

## 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 deuterocanonical (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 *Esther*, *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.

3. There has been far less controversy with reference to what represents the New Testament.

3.1 Criteria for New Testament Canonicity can be summarized:

- a. Apostolicity - every Book must be written by an apostle or someone close to an apostle.
- b. Reception by the early local Churches as being authentic.
- c. Consistency - doctrines in the Book must be consistent with extant Christian teaching.
- d. Each Book must give either internal or external evidence of Divine inspiration.

3.2 The Church Councils finally resolved all question as to what constituted our New Testament.

Council of Laodicea - 336 AD

Council of Damascus - 382 AD

Council of Carthage -397 AD

Council of Hippo - 419 AD

3.3 The Council of Laodicea recognized and accepted all books of the New Testament except the book of the Revelation however the next three councils included the book of Revelation into the Canon.

3.4 The question of Canonicity never came up again until the rise of liberalism in the nineteenth century which led to our twentieth century modernism.

### **How We Got Our King James Bible**

The following has been taken from a book written by Col. R. B. Thieme, Jr. The title of the book was *Canonicity*. It is necessary you understand some of the background connected with the reign of King James I. Elizabeth, Queen of England, had a beautiful cousin, Mary Stuart, who had returned from France in 1561 to take her rightful place as Queen of the Scots.

Scotland was in a state of turbulence: the clans fomented discontent; the new faith preached by John Knox swept across the chilling lochs; and Catholic Mary was held in contempt, not only for her presence in Scotland, but for her continuing claim to the Tudor crown of Elizabeth. Mary unwisely married the Scottish Lord Darnley. This created further antagonism, both to the English because of his Tudor connections and to the Scots because he was Catholic.

The Scots had become Calvinistic in their beliefs and resented Mary's Romanism and the influence of her French court. The people were determined that never again should the Roman Church be allowed to gain and hold political power in their nation. After a series of indiscretions and acts of poor judgment, Mary was forced to abdicate in favor of her infant son, who then became James VI of Scotland. Fleeing the wrath of the Protestant nobles, Mary sought refuge in England.

Elizabeth was in a quandary. She dared not send Mary back to Scotland, for the Scots might execute their ... monarch; she was equally afraid to give her sanctuary in England where Mary was certain to be a rallying point for all manner of malcontents. Therefore, Elizabeth was obliged to keep her 'guest' strictly confined and thus began a kaleidoscope of intrigues and plots that was to span almost two decades. Eventually, Mary's continued sedition left Elizabeth no other alternative. Mary was executed in 1587.

James VI, Mary's son by Lord Darnley, who had been King of Scotland since 1568 under the regency of the Earl of Moray, was reared a protestant. He was taught Calvinistic theology, Greek, Latin and Hebrew. Jamie was quite a student. He could discourse on theological subjects in both English and Latin. When Elizabeth died, she left no heirs, thus ending the House of Tudor. James VI was brought down from Scotland and crowned James I of England, beginning the reign of the House of Stuart. The year was 1603. James had led an uneasy life in Scotland and actually looked forward to coming to England.

However, he soon found that England, too, had its troubles; the Puritans were in revolt against the established church. One thousand Puritan preachers had gathered together to write a petition. They beseeched his noble Majesty and parliament for a change in the established church service and the removal of such superstitions as the sign of the cross. Furthermore, the Puritans refused to use the prescribed prayer book because of its corrupted translations.

This petition became known in history as the *Millenary Petition* because of the thousand signatures affixed to it. It resulted in the Hampton Court conference on January 14, 1603, over which King James himself presided. It was during one of the endless debates that the leader of the Puritans, John Reynolds, said, "May your Majesty be pleased, that the Bible be new translated, such as are extant not answering to the original."

Immediately Reynolds' request ran into opposition from Bancroft the Bishop of London. The Bishop claimed that if all who wished were permitted to come up with translations, the country would be swamped with Bibles. So the talks dragged on.

Finally the King of England grew weary listening to the debates in Parliament. He sided firmly with Reynolds in favor of a new Bible. He admitted that he had "never yet seen a Bible well translated into English," and he wished that "some special pains were taken for a uniform translation ... done by the best learned of both universities ... lastly ratified by royal authority ... to be read in the whole church and none other."

James was vitally interested in theology and in languages. He was knowledgeable in the Scriptures and in Bible doctrine. Besides, the thought that a new and better translation of the Bible should be published during his reign appealed to James tremendously. He made but one condition: He would handpick the translators himself. Although the new translation had his complete backing and would eventually be ratified by him, he did not contribute one penny toward its expense. It is said to have cost 3500 pounds sterling - a considerable sum in those days. On July 22, 1604, the King announced that he had appointed fifty-four men to make the new translation. How did he select the scholars? His only requirement was that they must be good linguists.

Half of them were Hebrew experts and the other half experts in Greek. The list included Anglicans and Puritans, believers and unbelievers. Of those selected, seven men died before the work was begun, including John Reynolds, who had asked for this translation. Actually, only forty-seven men worked on what we call today "The Authorized" or "King James Version of the Bible."

It was a perfect time for the translation to be undertaken, for the English language had been greatly improved by men like Shakespeare, Donne, and Spenser; classic literature had reached its peak. The beauty of the English language of that day and its power of expression are thus preserved for us in the King James Bible. Thus, a style of language which would otherwise be long outdated has come down to us fresh and, with the exception of some words, very much to the point.

The scholars were divided into six teams; two teams worked at Oxford, two at Cambridge, and two at Westminster, with the work portioned among them. In each of the groups, the teams were further broken down into an Old Testament team and a New Testament team. All worked independently of each other. That explains, of course, why the word **pneuma** was translated "spirit" in one place and "Ghost" in another. It was simply a matter of esprit de corps - school spirit. The Westminster group used Ghost, and the Oxford group used Spirit. Each put down what he preferred. One of the teams worked entirely on the Apocrypha, which as you know, is no longer included in the King James Version of the Bible. The teams translating the Old Testament used the Masoretic Text as their source.

For the Greek, the *Textus Receptus* ("the text received by all") was used. All in all, the 1611 edition was a good translation from the manuscripts that were then available. The majestic Anglo-Saxon, with its clarity and style, its directness and force, have made the King James Bible an English classic and a model for hundreds of years. Yet upon its release, the Authorized Version turned out to be the most unpopular and universally condemned translation that had ever come off the printing press. It caused the biggest ruckus ever raised over an edition of the Bible in the English-speaking world.

Some criticism was justified because, in the process of printing, over four hundred typographical errors were made which had to be corrected. For the most part, however, the criticism was unfounded and biased. The Catholics condemned it for favoring the Protestants. The Arminians thought it favored Calvinism. The Calvinists claimed that it favored Arminianism. The Puritans objected to the church polity and the ritual, as well as the use of such words as "bishop," "church," "ordain" and "Easter." In short, everyone who considered himself to be an expert on the subject screamed in protest and began to write pamphlets condemning the new version of the Bible. No one liked it except King James I.