



Conducted by
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"On purchasing a Bible the other day I was offered one with, and one without, the Apocrypha.

I was confused because I did not know what the Apocrypha was or what difference it would have made. Could you please explain to me about this matter?"

I am sure that many of us have had a similar experience at one time or another and I shall try to pass on what little I know about the subject.

What the Apocrypha is

First of all we must try to avoid confusing the Apocrypha with the Apocalypse, which is quite an easy thing to do. The Apocalypse is a term commonly given to the book of Revelation in the New Testament and the word "apocalypse" means *a revealing*, a disclosing.

We find that the word "apocrypha" however, means almost the very opposite to apocalypse; it means that which is hidden, *not revealed*. Indeed "the Apocrypha" means "the hidden books", and this is the literal meaning of the term. However in actual usage the term "Apocrypha" is intended to refer to a group of books which have in no wise been hidden away somewhere, but, rather, have gone *unpublished as the inspired word of God*. This is a group of books whose authors are unknown; whose authenticity as inspired writings is not admitted and which are therefore not considered a part of the sacred canon of scripture. When the Jews published their sacred books, they called them *canonical and divine*; such as they did not publish were called *apocryphal*. Today the apocryphal books are received by the Roman Catholic Church as canonical, but, generally speaking, have never been so accepted by protestants, This is, I suppose; why some Bibles contain the Apocrypha and why some don't - the publisher is catering to the requirements of the Roman Catholic members of the population and any others who feel that the Apocrypha is part of the Bible. This is, of course, a question of the utmost importance - is it a part of the Old Testament or is it not?

Contains Errors

The Apocrypha consists of fourteen books, *viz.*:- 1st Esdras; 2nd Esdras; Tobit; Judith; Esther; The Wisdom of Solomon; The Wisdom of Jesus; Baruch; The Song of the Three Holy Children; The History of Susanna; Bel and the Dragon; The Prayer of Manasses; 1st Maccabees; 2nd Maccabees. The dates of some of them are supposed to be a few centuries B.C., while others were evidently written much later. Most of them were probably written between the third and the first centuries B.C. - a time, as most of us believe, when Divine inspiration was non-existent. Unlike *the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms* (the O.T. scriptures) they were not written in the Hebrew tongue, nor were they ever received or admitted by the Jews as part of the Old Testament. As mentioned before, the authors of the books are unknown and in any case did not make any claims to being inspired men. Indeed, at the end of the book 2nd Maccabees (a book received by the R.C. Church as part of the sacred scriptures) the writer asks to be pardoned for any mistakes he may have made. Where in the Bible can we find an inspired writer conceding mistakes in that which he has penned? The writer of the Book of Wisdom claims that Solomon

was the author but the time-seale surely shows how false a claim it is — and with one falsehood who can believe the rest?

The Apocrypha also contains ideas and suggestions foreign to general Bible teaching and directly opposed to the teaching of Christ. For instance, in 2nd Maccabees we read, "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins." Not only are prayers for the dead advocated but a suicide is referred to as "dying nobly". (2nd Maccabees 14:24). Also in the Book of Wisdom (8:19-20) we have the transmigration of souls suggested. It seems to this writer that the book *Bel and the Dragon* would be better suited to a place in Grimm's Fairy Tales or Aesop's Fables. It is said that 1st and 2nd Maccabees contain some useful history but, at the same time they surely contain too many contradictions to be regarded seriously as God's word. In 1st and 2nd Maccabees there are three accounts of the death of Antiochus which completely contradict one another. In 1st Macc. 6:4-16 he is said to have died of mental agony, while in 2nd Macc. 1:13-16 he is reported as having been slain by priests, and in 2nd Macc. 9:28 he is spoken of as having died of some disease. The release of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity as recorded in 1st Esdras 3 and 4 plainly contradicts the Bible account of this historical event as contained in Ezra.

Only of Recent Acceptance

It is an extremely important fact that the Council of Trent in 1546 under the immediate control of the then Pope, declared that tradition (the unwritten word) *and the Apocrypha* would thenceforth be regarded by the R.C. Church as canonical and authoritative. In terms of the age of the Apocryphal books this is a fairly recent declaration (albeit 1546) and tends to show that *prior to the Council of Trent the Apocrypha was not regarded as canonical or authoritative.* This is a fairly well established fact for prior to 1546 most important Catholic teachers rejected and renounced the Apocrypha. I think it can be fairly said that from the writings of the books of the Apocrypha (two or three hundred years B.C.) until the Council of Trent in 1546 *no-one*, generally speaking, regarded these books as divine or canonical; and that from 1546 until the present time only the Roman Catholic Church regards the books as canonical. Even the Church of England does not receive the Apocrypha as sacred scripture, but concedes only that it may contain "moral lessons" (but no doctrine).

Not Quoted in Septuagint or New Testament

About 277 B.C. (*i e.* a little over one hundred years after the close of the Old Testament canon) a translation of the Old Testament was made into the Greek language. The Old Testament was, of course, written originally in Hebrew. This translation into the Greek language was made probably because Greek was the language generally spoken throughout the Roman dominated world at the time and was carried out by seventy scholars. Hence it is known as the Septuagint (Septuagint being a latin word meaning "seventy"). This translation was made, as has been said, about 100 years after the Old Testament had been closed and just about the time of the writing of the books of the Apocrypha, and yet it was not until many centuries later that the Apocryphal books began to be associated with the Septuagint. Whatever faults may attach to the Jews they certainly were not careless about their holy scriptures, and they certainly didn't recognise for one moment any of the Apocrypha as being part of their Scriptures. Moreover, had the Septuagint translation really contained the apocryphal books in the days of our Lord, and been generally acknowledged by the Jews as holy scripture, Jesus would surely have raised His voice against it. He did not do so for the simple reason that the Apocrypha was not so regarded. Although there are in the New Testament some 263 direct quotations from, and 370 allusions to, passages in the Old Testament, there is not a single clear and positive reference by Christ, or any of the apostles, to the Apocrypha.

The testimony of Josephus, the Jewish historian who was born in 37 A.D. (and thus a contemporary of the apostles) is powerful evidence indeed that the Apocrypha was not part of the Old Testament. In his work "Against Apion" (Book 1, sec. 8) he wrote, "We have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, but *only twenty two books*, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, *no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them.*" (The 22 books are the same as our 39 books of the O.T. — this is due to a different style of numbering them—the Jews regarding, for instance, the twelve minor prophets as one book). So, according to Josephus, no apocryphal writings were regarded in his day as part of scripture. This seems still to have been the position as late as 315 A.D. for Cyril of Jerusalem refers to the Septuagint and says "Read the divine scriptures — namely *the twenty two books of the Old Testament* which the 72 interpreters translated" (*i.e.* the Septuagint). Indeed it was not until, possibly, between A.D. 300 and 400 that the Apocrypha began to make its appearance alongside the Septuagint. This was probably why the Greek Church, in A.D. 363 at the Council of Laodicea, denied the inspiration of the apocryphal books and prohibited their use in the churches. The early Christian fathers, including Athanasius, Hilary, Epiphanius, Gregory and Amphilochius, all rejected it, as did Jerome (392 A.D.) Gregory the Great (Pope in 590 A.D.) rejected the two Books of Maccabees (accepted by the R.C. Church today).

Uninspired and Unauthoritative

Space has again gone, but all in all we can say that the Bible is complete *without* the Apocrypha and that in fact the Apocrypha should be regarded as *uninspired, unauthoritative and probably best ignored*. Almost all men, even eminent Roman Catholics, rejected it until 1546, and even now it is accepted as scripture only by the R.C. church. My advice — leave it well alone.