

# Canon of Scripture

## Lesson 8

### I. SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

- a. The history of the canon of Old Testament Scripture is like a teeter totter from the 300's clear through to the **twentieth** century. The issue was always the same: Do we accept the Apocrypha or do we not?
- b. From the time of the Reformation onward the struggle continued within the Church. For example, in **1589** an attack on the inclusion of the Apocrypha created a major furor among many Christians.
- c. In 1593, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in spite of his Calvinistic theology, decreed the binding or selling of Bibles **without** the Apocrypha would be punished by a year's imprisonment.
- d. The Authorized (King James) Version of 1611 was formally a revision of the last (1602) edition of the **Bishops'** Bible; it routinely included a version of the Apocrypha.
- e. A few years later, despite the penalty enacted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, copies of the AV/KJV without the Apocrypha began to be produced from **1626** onward.
- f. Three years later the Assembly of Divines at **Westminster** introduced their historic Confession of Faith with a chapter 'Of the Holy Scripture'. They decreed that all of Scripture is given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.
- g. The Confession declared: *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.*
- h. Therefore, churches which adopted the Westminster Confession as their standard—primarily the Church of Scotland and other **Presbyterian** churches—preferred to use copies of the Bible which did not include the Apocrypha.
- i. The English monarchy was in exile during Cromwell's rule. In 1660, Parliament offered to restore the monarchy of Charles II if he would agree to concessions for religious toleration and a general amnesty. Charles agreed to the **Restoration**.
- j. During the Restoration the strict **Puritan** morality of the previous decades was relaxed. Theatre, sports, and dancing were revived.
- k. After the Restoration of 1660 the readings from the Apocrypha **reappeared** in the Anglican book of worship. The exclusion of these books, however, became increasingly popular among nonconformist groups that had sprung up during the Reformation.
- l. An example of the **non-conformist** group is the Puritans who influenced American Christianity significantly. Their first edition of the English Bible to be printed in America (Philadelphia, 1782) omitted the Apocrypha.
- m. The first edition of the Bible in any European language to be printed in America was a **German** Bible of 1743; it did include the Apocrypha.

### II. PURITANS

- a. The sentiment **against** the Apocrypha was running in the Puritan favor during the early to mid 1600's: in 1644 the Long Parliament ordained that the Apocrypha should cease to be read in services of the Church of England.
- b. The writings and ideas of John Calvin gave support to Protestantism and were pivotal to the formation of nonconformist churches. As a non-conformist group, the Puritans were discontent in the Church of England and worked for religious, moral and societal **reforms**.
- c. Puritans and others contended that The Church of England had become a product of political struggles and man-made doctrines. They decided that the Church of England was **beyond** reform.
- d. Upon **Charles II** Restoration, to escape persecution from church leadership and the King, they came to America. The Puritans believed that the Bible was God's true law, and that it provided a plan for living within the context of the everyday life of the laity.
- e. Conversely, the established church of the day described access to God as **monastic** and possible only within the confines of "church authority". Thus, they often thought of true spirituality as the province belonging only to the clergy.
- f. Puritans held that the New Testament was their societal **model** and hence, their entire society was organized around their religious expression. People of opposing theological views were asked to leave their communities or to be converted.
- g. Puritan interpretation of Scripture was strict. In their view, conversion amounted to a rejection of the "**worldliness**" of society. In their New England colonies they banned; drama, religious music and erotic poetry.
- h. The Puritan view was that drama and erotic poetry led to immorality. They felt that music in worship created a "**dreamy**" state which was not conducive to one's listening to God.
- i. The next influential movement to weigh in on the Old Testament canon was the emergence of Bible **societies** in the late 1700's.

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### III. BIBLE SOCIETIES AND COMMON BIBLE

- a. The modern Bible Society movement dates back to the foundation of the British and Foreign Bible Society. The first organization called The Bible Society was formed in to distribute Bibles to **soldiers** and seamen.
- b. The impetus for its origin arose when a group of Christians sought to address the problem of a lack of **affordable** Bibles in Welsh for Welsh-speaking Christians.
- c. Although perceived as Protestant, from the early days the British and Foreign Bible Society was officially ecumenical, and allowed **inclusion** of the Apocrypha.
- d. As a reaction against the Apocrypha and its inclusion of these books in Bibles being distributed by the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Trinitarian Bible Society was founded in **1831**.
- e. In view of the interdenominational character of the British Society, at the outset they decided that editions of the Bible which it sponsored should have neither marginal **notes** nor comments.
- f. Before long it was realized that some editions handled by the Society contained something **more** objectionable in the eyes of many of its supporters than any note or comment could be—the apocryphal books.
- g. In a move to correct this problem, the Society in **1826** adopted the policy of neither circulating itself, nor aiding others in circulating, Bibles containing the Apocrypha.
- h. In 1844, Pope Gregory XVI in his encyclical **condemned** Bible societies and "the publication, dissemination, reading, and possession of vernacular translations of sacred Scriptures".
- i. Subsequently **Catholics** did not officially participate in the society. This encyclical was reversed by Vatican II in the 1960's.
- j. The British and Foreign Bible Society extended its work out from England, to India, and Europe and **beyond**. Auxiliary branches were set up all over the world which later became separate Bible Societies operating within their respective countries.
- k. When the British and Foreign Bible Society presented King Edward VII a Bible lacking the Apocrypha at his coronation in 1902, the Archbishop of Canterbury ruled that such a '**maimed Bible**' was *unacceptable for the purpose*.
- l. Today the **United** Bible Societies co-ordinates the work of these separate Bible Societies. Each Bible Society operates as a non-denominational independent enterprise which participates in the work of the network.
- m. The existing **charter** of the network of Bible Societies is to translate, revise, print, and distribute affordable Bibles in their own land, according to the demands of all the churches in that land.
- n. Nowadays Bible Societies print Bibles **according** to the canons of the countries they are in e.g. Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox, along with inter-confessional versions.
- o. Independent Bible Societies work with other Christian **agencies** and Bible translations are done on an ecumenical basis, through the International Forum of Bible Agencies.
- p. For the last century and a half it has been practically impossible to buy in Britain or America a copy of the Authorized (King James) Version **containing** the Apocrypha.
- q. The American Standard Version of 1901, never included the Apocrypha. The Apocrypha did, however, appear in the Revised Standard Version in **1957**.
- r. Roman Catholic versions of the Bible, like the Jerusalem Bible of 1966 (and the New Jerusalem Bible of 1985) and the New American Bible of 1970 included the Apocrypha as an **integral** part of the Old Testament.
- s. An ecumenical milestone was reached in 1973 with the appearance of the **Common** Bible, an edition of the RSV with the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books printed between the Testaments.
- t. This version received the blessing not only of Catholic and **some** Protestant church leaders but also of the Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain, the leader of the Greek Orthodox community in Britain.
- u. The debate has more or less **abated** in our own day. Conservative Protestant churches appear to prefer the Apocrypha to be omitted from Bibles they recommend while liberal churches seem to be accepting of its inclusion, even if it is not considered canonical.

### IV. APPLICATION

- a. What is the first requirement for determining what is or is not the Word of God?
- b. In reading the Apocrypha, how would you discern for yourself whether it should be understood as the Word of God or not?
- c. Is there a difference between words that communicate the same thing that God says but that originate from man and words that God has spoken? If there is a difference, what is it?