

## 1 **The Bible Among Those Other Books**

- Module: Authority
- Lesson 31

## 2 **Some Recommended Sources**

- Norman Geisler, Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics
- Douglas Groothuis, Jesus in an Age of Controversy.
- Andreas Köstenberger and Michael Kruger, The Heresy of Orthodoxy
- John Oswalt, The Bible Among the Myths
- Richard Bauckham, Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony
- Richard Bauckham, The Authenticity of the Apostolic Eyewitness, (video lecture, 56 min)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hsAEodyPnQ>
- Peter Williams, Why I Don't Believe in the Septuagint, (video lecture, 56 min.)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmpnJ1cgh58>

## 3 **What About Books Outside The Canon?**

- The Old Testament Apocrypha?
- The New Testament Apocrypha?
  - The religious texts of other religions?

## 4 **"Competing" Religious Texts**

- What about the writings of other religions that are believed by their respective adherents to be sacred or inspired?
  - e. g. the Qu'ran (Islam) the Bhagavad Gita (Hindu), the Upanishads (Hindu), the Lotus Sutra (Tendai Buddhism), the Book of Mormon (Mormons), etc.
- Some Mistaken Non-Sequiturs:
  - The existence of multiple texts which claim to be divinely authored or which its adherents claim are spiritually authoritative, is reason to reject the claims of all of them.
    - It does not follow, logically, that the existence of competing claims renders all claims invalid. (e.g. The competing claims of two parties in a legal case does not render the claims of both parties false or invalid.)

## 5 **"Competing" Religious Texts**

- Some Mistaken Non-Sequiturs (cont.):
  - Since there are multiple competing religious texts, one could never know which one, if any, is authentically authoritative.

- It does not follow, logically, that the existence of competing claims renders it impossible to determine which, if any, is credible. (e.g. The competing claims of two parties in a legal case does not render it impossible to determine, with a high degree of confidence, which is legitimate.)
- One cannot have confidence the bible to be the true and authoritative unless one has studied and considered all the other texts which are claimed to be authoritative.
  - This claim works both ways. If the Christian must study the texts of all religions before believing that the bible is true, then the one who discounts any religious text must also have studied all of them, including the bible, before believing any one is false.
  - It does not follow, logically, that someone needs to be thoroughly familiar with all counter claims regarding a subject to have sufficient confidence that the claims they do believe are true. (e.g. One may have bonafide confidence that the United States landed someone on the moon without having thoroughly studied the writings of all the moon-landing skeptics.)

## 6 "Competing" Religious Texts

- The Bible has unique credentials attesting to its authority.
- Remember the countless examples of the Bible's self-attestation, its countless claims to be both divine and authoritative. (By multiple authors over 1500 years.)
- Remember the evidences which uniquely support these claims:
  - Truthfulness
  - Internal Integrity
  - The historical nature of its message, and the verification of its historical claims
  - Its prophetic accuracy
  - Miracles by its human authors
  - Witness of the Holy Spirit
- The bible's substantial supporting evidence renders it unique among all sacred texts.

## 7 The Apocryphal Texts

- Apocrypha: (apo: from, grapha: writing) Books that lie outside the recognized canon.
- The Old Testament Apocrypha: 14 books included by the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox churches at the end of the Old Testament. (Not considered by Protestants or Jews to be canonical or inspired.)
- The New Testament Apocrypha:
  - Those considered useful or edifying, but not divinely inspired.
  - Those regarded as pseudo-scripture, heretical, or otherwise problematical.

## 8 **Determining the Reliability of Ancient Texts**

- Authenticity: Was the text written by whom it says it was written. Do we have reason to accept the author's authority?
- Integrity: Is the text itself sufficiently preserved so as to be reliable?
- Veracity: Is what the text says verifiably true?

## 9 **The Old Testament Canon**

- The Jewish canon (22 or 24 books, depending on how they are divided) coincides precisely with the 39 books of the Protestant Old Testament.
- The canon of the Old Testament falls under the purview of ancient Judaism, and is not in the place of the Christian church to alter.
- Ancient Judaism regarded their canon closed after the cessation of prophecy. It was closed prior to the New Testament era.
- Aside from the question of the O. T. Apocrypha, the canon of the O.T. is widely recognized.

## 10 **The Old Testament Apocrypha**

- Recognized as canonical by Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.
- Not recognized as canonical by Jews or Protestants.
- Never quoted by Jesus or the apostles.
- The O.T. canon of our 39 books is confirmed by numerous ancient Jewish and early Christian sources, including Second Esdras, Josephus, the Jerusalem List, Origen, etc.
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## 11 **The Old Testament Apocrypha**

- Key issues:
  - The Council of Trent (1548), in a response to the Protestant Reformation, asserted the canonical authority of the O. T. Apocrypha.
  - Argument that the Septuagint (LXX) (Grk. translation of Jewish writings, 2nd & 3rd centuries B. C.) included the Apocrypha. (The Septuagint is a collection of Jewish texts translated into Greek. The Septuagint was never intended as a canonical collection, and the Jews did not regard it as such.)
  - One motivation for inclusion of the Apocrypha by the Council of Trent was the perception that it lent support to the Catholic doctrines of purgatory and prayers for the dead.
- Protestant and Jewish scholars regard the O. T. Apocrypha to have value for historical purposes and for insight into the Jewish cultural and religious milieu of the period. It is also influential in how translators translate the New Testament from Greek.

## 12 **The New Testament Apocrypha**

- Apostolicity (authenticity) of a text was requisite for confirming canonicity.
  - Was it written by an apostle of Jesus or by a person known to have been within the circle of the apostles?
  - At issue was whether the text accurately represents the teachings of the apostles who were entrusted by Jesus with His message.
- Remember the connection of canon with covenant. (One had to have confidence that a writing was actually a document of the [New] covenant, inspired by God.)
- A text not known with a high degree of confidence to be apostolic was excluded from the canon and is therefore classed as apocryphal. (Whether useful or not.)

### 13 **Three C's to Determine Apostolicity**

- Chronology
  - Was it written in the apostolic era? (During the lifetime of the apostles.)
  - Ancient historians believed good history could only be written within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses.
  - The apostolic age ended around 100 A. D.
- Circle
  - Was the author within the circle of the appointed apostles?
  - e.g. The Gospel of Mark is believed to be Peter's memoirs recorded by Mark.
  - e.g. Luke was a close associate of Paul and had access to numerous eyewitnesses.
- Continuity
  - Did the content reflect continuity with the early church's teachings and traditions?

### 14 **Some Apocryphal Books**

- Among those the early church considered useful and/or edifying:
  - Epistle of Barnabas
  - Shepherd of Hermes
  - The Old Testament Apocrypha (11 or 12 books)
- Among those the church rejected as pseudo or false:
  - Ptolemy's letter to Flora (2nd century, Gnostic)
  - Gospel of Thomas (Nag Hammadi, not truly gospel genre but an anthology of sayings, Gnostic, 4th century)
  - Gospel of Philip (Nag Hammadi, not truly gospel genre, 3rd century)
  - Gospel of Mary (Nag Hammadi, 2nd century)
  - Gospel of Nicodemus (4th to 6th century)

### 15 **What are the Nag Hammadi Texts?**

- In December, 1945, a farmer near the Egyptian city of Nag Hammadi discovered a red earthenware jar which he discovered to contain the remains of 52 assorted manuscripts.
- The manuscripts were later determined to be ancient Coptic translations of earlier Greek writings representing an early Christian heresy called Gnosticism.
- Though some of these writings had been denounced in the writings of early church fathers, and therefore were known to New Testament scholars, no actual copies were known to still exist until the Nag Hammadi discovery.
- The Nag Hammadi discovery fueled interest in Gnosticism, as well as the mistaken belief by many that they contained the “lost books of the bible” with a historical stature equal to or greater than that of the New Testament Gospels.

## 16 **Why Christians Reject the Nag Hammadi and Other Apocryphal Texts as Canonical or Authoritative**

- They Fail the Tests for Reliability of Ancient Texts and for Canonicity.
  - Authenticity/Apostolicity
    - Chronology (Their authorship lies outside the apostolic age, and therefore cannot be apostolic.)
    - Circle (The authors, whoever they were, could not have come from within the circle of the apostles.)
    - Continuity (The content of these books are at places at odds with what we know to be the teaching of the early church)
  - Integrity (It is impossible to reliably document the textual integrity of the books.)
  - Veracity (The historical claims within these texts are not subject to verification.)

## 17 **Concluding Observations**

- The Bible stands unique among all religious texts—
  - For its hundreds of self-attestation statements of divine authorship.
  - For its thoroughgoing historical nature, and for the extent to which its historical claims can be independently verified.
  - For its heavy reliance on fulfilled prophecy as validation of its divine nature.
- There are very strong reasons to accept the 66 books (39 Old and 27 New) of the Protestant bible as the complete and only authoritative canon of the Christian faith.
- The claims made on behalf of the pseudo-Gospels that they should be included in, or replace, the orthodox canon, falter on the grounds of the tests of authenticity, integrity, and veracity.

## 18 **Next Week:**

- Can We Trust the Text?