

The So-Called “Extra Books” of the Old Testament

I. Introduction:

Deuterocanonical connotes “second canon.” It is used “referring to those books and passages of the Old and New Testaments about which there was controversy at one time in early Christian history.” On the other hand, *Protocanonical* is “a term applied to those books of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, whose inspired character had never been questioned, e.g., by any Church Father” (source, Modern Catholic Dictionary). In relation to the Old Testament (OT), the complete list of “deuterocanonical” books as they appear in the Orthodox Scriptures include: Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Maccabees 1-3, Judith, Tobit, Esdras (1 Ezra), Esther and Daniel (the fuller Greek versions).

Most Protestants call these books the “Apocrypha” and reject them as non-canonical and uninspired. The ancient Churches (Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholics) accept them as canonical and inspired. This based primarily on the Greek Septuagint OT which contains the fuller canon, in addition to the witness of early Church councils (e.g., the Councils of Hippo 393 and Carthage 397) and numerous Church Fathers and early Christian writers.

It is important to note that the term “deuterocanonical” is not reserved to the Old Testament books alone. It is also applied to the New Testament. In the NT the “deuterocanonical” books are: Hebrews, St. James, 2 St. Peter, 2 & 3 St. John, St. Jude and the Apocalypse (or Book of Revelation). The inspiration of these books was called into question by some in the early Church. Some of these deuterocanonical NT letters were also rejected by leading Protestant Reformers. Martin Luther, for example, rejected the Epistle of St. James (among others) calling it an “*Epistle of Straw*” because of its insistence on the necessity of works in the Christian life. These NT deuterocanonical books, as their name implies, were eventually added to the protocanonical books and canonized by the early Church in official Church councils. Thus, it was that the Church used her God-given authority to affirm the canons of both the Old and New Testaments.

II. The Scriptural Canon as it was at the Council of Carthage (397):

CANON XXIV. (Greek xxvii.) That besides the Canonical Scriptures nothing be read in church under the name of divine Scripture. But the Canonical Scriptures are as follows:

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy
- Joshua the Son of Nun
- The Judges

- Ruth
- The Kings (4 books)
- The Chronicles (2 books)
- Job
- The Psalter
- The Five books of Solomon:
[Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Canticle of Canticles, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus]
- The Twelve Books of the Prophets
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel
- Daniel
- Tobit
- Judith
- Esther
- Ezra (2 books)
- Maccabees (2 books)

The New Testament:

- The Gospels (4 books)
- The Acts of the Apostles (1 book)
- The Epistles of Paul (14)
- The Epistles of Peter, the Apostle (2)
- The Epistles of John the Apostle (3)
- The Epistles of James the Apostle (1)
- The Epistle of Jude the Apostle (1)
- The Revelation of John (1 book)

“Let this be sent to our brother and fellow bishop, [Pope] Boniface, and to the other bishops of those parts, that they may confirm this canon, for these are the things which we have received from our fathers to be read in church.”

III. A Short Dialogue on the Deuterocanonical Books

One person objected stating:

“And if the Catholic claim that the Jews rejected the Apocrypha at Jamnia because they were embarrassed by Messianic references therein, they'll have to show me what Messianic references there embarrassed them more than the Law, Prophets and the Writings. I've read most of the Apocrypha, and I can't find any Messianic references that would have embarrassed a Jew.”

Reply:

It is not that the Jews rejected the “Apocrypha” at Jamnia but instead they rejected the entire Septuagint because it was the primary OT of the Christians. The Septuagint included all of

the OT books including those which most Protestants call “Apocrypha” and reject as non-canonical. These books were used and quoted by the majority of Church Fathers and early Christian writers as authoritative and canonical Scriptures.

The Jews rejected the Septuagint (as a whole) because it contained so many Christological prophecies. For example, scholars have shown that 80% of the time when NT writers quote the OT it is from the Greek Septuagint and not the Hebrew text. In fact, even Protestant scholars have found and demonstrated that Jesus and St. Paul clearly allude to passages contained of the Deuterocanonical books. The Septuagint was *the* translation of the NT writers and the early Church and it was canonized in full along with the 27 books of the NT.

For an example of a Messianic reference in the Deuterocanonical books, see The Book of Wisdom (2:12-21):

“Let us therefore lie in wait for the just, because he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our doings, and upbraids us with transgressions of the law, and divulges against us the sins of our way of life. He boasts that he hath the knowledge of God and calls himself the son of God. He is become a censurer of our thoughts. He is grievous unto us, even to behold: for his life is not like other men's, and his ways are very different. We are esteemed by him as triflers and he abstains from our ways as from filthiness, and he prefers the latter end of the just, and glories that he has God for his father. Let us see then if his words be true and let us prove what shall happen to him, and we shall know what his end shall be. For if he be the true son of God, he will defend him, and will deliver him for the hands of his enemies. Let us examine him by outrages and tortures, that we may know his meekness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a most shameful death: for there shall be respect had unto him by his words. These things they thought and were deceived: for their own malice blinded them.”

I don't think there are many quotes from the OT protocanonical books that are more clearly prophetic of our Lord and His rejection by His own people. But even many of these OT protocanonical prophecies are lost if we, like the Jews of Jamnia, reject the Septuagint and go with the Hebrew alone.

IV. Scriptural Prophecies distorted (or corrupted) in the Hebrew Masoretic text but preserved in the Greek Septuagint (Messianic prophecies are capitalized for clarity):

A. Genesis 49:9-10: *Prediction of the coming of the Christ.*

---Greek Septuagint: "Juda is a lion's whelp: to the prey, my son, thou art gone up: resting thou hast couched as a lion, and as a lioness, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not be taken away from Juda, nor a ruler from his thigh, TILL HE COME THAT IS TO BE SENT, AND HE SHALL BE THE EXPECTATION OF NATIONS."

---Hebrew Masoretic: "Judah, like a lion's whelp; you have grown up on prey, my son. He crouches like a lion recumbent, the king of beasts - who would dare rouse him? The scepter shall never depart from Judah, or the mace from between his legs, while tribute is brought to him, and he receives the peoples' homage.

B. Psalm 21:17 LXX (22:16 in Protestant Bibles): *Prediction of the Passion.*

---Greek Septuagint: "...THEY PIERCED MY HANDS AND MY FEET."

---Hebrew Masoretic: "...they have bitten like a lion my hands and my feet."

C. Psalm 109:3 LXX (110:3 in Prot. Bibles): *The Son is eternally begotten of the Father.*

---Greek Septuagint: "WITH THEE IS THE PRINCIPALITY IN THE DAY OF THY STRENGTH; IN THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE SAINTS: FROM THE WOMB BEFORE THE DAY-STAR I BEGOT THEE."

---Hebrew Masoretic: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth."

D. Psalm 39:7 LXX (40:6 in Protestant Bibles): *Prediction of the Incarnation.*

---Greek Septuagint: "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING THOU WOULDST NOT; BUT A BODY HAST THOU PREPARED ME."

---Hebrew Masoretic: "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened:"

E. Isaiah 7:14: *Prediction of the Virgin Birth and Incarnation of the Christ.*

---Greek Septuagint: "BEHOLD A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE, AND BEAR A SON, AND HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED EMMANUEL."

---Hebrew Masoretic: "...the young woman is with child and will give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel."

These are some of the more prominent prophecies about Christ. Some of these are even quoted verbatim by the NT authors from the Greek Septuagint. The others were quoted by Church Fathers as clear messianic prophecies. Either way, these are lost in the Masoretic OT. This is why the Jews at Jamnia chose to discard the Septuagint. These messianic passages were a hindrance in their quest to eradicate Christianity. They chose, therefore, the shorter "Palestinian Canon" which also excluded all books thought by them to be composed in Greek. Thus, they totally discarded the longer "Alexandrian Canon" contained in the Greek Septuagint. It is interesting to note that some of the deuterocanonical books, although previously thought to have been composed in Greek, were in reality originally composed in Hebrew (e.g., see the Wisdom of Sirach, Chapter 1). The Jews at Jamnia succeeded at eliminating the deuterocanonals (or "Apocrypha") from their Jewish canon along with the Gospels. Although it is reported that the Jews in Ethiopia retained use of the full OT canon (with the deuterocanonals).

V. Why is there a discrepancy between the Hebrew and Greek Old Testaments?

Some believe the Jews at Jamnia maliciously translated away these prophecies. This is a concerning thought, but plausible. The Dr. Haydock Roman Catholic commentary states (commenting on Ps 21:17 LXX),

"The Jews have here, and God knows in how many other places, corrupted their text; reading 'like a lion,' though it have no sense, to avoid so clear a prophecy. 'Brusius informs us that a Jew threatened Bomberg, when he designed to adopt this correction [they pierced my hands and my feet], that if he did, he would prevent any of his brethren from purchasing a single copy."

Another explanation is that when the Greek-speaking Jews were translating the Hebrew into Greek (a couple hundred years before Christ) the Holy Spirit led these "Seventy-Two" translators to a clearer understanding and the proper translation of the Hebrew words which were later contradicted by the anti-Christian Jews at Jamnia.

At any rate, one thing should be clear: The Jews at Jamnia were anti-Christian. The council was specifically anti-Christian in intention and so was the motivation for its decisions. Their sole purpose was to undermine the Septuagint in hopes of stamping out Christianity. It is hard to imagine why any Christian would accept the decisions of that council as correct (for more background on the Council of Jamnia see Steve Ray's webpage: <http://www.catholic-convert.com/>).

Finally, regarding the Armenian Church's Canon, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian affirmed the traditional Septuagint canon in his forward to the English edition of the Armenian Church Holy Bible. His Grace states:

"The Armenian Canon contains a greater breadth of sacred writings than the contemporary Western versions and includes books which were termed 'apocryphal' or 'secret' in the West, but which in the Armenian tradition have been offered to the faithful with the full authorization of the Church."

Thus, the Armenian Church, like all the ancient Apostolic and Orthodox Churches, has always held to the longer Septuagint canon rather than the truncated one used by Protestants today.

In Christ's Light,
Wm. DerGhazarian