:25-29 we read that the best way to treat a slave is to pile the work on him, and that, if need be, cruelty to slaves is fully justified ...

“e. The doctrine of emanations. This is a cosmological concept characteristic of ... Gnosticism. It explains the world as an "outflowing" from One Absolute source but never uses the word God

“f. The preexistence of souls is also mentioned ... which claims that the soul, as well as the body is produced in procreation ... We know that ultimately only God can give soul-life.

“g. other fallacies in the Apocrypha ... hatred of Samaritans ... lying is sanctified in certain cases ... incantations are encouraged as is assassination ... seven angels are said to have the power of intercession ... purgatory is established as a place ... ”

2. Interestingly neither the Roman or Greek Orthodox Church accepts all of the theology of the Apocrypha but rather they have chosen to pick and choose and have therefore no absolute standard or Canon.

2.1 Much of that taught in the Apocrypha is vehemently opposed to sound Catholic teaching and many of the early Church fathers without question ... considered the Apocrypha as questionable and not to be considered as equal with the Bible. There has been far less controversy with reference to what represents the New Testament.

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