

The Importance of Inspired Scripture...Sanctified and Approved by God

My Critique of Extra-Biblical Writings Focus: Apocrypha

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The Bible is an invaluable collection of “sacred, credible, factual and infallible” ancient texts, written, assembled (fitted and joined together) over several hundreds of years by numerous authors. These texts were written to particular people living at a definite time and place who shared common experiences and knowledge. However, the Bible is also written that men might:

- “..believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing (they) may have life in His name” (John 20:31),
- Come to know the Savior in a personal way...and be willing to share the “good news” and “...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I (Jesus) have commanded you...” (Matthew 28:19-20a),
- Continue to “study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that does not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy, 2:15) after the initial salvation experience.

It is relevant for the proper understanding of the Word of God, however, to believe that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, ‘thoroughly’ furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible, therefore, is inspired, approved, and

“determined” by God. Man has “discovered”¹ these truths and placed it in written form (the canon) to provide man with the means to know the truth and in which to live according to God’s principles. In a real sense, Christ is the key to the inspiration and canonization of the Scriptures. It was He who confirmed the inspiration of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament; and it was He who promised that the Holy Spirit would direct the apostles into all truth.²

Knowing that the canon, the Bible, the inspired Word of God, has been established, it is applicable to understand that there are many books and writings that were written over the years that were considered inspirational and historical, but not inspired (God breathed) by the Holy and Righteous God. These books are identified as non-canonical or extra-biblical writings. To these “writings” we are dedicating this time and personal writing. It is a “critique of extra-biblical writings” and focused on the Biblical apocrypha.

A true Bible scholar should hesitate in calling the Apocryphal writings... “Biblical.” The historical, grammatical and literal Bible theologian normally views the Bible as an invaluable collection of “sacred” ancient texts that were inspired by the Holy God. Apocryphal literature was apparently intended either to supplement or supplant existing canonical literature. Much of the apocryphal gospels are “guesses” as to what occurred during the so-called “missing years” of Jesus life...during his child hood or after His resurrection.³ There are some theologians, however, that see the apocryphal writings as an attempt to provide support for later theological convictions...both Orthodox and heretical. As a believer in the truth of God’s Word (Holy Scripture), it is pertinent to understand that although the apocryphal writings are non-canonical and, in some cases not factually correct, these documents help the student of God’s Word with

¹ Geisler, Norman and Nix, William; A General Introduction to the Bible, Moody Press, page 221.

² Ibid, page 207.

³ Wesley Center On-line, Non-canonical Literature, page 1, website, http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/index.htm

valuable insights into what some Jews and Christians believed in various places at different times. Therefore, the non-canonical literature has historical value and, in some cases, help substantiate the fact that God is faithful and true to His Word at all times.

Norman Geisler states that there were three steps to canonization.....

1. Inspiration by God,
2. Recognition by the people of God, and
3. Collection and preservation by the people of God.

Although the books accepted into the canon were accepted by both Catholics and Protestants alike, there were some books that were accepted only by some. These extra writings of Biblical times did not meet one or more of the criteria stated above. These writings were known as “Apocrypha” or “Pseudepigrapha.”

The term “apocrypha” was used by St. Jerome, a fifth century biblical scholar, and refers to the biblical books included as part of the Septuagint (Old Testament Greek version). The books were not included, however, in the Hebrew Bible. Several works between the 4th century B.C. to New Testament times are considered apocryphal. The apocryphal books included at the time, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit, Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, 1st and 2nd Maccabees, two books of Esdras, additions to the Book of Esther (Chapter 10:4-10), the Book of Daniel (chapter 3 has 90 verses; and chapters 13 and 14 added to the book), and the Prayer of Manasseh. It should be noted that the apocrypha have been included and omitted from the “bibles” over the course of the centuries. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches include the apocrypha except for the books of Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. The Protestant churches generally exclude the apocrypha. The term “apocrypha” generally refers to writings entirely outside of the biblical canon and not considered inspired.

Apocrypha (a Greek word meaning “those having been hidden away”) are texts of uncertain authenticity or writings where the authorship is questioned. The term *apocrypha*, according to Judeo-Christian theology, refer to any collection of scriptural texts that falls outside the canon. During 16th century controversies over the biblical canon the word “apocrypha” acquired a negative connotation, and have become a synonym for “spurious” or “false”.⁴ “Apocrypha” has evolved in meaning with implications ranging from positive to ‘pejorative’ (downgrading; becoming worse with time).

The first time the word “apocryphal” was applied in a positive sense was as writings which were kept secret because they were the vehicles of esoteric knowledge (confidential; intended for or understood by only a particular group)...writings that were considered too profound or too sacred to be disclosed to the general public...only to those that were qualified or initiated.

The term “apocrypha” has also been applied to writings that are hidden not because of their divinity but because of their questionable value to the church. Origen, an early theologian and writer (185-254 A.D.), distinguishes between writings which were read by the churches and those that were apocryphal (Commentary on Matthew). It is mentioned that the apocryphal writings were “*excluded from the public use of the church*”, and *prepares the way for an even less favorable use of the word*.⁵

“False, spurious, bad, or heretical” were meanings attached to the word “apocrypha.” This meaning appeared in Origen’s prologue to his commentary on the Song of Songs. In his works, Origen states, concerning these scriptures (Song of Songs) considered apocryphal

⁴ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, Apocrypha, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>, page 1 of 5

⁵ Ibid, Wikipedia, page 2 of 5.

because “*many things are found in them corrupt and against the true faith handed down by the elders, it has pleased them that they not be given a place nor be admitted to authority.*”⁶

Augustine defined the word as “obscurity of origin.” This implied that any book of unknown authorship or questionable authenticity would be considered “apocryphal.” Jerome, however, clearly stated that all books outside the Hebrew canon were apocryphal. It should be noted that Jerome, in practice, treated some books outside the Hebrew canon as if they were canonical. Because of this, the Western Church did not accept Jerome’s definition of apocrypha. They, instead, used the prior meaning of the word (Deuterocanon).

*“Many of the Greek fathers included some apocryphal books in the Septuagint with little distinction made between them and the rest of the Old Testament. Origen, Clement and others cited some apocryphal books as “scripture”, “divine scripture”, “inspired”, and the like. On the other hand, teachers connected with Palestine and familiar with the Hebrew canon excluded from the canon all of the Old Testament not found there. This view is reflected in the canon of Melito of Sardis, and in the prefaces and letters of Jerome.”*⁷

There was another view of apocryphal literature. This view found that the books were not as valuable as the canonical scriptures of the Hebrew collection, but were of value for moral uses and to be read in congregations. These writings were referred to as “ecclesiastical” works by Rufinus.

Almost all of the Church Fathers and Biblical theologians agree that *the Apocrypha has some historical value. It provides a most important source of information about the history and religion of the Jewish church in the intertestamental period. Nevertheless, it is probably going too far to give the Apocrypha a semi-canonical status, as did the Church of England, or a quasi-*

⁶ Ibid, Wikipedia, translated by a Wikipedia editor, page 2 of 5.

⁷ Ibid, Wikipedia, page 3 of 5.

*canonical status, as did the Eastern Orthodox Church. Whatever place it may be accorded below this level, it clearly is not part of the theological canon, which alone should be used for faith and practice.*⁸

What value the apocrypha has to the world, however, can be off-set by what the apocrypha de-values or misrepresents. Those of the Catholic Church/orientation will tell you, “You Protestants are missing part of the Bible. We have the rest of it.” This can irritate and antagonize the believer of the Word if he or she does not understand the principle and reasoning for a good hermeneutic and apologetic (in defense of the gospel and the Inspired Word of God). It is imperative that a true believer who knows the Word and stands on the Word will know how to deal with the person that is ignorant or unbiblical as to the facts for the “closed canon” and the significant understanding that “what God has put together...let no man put asunder.” Although this quote was by Jesus in response to some Pharisees’ questions concerning marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:3-12), it is relevant here only to stress a point; that the Word was inspired by God (God breathed) and is infallible...thus, if God inspired the Word of God to be put together by men that recognized the truth and put it in writing, then let not any man “add to or take away from it.” The writer here does not dare misuse or abuse the Word as quoted concerning “God putting together...and man not putting asunder (separating).” If, by the use of it, it misaligns the true meaning of what our Lord was conveying to the Pharisees, it is not done in response to the same question. It was done to “stress” the importance of the work of God in marriage and/or His Word.

It is true, we must have faith to believe that “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17). This Scripture was not just relevant to the Israelites in whom

⁸ Ibid, page 274.

Paul was referring to in the Romans passage, but it was stressing the importance of “faith” and “the Word of God” as the tool to incorporate the “Faith Principle.”

With the above thought in mind (God inspiring the Word [Bible] and, by faith, our believing that the Word of God was approved by the God that knows all, sees all, and has planned it all), let us come to the conclusion as to why the Apocryphal books and writings are not in the Bible. Some of the more noted reasons are as follows:

1. Not one of the apocryphal books is written in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew language, without question, was used by the inspired historians and poets of the Old Testament. The Apocryphal books are all in Greek with the exception of one which is extant only in Latin.
2. None of the apocryphal writers voiced or laid claim to inspiration.
3. The apocryphal books were never acknowledged as sacred scriptures by the Jews who were recognized as the custodians of the Hebrew Scriptures.
4. Unbiblical or heretical teachings are found in some of the added books. Main doctrines that are in dispute such as ‘prayers for the dead’ (2 Maccabees 12:45-46) and salvation by works (Tobit 12:9) are not supported in the canonical books of the Bible.
5. Extrabiblical and fanciful stories are in some of the Apocryphal books, i.e. Bel and the Dragon where Bel tries to deceive Daniel in his attempt to prove that “Bel” (a pagan god) was a “living God.”
6. Immoral teachings found in the Apocrypha as well as obvious historical and chronological errors...

There are some additional reasons or arguments for not accepting the Apocryphal books as part of the Protestant Bible; one of the strongest reasons being that the Apocryphal books did not satisfy the tests of canonicity. The test being:

1. Was it written by a “prophet” of God?
2. Was its writer confirmed by an act of God?
3. Did it have the power of God?
4. Did it tell the truth about God, man, etc.?

From all indications the apocryphal literature did not meet all of the criteria necessary for acceptance into the canon of Scripture.

NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHAL WRITINGS

As to New Testament apocrypha, there are books similar to those in the New Testament but rejected by Catholics, Orthodox and/or Protestants. These include several gospels and lives of apostles. It is for certain (clearly understood) that some of these texts were produced by Gnostic authors or members of other groups later defined as “heterodox.” There were many texts believed lost for centuries that were found in the 19th and 20th centuries. Of course, these texts produced speculations among religious scholars about their importance in early Christianity.

There were many Gnostic traditions that were the source of apocryphal gospels. These writings borrowed the characteristic poetic features of apocryphal literature from Judaism, but the Gnostic sects more or less insisted on allegorical interpretations based on a secret apostolic tradition. As with many, if not most Christians of the first and second centuries, the Gnostic sect held the apocryphal books with high esteem.

Although Protestants, Catholics and, in general, Orthodox agree on the canon of the New Testament, the European Orthodox have included I and II Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas in their New Testament canon in the past. *However, a well-known Biblical scholar, R.W. Cowley, states that, at present, this is no longer the case.*⁹ The Gospel of Thomas is a well-known New Testament apocryphal book. It was found, along with 48 other documents like it, in the Egyptian community of Nag Hammadi in 1945. The great majority of the documents proved, after close examination and study, to be Gnostic in character (basically meaning that they represent a more developed form of the sort of heresy in which Paul condemns and refutes in the Epistle to the Colossians). However, the “Gospel according to Thomas” is not considered a directly Gnostic work. It is a collection of sayings (114) attributed to Jesus. The 114 sayings contained in this document are of a varied nature and many of the sayings are the same as recorded in the canonical Gospels. The sayings of Jesus in this writing could conceivably be genuine in that they are in keeping with Jesus’ character and teaching. However, due to the company (Gnostic writings) that the writing was found makes the sayings suspect. Some of the sayings ascribed to Him are self-evidently spurious and reflect the Gnostic outlook of the community to whose library this particular copy of the work belong. A fairly reliable account of the whole matter is provided in the recently published Fontana paper-back entitled “The Secret Sayings of Jesus: From the Gospel according to Thomas.” The author points out that the Thomas Gospel differs from the New Testament Gospels in that it *minimizes the historical basis of Christianity. To call it a “Fifth Gospel” is wide of the mark; properly speaking, it is not a Gospel at all. No compilation of sayings of Jesus, even if they were all genuine, can properly be called a Gospel. For a Gospel must declare God’s good news; it must tell of Christ’s redemptive*

⁹ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, Apocrypha, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>, page 4 of 5.

*death. And even those sayings of Christ which refer to His death are significantly absent from the 'Gospel of Thomas'.*¹⁰

Also, the Gospel of Judas, which is a Gnostic gospel, has received a significant amount of media attention while it was reconstructed in 2006.

The early Christian writers outside the New Testament were/are known as the Apostolic Fathers. These writers were of the early Christian era between A.D. 80 and 180. None of *“their works are to be classed as ‘New Testament Apocrypha’; only to simply be what they profess to be, the writings of Christian men...designed for the edification of their fellow-Christians.”*¹¹ All of these writings were and are not regarded as canonical because they do not have the markings or authority of canonicity. The writers themselves recognized the superior authority of the apostolic writings. Early Christian writers such as Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who wrote seven epistles that were authored prior to being on his way to the Roman Amphitheatre to be thrown to the lions in about 115 A.D. stated in his Epistle to the Romans (4.3): “I do not enjoin you, as Peter and Paul did. They were Apostles, I am a convict; they were free, but I am a slave to this very hour.” Although Ignatius was certain of the “rightness” of his views and appealed for the acceptance of those views, he still did not enforce them with apostolic authority. Such works as the ‘Epistle of Barnabas’ and ‘1 and 2 Clement’ use fables to illustrate Levitical food laws (clean and unclean animals)...Epistle of Barnabas, and the Resurrection...Clement. There is no doubt that Clement was a good man with a pastoral heart for the welfare of his own and other Churches. However, Clement falls short of the New Testament level of inspiration indicated by the fact that he uses illustrations to support his own arguments about the Church’s Ministry (Presuppositional writing). The Shepherd of Hermas...written in the 2nd century by a member of

¹⁰ Bible Study Manuals: Apocrypha, website: <http://biblestudymanuals.net/apcrypha.htm> page 3 of 6.

¹¹ Ibid, *Bible Study Manuals*—Apocrypha, page 1 of 6

the Roman Church named Hermas, is an allegory read publicly in church (Catholic) as a work of edification, but not accorded canonical status. Again, *the New Testament apocrypha are the various Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses produced during the 2nd century and later under the names of apostles and other associates of the Lord. Most of these belong to the category of religious fiction. Some of our apocryphal Gospels were intended to satisfy the desire for information about the 'hidden years' of our Lord's life before His entry upon public ministry; these include several 'Infancy Gospel' relating the prodigies performed by Jesus as a child.*"¹²

The Acts that are considered apocryphal are works basically intended to give information about the Apostles' later careers as they disappeared from the New Testament record. The apocryphal Epistles are simply letters to the Laodiceans and an exchange of thoughts between Christ and King Abgar of Edessa. Apocalyptic apocrypha include the Apocalypse of Peter which was mentioned in the Muratorian Canon. This interesting writing was read in some churches as stated by Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius and Sozomen. The literary interest seems to have come from the writings' lurid descriptions of the torments of the damned. Dante's *Inferno* had drawn its depiction of hell from this writing.

Various heretical beliefs and practices were supported through some the apocryphal writings. It is easy to spot the presuppositional beliefs in these writings; i.e. The Ebionite Gospel gave John the Baptist a vegetarian diet.

The Gospel according to the Hebrews seems to have been an expanded paraphrase of our Gospel of Matthew. This Gospel was circulated in Egypt and Transjordan. This writing contains some other quotes (sayings) ascribed to Jesus not found in the canonical Gospels, but the authenticity is very doubtful. Jerome found a document in Caesarea that he identified as the

¹² Ibid, page 2 of 6

Gospel of the Nazarenes which he, at first, mistook for the Hebrew or Aramaic original of Matthew's Gospel. Both the Gospel according to the Hebrews and the Gospel of the Nazarenes did bare some relation to the canonical Matthew.

The 'Acts of Paul', an apocryphal book, contains a pen-portrait of Paul which describes Paul as a 'man that was small in size, eyebrows that met, large nose, bald-headed, bow-legged, strongly built....and full of grace. This, of course, is a traditional view of Paul, the Apostle. The 'Acts of Paul' was written in about A.D. 160 by an orthodox presbyter of Asia. This writing, of course, is apocrypha. Although some of the thoughts and writings may be true, no authenticity can be substantiated. *The New Testament apocrypha include the following writings:*

*The Gospel of Thomas, Oxyrhynchus 1224 Gospel, The Egerton Gospel, The Gospel of Peter, Secret Mark, The Gospel of the Egyptians, The Gospel of the Hebrews, The Apocalypse of Peter, The Secret Book of James, The Preaching of Peter, The Gospel of the Ebionites, The Gospel of the Nazarenes, The Oxyrhynchus 840 Gospel, The Traditions of Matthias, The Gospel of Mary, The Dialogue of the Savior, The Gospel of the Savior, The Epistula Apostolorum, The Infancy Gospel of Thomas, The Acts of Peter, The Acts of John, The Acts of Paul, The Acts of Andrew, The Acts of Peter and the Twelve, The Book of Thomas the Contender, and the Acts of Thomas.*¹³

The first church council to list all twenty-seven (27) books of the New Testament was the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397). Individual books of the New Testament were acknowledged as Scripture before this time (2 Peter 3:16; 1 Timothy 5:17). Most were accepted in the era just after the apostles. However, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2nd and 3rd John and Jude were debated for an extended time. The selection of the canon was a process that went on until each book proved its own worth by passing the tests of canonicity.

¹³ Website, Early Christian Writings, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/apocrypha.html> , page 1 of 1

CONCLUSION:

As noted previously, the term “apocrypha” tends to mean “writings entirely outside of the biblical canon and not considered inspired.” However, the term has come to be “applied” particularly to the books added to the Roman Catholic Bible and, in which, have been ordinarily rejected by non-Catholics. These books typically called ‘apocrypha’ by most Protestants were included as part of the Catholic Bible in 1546 at the Council of Trent. At the Council of Trent, the council decreed that the canon of the Old Testament should include the additional books (except the Prayer of Manasseh and I and II Esdras). This list includes *The Wisdom of Solomon* (30 B.C.), *Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)* (132 B.C.), *Tobit* (c. 200 B.C.), *Judith* (c. 150 B.C.), *1 Maccabees* (c. 110 B.C.), *2 Maccabees* (c. 110-70 B.C.), *Baruch* (c. 150-50 B.C.), *Letter of Jeremiah* (c. 300-100 B.C.), *Additions to Esther* (140-130 B.C.), *Prayer of Azariah* (2nd or 1st century B.C.), *Susanna* (2nd or 1st century B.C.), and *Bel and the Dragon* (c. 100 B.C.).¹⁴

The decree at the Council of Trent pronounced an anathema (curse and an exclusion/expulsion of any member of the church) for anyone who “does not accept as sacred and canonical the aforesaid books in their entirety and with all their parts” (The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha, pp. x, xv). This action (decree) was an attempt by the Catholic Church to counteract the Protestant Reformation’s theme and belief of “faith alone” and “Scripture alone.” The books named in the decree (Council of Trent) include the apocryphal Old Testament books, and place unwritten traditions of the church upon an equal basis with Holy Scriptures as approved of Christ or of the Holy Spirit. The Apocrypha have a variety of content. Some are histories of events (concerning the Jews); some are short quotes or sayings similar to the

¹⁴ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 1986; page 266.

Proverbs; some are sermons and others are like novels. There is one that is considered symbolical prophecy.

There was much confusion about the Apocrypha that revolved around the two traditions of the Old Testament canon. There are twenty-two books in Hebrew and thirty-nine in English in the Palestinian Canon. However, the Alexandrian Canon has an added number of books (14 or 15) in its collection. The Jews recognized the Palestinian Canon (Hebrew) while the Greeks recognized the Alexandrian collection of the Old Testament books. It was alleged to have arisen in Alexandria, Egypt (where the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek Septuagint (LXX). The date of translation was approximately 250 B.C. Some have thought that there were two canons: a broader, more diverse canon containing the Apocrypha, and a narrow one that did not include the Apocrypha. This thought...or “two canon hypotheses” was based on the fact that the earliest existing copies of the Greek Septuagint contain some of the apocryphal books while the Hebrew Bible has only the familiar books which total thirty-nine.

Why should the born-again, saved and sanctified Christian reject the Apocrypha? It is very important that God’s people understand why the Apocryphal books (also called the Deuterocanonical Books) are rejected from the canon of inspired and Holy Scripture. Because of ecumenical activities involving the Roman Catholic Church, there is an increasing tendency for publishers to include the Apocryphal writings with the Bible. This is being emphasized and practiced by the United Bible Societies as they push their published works as “Bibles” in many languages. By 1981, over 500,000 copies of the Today’s English Version including the Apocryphal books have been published and distributed by the American Bible Society. The 1992-’93 American Bible Society listed in their catalog of Scripture Resources at least nine different Bibles containing the Apocrypha. Although early editions of the King James Version

of the Bible, as well as many other Reformation Bibles (including the German Luther Bible) contained the Apocrypha, these “extra-biblical” books were included for historical reference only...not as additions to the canon of Scripture.

Alexander McClure, a biographer of the King James Version translators, states... *“the Apocryphal books in those times were more read and accounted of than now, though by no means placed on a level with the canonical books of Scripture”* (McClure, *Translators Revived*, page 185). McClure then listed several reasons assigned by the King James Version translators for rejecting the Apocrypha as inspired. Those reasons being:

- The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England clearly states that the Apocrypha have no scriptural authority,
- The Church of England “doth not apply to them to establish any doctrine.”
- The Westminster Confession says, “The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.”
- Luther included a note on the Apocrypha which stated, “These are books not to be held in equal esteem with those of Holy Scripture...”

Though some of the Apocryphal books do have historical value, giving information regarding the inter-testament “quiet years” prior to the coming of Christ, there is no justification for giving these a place in the Holy Scripture. Their proper place is possibly on the same level as the writings of Josephus or some other uninspired writer of that period.

*The twelve books of the Apocrypha were never accepted by the Jews or by our Lord as to being on par with the books of the Old Testament. They were held in high esteem and possibly even revered, but were not considered Scripture.*¹⁵

The Apocrypha was included in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament, 3rd century B.C.) along with the Old Testament canonical books. In translating the Vulgate, Jerome (A.D. 340-420) distinguished the canonical books from the Ecclesiastical books (the Apocrypha); thus, by doing so, had the effect of according them secondary status. In our English Bibles the Apocrypha was set apart in the Coverdale, Geneva, and the King James Versions. Although the Council of Trent (1548) had recognized the Apocryphal books as canonical, the Reformers rejected the decree. The Reformers saw that the Apocryphal books had many contradictory passages that did not agree with the Holy Scriptures and did not have the authority and inspiration that was obvious in the canon of Scripture.

*The canon of Scripture was being formed as each book was written, and it was complete when the last book was finished. When one speaks of the “formation” of the canon, he actually means the “recognition” of the canonical books of the church. This took time.*¹⁶

There are many biblical scholars that assert that all the books of the Old Testament canon were collected and recognized by Ezra in the fifth century B.C.¹⁷ Several references by Josephus in A.D. 95 and in 2 Esdras 14 (A.D. 100) indicate the extent of the Old Testament canon as the thirty-nine books that we recognize and affirm as the Word of God. Also, at

¹⁵ Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, Moody Press, page 1962.

¹⁶ Ibid, page 1961.

¹⁷ Ibid, page 1961

the Teaching Place at Jamnia (A.D. 70-100), the written discussions seemed to assume the existing canon.

Jesus wrote no book, but taught by word of mouth and personal example. Some of his followers, however, taught in writing as well as orally. Their writing was a substitute for the spoken word. If Jesus wrote no book, what He said was treasured and repeated by those who heard Him...and, in turn, by their hearers. To those precious apostles and followers who confessed Jesus as Lord, *His words were at least as authoritative as those of Moses and the prophets. They were transmitted as a most important element in the 'tradition' of early Christianity, together with the record of His works, His death and resurrection. These were delivered by the original witnesses and received in turn by others not simply as an outline of historical events but as the church's confession of faith and as the message which it was commissioned to spread abroad.*¹⁸

History has confirmed and the future will reveal that the Word of God is truth in its best and most glorious form. The Bible is a unique and an “*amazing book. It has been circulated more, read more, and discussed more than any other book in all of history. But it is more than just a book. It is more than just a compilation of stories and narratives and morals and poems. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself to mankind, in order that His character may be clearly demonstrated, seen, and to whatever degree He desires: understood.*”¹⁹

The Bible was written over a period of approximately 1,500 years by about 40 different authors. Yet, it is one book without contradictions in what it says...and what it says is remarkable. It speaks with equal ease and authority of the known and unknowable, of the pleasant and unpleasant, of man's accomplishments and failures, of the past and the future.

¹⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, IVP Academic Press, page 118.

¹⁹ Christopher Cone TH.D, *The Promises of God—A Bible Survey*, Exegetica Publishing (2005), page 7

*Inspiration is God's superintending of human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error in the words of the original autographs His revelation to man.*²⁰ The Bible, the Word of God, was inspired by God and was imparted to His creation that He loved so much in that "He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

No records, no books, nor any extra-Biblical materials from the past that might be found in the future will take the place of what God has placed in the heart of those that live and die trusting His Word.

As the old hymn of the past (*Holy Book, Book Divine*) states,

"Holy Bible, book divine, precious treasure, thou art mine; mine to tell whence I came;
mine to teach me what I am.
Mine to chide me when I rove; mine to show a Savior's love; mine thou art to guide and
guard; mine to punish or reward.
Mine to comfort in distress, suff'ring in this wilderness; mine to show by living faith,
man can triumph over death.
Mine to tell of joys to come, and the rebel sinner's doom; O thou Holy Book divine,
precious treasure, thou art mine."²¹

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²⁰ Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, Moody Press, page 1933.

²¹ The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration, *Holy Bible, Book Divine*, number 273

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