

Appendix IV – The Old Testament “Apocrypha

In a few instances you will see me quote from books excluded from non-Catholic editions of the Bible. Non-Catholic brothers and sisters refer to these writings (Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Baruch, 1 & 2 Maccabees, an additional 107 verses to the Book of Esther and two chapters to the Book of Daniel) as the Apocrypha; Catholics refer to them as the “Deuterocanonicals.” Initially I came to accept their inspiration because of the resonance I found between them, as a group, and the rest of Scripture. Most convincing was a passage I had “happened upon” in Wisdom – it was the most explicit prophecy of Christ I had seen. Observe how closely it mirrors our Lord, especially His passion and death:

<p>Wisdom 2: 12 – 22</p> <p>[The wicked said:] “Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against our training.</p> <p>He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord. He became to us a reproof of our thoughts; the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange. We are considered by him as something base, and he avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy, and boasts that God is his father.</p> <p>Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God’s son, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.</p> <p>Let us test him with insult and torture, that we may find out how gentle his is, and make trial of his forbearance.</p> <p>Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.”</p>	<p>Jesus’ Ministry and Death</p> <p>Consider Jesus’ many confrontations with the Pharisees and teachers of the Law recorded in the New Testament.</p> <p>Reminiscent of the Beatitudes: “Blest are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matt. 5:5-12)</p> <p>At the crucifixion: “So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”(Matt. 27:41-44)</p>
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I couldn't ignore such prophetic precision. I was grateful to the Holy Spirit for letting me find this and began reading more of the "apocrypha." I wanted to understand why Christians disagreed over the Old Testament.

Through reading and talking with others I learned several interesting facts. First, that the Protestant Old Testament matches that of today's Jewish community; the Protestant Reformers considered it to be more authentic. Second, that St. Jerome, probably the greatest biblical scholar of the first three centuries, chose to distinguish these books from the rest of the Old Testament in his Latin translation, labeling them "ecclesiastical" as opposed to "canonical." These things would seem to argue against the deuterocanonicals acceptance, but there's another side to consider.

So far as the Jewish canon of Scripture goes, it was not decided until close to 100 A.D. The debate over which books to include in the canon was carried on in Jamnia, a Palestinian seacoast town. It was there that Rabbi Johanan ben Zakai had established a center for scribal learning.³⁰⁹ All of this took place after the fall of Jerusalem and the expulsion of Christians from the Synagogue. Prior to the decisions of Jamnia the Old Testament canon was not "set in stone" and was apparently larger than today's; this was the Old Testament used by the Apostles and the early Church. The Anglican scholar, J.N.D. Kelly writes,

. . .the Old Testament thus admitted as authoritative in the Church was somewhat bulkier and more comprehensive than the . . .books of the Hebrew Bible of Palestinian Judaism. . .It always included, though with varying degrees of recognition, the so-called Apocrypha, or deuterocanonical books. The reason for this is that the Old Testament which passed in the first instance into the hands of Christians was not the original Hebrew version, but the Greek translation known as the Septuagint.³¹⁰

The Greek translation, begun about 300 B.C., and which included the deuterocanonicals, was what the Church used in her worship and study; after all, Christians were predominately Greek-speaking. When the Apostles

³⁰⁹Hanson, James E., *If I'm a Christian, Why Be a Catholic?*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p.126

³¹⁰ Kelley, John Norman Davidson., *Early Christian Doctrines* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), p.53