

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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~ All articles are written by George L. Faull, Rel. D. unless otherwise stated ~

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George L. Faull, Editor

The Apocrypha

--By Terry Carter

Recently one of our students called to ask about the Old Testament Apocrypha. He had read that some believe **Hebrews 11:35-38** may refer to incidents recorded in the Apocrypha. "35 Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth." **Hebrews 11:35-38 (NKJV)**

This assumption of allusions to the Apocrypha was, in turn, used as an argument for including the Apocrypha in the Canon of Old Testament Scripture. There are a number of reasons why this is not valid reasoning.

First, there is nothing mentioned in these verses that are certainly references to the Apocrypha. In fact, it is far from certain that any of these incidents referred to what happened during the time between the Old and New Testaments. That is, after the time of Malachi and before the birth of Jesus. All the events listed here are described in a rather general way. Just because an incident recorded in the Apocrypha fits one of these

descriptions is certainly not proof that that is the incident the Hebrew writer had in mind. Some of them certainly correspond to events recorded in the Old Testament Canon. The ones for which we have no specific record of in the Old Testament Canon might just as well come from oral tradition as from similar events in the Apocrypha.

Second, a reference or allusion is not the same as a quotation. It is certainly true that neither the apostles nor Jesus ever quoted from the Apocrypha. The events listed in these verses from Hebrews are certainly not exceptions to this statement. They are allusions at best and that is far from certain. Allusions are not valid grounds for inclusion in the Canon. If they were, then Jewish tradition must be included as many of them are alluded to in the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles. But often it is the fact that they are at odds with these traditions that explains why they are mentioned at all.

Third, even a quotation is not automatically a valid basis for inclusion in the Canon. If they were, then there are some heathen poets whose works must be included. While at Athens, Paul quotes one of their poets who said that we are the offspring of God. "For in Him we live and move and have our being, **as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'**" **Acts 17:28 (NKJV)**

This is not an indication that everything that poet said was true. It certainly is not proof that that poet was inspired of God. There is no

valid argument to be made for including any of his works in the Canon. It could be that everything else he said was in error, but this was true. The audience to whom Paul was speaking was evidently familiar with what this poet had said, yet what they were practicing was a long way from what it should have instructed them to do. Paul is saying that since you are God's offspring, we should not think of God as made of materials like gold, silver, or stone. In fact, Paul calls their practices ignorant. "29 Therefore, **since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.** 30 "Truly, **these times of ignorance** God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent," **Acts 17:29-30 (NKJV)**

Paul also quotes from a Cretan in his letter to Titus. In fact, he called him a prophet of theirs. He even went so far as to say that what he quoted was, in fact, true. "12 **One of them, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.** 13 **This testimony is true.** Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith," **Titus 1:12-13 (NKJV)**

Once again this is no indication that everything this man said was true. Since what he said is that Cretans are always liars, it was especially important that Paul told us this is true. Otherwise we might have thought that he was lying when he said that. However, it is also a good indication that we should be very careful about

heeding the words of any Cretan, including the one Paul quoted here. Certainly, this is no indication that he was inspired of God or that any of his works should be included in the Canon. As the old saying goes, "Even a stopped watch is right twice a day, but I don't wear one".

In contrast to these quotations and alleged references, we have Peter calling the writings of Paul, "Scripture". This is a valid argument for inclusion in the Canon. "15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also **our beloved brother Paul**, according to the wisdom given to him, **has written to you**, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also **the rest of the Scriptures.**" **II Peter 3:15-16 (NKJV)**

Paul referred to what Luke wrote as Scripture. This is a sure foundation for inclusion in the Canon. "For **the Scripture says**, You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, **The laborer is worthy of his wages.**" **I Timothy 5:18 (NKJV)**

"And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for **the laborer is worthy of his wages**. Do not go from house to house." **Luke 10:7 (NKJV)**

The quotations of the pagan or alleged references to writings outside of the Canon are not a valid basis upon which to argue for their inclusion in the Canon. Alleged allusions are the best-case scenario for those who would advocate for the inclusion of the Old Testament Apocrypha in the Canon. But it cannot even be proven that Hebrews contains references to the Apocrypha, much less quotations. Certainly nothing from the Apocrypha is referred to as Scripture.

The following is some general information about the Old Testament Apocrypha that the reader may find helpful in this discussion:

The Old Testament Apocrypha

A. The word means "hidden" or "concealed", from the Greek word, "*apokruphos*"

1. It referred to books that religious authorities wanted hidden from the public.
2. At least that's how they were characterized by their supporters.
3. In fact, there was good reason to conceal them from the public.
4. They were often filled with esoteric teachings, as well.
5. Use of this word in reference to noncanonical books dates to Jerome in the 5th century A.D.
- B. They are books rejected by all but Catholics today.
- C. They were often included in early versions of the Old Testament but separate from the other books.
- D. They were never considered part of the canon.
- E. Note that Josephus knew of such books but said they lacked prophetic authority.
- F. Why they are rejected:
 1. They contain many historical, geographical and chronological errors.
 2. They contain doctrines that are contrary to Scripture.
 3. They contain contradictions.
 4. Their style is out of keeping with Scripture.
 5. They lack the distinctiveness of Scripture.
- G. Historical evidence against them.
 1. Philo (20 B.C. to 40 A.D.) recognized the Old Testament but not the apocrypha.
 2. Josephus (30 – 100 A.D.) same as Philo.
 3. Jesus and the New Testament writers, same as Philo.
 4. Jewish scholars of Jamnia (90 A.D.) didn't recognize them.
 5. No church council recognized them in the first four centuries.
 6. The early Church fathers rejected them.
 - a. Origen
 - b. Cyril of Jerusalem
 - c. Athanasius
 7. Jerome (340-420 A.D.) refused to put them in the Vulgate and argued with Augustine about it.
 8. Many Catholic scholars during the Reformation rejected them.
 9. Luther and the reformers rejected them.
 10. They weren't fully recognized by the Catholic church until 1546 A.D.
- H. Individual books

1. I Esdras, 150 B.C., tells of the return from captivity.
2. II Esdras, 100 A.D.
 - a. Contains seven visions.
 - b. Confused Luther so much that he threw it into the river.
3. Tobit, second century B.C.
 - a. A novel.
 - b. Claims that giving alms atones for sin.
4. Judith, second century B.C., a novel about a Jewish heroine.
5. Additions to Esther, 100 B.C., contains prayers of Esther and Mordecai.
6. Wisdom of Solomon, 40 A.D., warns against idolatry and materialism.
7. Ecclesiasticus or wisdom of Sirach, 180 B.C., proverbial sayings.
8. Baruch, 100 A.D.
 - a. Claims to be written by Jeremiah's scribe in 582 B.C.
 - b. Probably written in reaction to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
9. Story of Susanna, first century B.C.
 - a. Was appended to Daniel to make a chapter 13.
 - b. Story about a woman falsely accused of adultery.
10. Bel and the Dragon, first century B.C.
 - a. Was added to Daniel to make a chapter 14.
 - b. Shows the folly of idolatry.
11. Song of three Hebrew children.
 - a. Follows **Daniel 3:23** in the Septuagint and Vulgate.
 - b. It borrows from **Psalms 148**.
12. Prayer of Manasseh, second century B.C., supposed prayer of Manasseh.
13. I Maccabees, first century B.C.
 - a. Describes the exploits of three Maccabean brothers.
 - b. A valuable source for the history of the period.
14. II Maccabees, a parallel account to I Maccabees that is more legendary.
15. Some also include the following:
 - a. The Letter of Jeremiah.
 - b. The Prayer of Azariah.
 - c. III Maccabees
 - d. IV Maccabees