

Exclusivity (*Or Not*) of the Canon of Scripture

Introduction

I am one who advocates apocryphal study and firmly believe that excluding this extra canonical literature is an impediment to a complete and accurate understanding of the Scriptures. Surely if an inspired work endorses a separate work, the separate work must claim some level of credibility.

To those who would challenge the authenticity of the apocryphal literature on the basis of originality I would similarly challenge them to produce a single original text for any of the manuscripts found in the 66-book redacted Scriptures or the Canonized scripture found in the 1611 KJV-AV, the 1560 Geneva Bible, or the Catholic Canon of 1256, since we possess only copies (apographs) and none of the original manuscripts (autographs) of the contents of these Scriptures.

Whilst the content of Scripture may itself be considered divinely inspired the same cannot be said regarding the Canon of Scripture. With respect to divine inspiration this cannot be applied to those responsible for establishing the Canon of Scripture because several variations are in use today. Thus, what is considered divinely inspired by one is not by another. Let us examine the history behind of the Canon of Scripture.

The Canon of the Scriptures – Divinely Inspired *or Not*!

Let the opponents of the apocryphal study justify their proclamation of a complete Scriptures comprising only 66 books. John Calvin in his 1560 Geneva Bible didn't confine himself to 66 books, nor, according to the following abstract, did the Catholic Church when it canonized scripture at the 1256 Council of Trent,

Extract From The Decree of The Council Of Trent

It (the Council) has thought it proper, moreover, to insert in this decree a list of the sacred books, lest a doubt might arise in the mind of someone as to which are the books received by this council.[4]

They are the following:

Of the Old Testament, the five books of Moses, namely, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Josue, Judges, Ruth, the four books of Kings, two of Paralipomenon, the first and second of Esdras, the latter of which is called Nehemias, Tobias, Judith, Esther, Job, the Davidic Psalter of 150 Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of Canticles, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Isaias, Jeremias, with Baruch, Ezechiel, Daniel, the twelve minor Prophets, namely, Osee, Joel, Amos, Abdias, Jonas, Micheas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggeus, Zacharias, Malachias; two books of Machabees, the first and second.

Of the New Testament, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; the Acts of the Apostles written by Luke the Evangelist; fourteen Epistles of Paul the Apostle, to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews; two of Peter the Apostle, three of John the Apostle, one of James the Apostle, one of Jude the Apostle, and the Apocalypse of John the Apostle.

Today all Catholic bibles have 73 books. Only copies adhering to Protestant principles are confined to 66 books for which Martin Luther must take responsibility.

Even the 'Jewish Canon' is not without a chequered history. The 72 interpreters of the Septuagint did not confine themselves to only 39 books of the Old Testament. Earlier it was believed to be the Council of Jamnia that finalized

the Jewish Canon but recently the leaders of Judaism have challenged the accuracy of this claim and today, there is no scholarly consensus as to when the Jewish canon was finalized and by whom. If it is not known who is responsible for the Canon how can anyone claim it was by divine inspiration. History shows that the Jewish Canon, like the Catholic Canon, evolved over a very protracted period of time growing from 22 to 24 and finally 39 books. Clearly the Canon of Scripture has undergone remodelling and reshaping over the centuries, this alone defies any claim to divine inspiration, unless divine inspiration is elastic.

Most assuredly we cannot confine the apostle's reference in 2Tim.3:16 to the canon of today, it didn't exist. So to what scriptures was the apostle referring and more to the point, what qualifies a work to be classified as 'inspired by Elohim?' Perhaps we should investigate the criteria defining this phrase albeit impossible to know what the apostle meant.

1. Is a work to be considered inspired by Elohim only if it contains the phrase 'the word of Elohim came to me' or 'thus said Elohim?' This cannot be what governed the Canon because neither phrase can be found in several texts; Ruth, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Solomon and Lamentations.
2. Is a work to be considered inspired by Elohim only if it contains prophesy? Apparently not because this would remove a large percentage of the epistles.
3. Is a work to be considered inspired by Elohim dependant on the status of its author? This cannot be the criteria either because some of the authors of the Canon are unknown or uncertain; Judges, Ruth, Esther, Job, Hebrews etc.
4. Is a work to be considered inspired by Elohim if it was originally found to be in Hebrew by the scholars at the time of the Council of Jamnia? This also cannot be the criteria because Daniel was written in Aramaic.
5. Is a work to be considered inspired by Elohim if it was given the 'seal of approval' by the Church Fathers? This also cannot be correct considering that Tertullian described Enoch as "That most ancient prophet Enoch" and the book as "The divinely inspired autograph of that immortal patriarch, preserved by Noah in the ark." He further classified Enoch as 'Holy Scripture.' It is well accepted that the book of Jubilees was revered by such Church Fathers as Origen, Diodorus and Epiphanius, whilst the book of Yasher has Scriptural references; Josh.10:13, 2Sam.1:18. As said earlier, if an inspired work endorses a separate work then the separate work must be given some level of credibility.

Some allege that the apocrypha should not be canonized because a lot of its content is merely historical record. But on this basis should not 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles and the Book of Acts also be excluded? Indeed is not the Tanakh a history record of Israel's fallen lifestyle and YHWH's response?

In his two volume presentation 'The Formation of the Biblical Canon' Lee Martin McDonald provides an in depth analyses of the fluidity of the compilation of the Jewish Canon. Indeed the degree of fluidity portrayed by McDonald opposes any concept of divine inspiration. The view that the canon is purely the result of man's selection without any divine inspiration is reinforced by Timothy Lim, a Professor of Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Period at New College, the University of Edinburgh, who addressing the 'Dead Sea Scrolls' commented,

There are some 220 biblical Dead Sea Scrolls that give us unprecedented insight into what "The Bible" was like two thousand years ago, and underscore the point that the writing, transmission, and selection of the books of the canon was a thoroughly human activity. Despite the claim of divine inspiration by communities of believers, then and now, the Bible did not drop down from heaven, nor is it inerrant as assumed by fundamentalists of different faiths. The composition of each book of the Bible grew over centuries as it was revised and transmitted by groups of anonymous scribes.*

*Timothy H. Lim has written several books and numerous articles on the Dead Sea Scrolls, including The Formation of the Jewish Canon (Yale University Press, 2013), and he co-edited The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls (OUP, 2010), with John J. Collins. He is the General

Editor of The Oxford Commentary on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Professor Lim is a renowned authority on Biblical and Jewish Studies and recently delivered the Chuen King Memorial lectures at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in China. He is also the author of ‘The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Very Short Introduction.’

There is simply no compelling support behind the claim the canon is divinely inspired and to regard a work not to be on a level with Holy Scripture purely because it is not in the canon is just asinine. Whilst we need to be guarded where the apocrypha conflicts with Scripture, its outright rejection on such a tenuous basis is simply myopic and an impediment to a complete understanding of the Scriptures.

The Credibility of the Book of Enoch

A divinely inspired works cannot contain misleading information. If all agree that Scripture itself (not the canon) is divinely inspired and within it can be found many comments which, if not a direct quote from the book of Enoch, are in harmony with it, then Enoch must have some credibility. The number of parallels between the Scriptures and the book of Enoch is too numerous to provide, the following tabulation however provides a few examples;

Scripture	Enoch
Gen.6:1-4	Enoch 7:1-2,11
Isa.40:12	Enoch 92:22-23
Isa.65:18-24	Enoch 24:10
Jer.9:1	Enoch 94:1
Matt.22:29-30	Enoch 15:6-7
John. 1:51	Enoch 24:8
Jude 1:6	Enoch 10:15-16
Jude 1:14-15	Enoch 2:1

Robert Henry Charles (1855–1931) was an English biblical scholar and theologian and left parochial work in 1889 to devote himself to biblical research and became the greatest authority of his time in matters of Jewish eschatology and apocrypha. He became a canon at Westminster Abbey in 1913 and archdeacon there in 1919. Speaking of the book of Enoch Charles said,

“This precious book throws much light on the thinking of our Lord Jesus, also St. Paul. Both regarded it as sacred scripture and quoted from it. Our gratitude to the Ethiopians could be expressed by restoring to its proper place in our Bible this important and extremely valuable Ethiopic Enoch”

Charles says that Mashiach regarded Enoch as sacred Scripture and he is correct. If Mashiach considered the book of Enoch as Holy Scripture how can mere man denounce it? Let us prove what Charles has said,

On that day Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying, “Teacher, Moshe said that if anyone should die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise offspring for his brother. And there were with us seven brothers, and the first died after he had married, and having no children, left his wife to his brother. In the same way the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died too. At the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven shall she be – for all had her?” And Yahusha answering, said to them, “You go astray, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of Elohim. For in the resurrection they do not marry, nor are they given in marriage, but are as messengers of Elohim in heaven.” (Matt.2:23-30).

We know the motive behind the Sadducees was to entrap Mashiach but why was it necessary for them to ask this question? It is because the answer is not provided anywhere within the Tanakh. Nowhere does the Tanakh tell us that the heavenly host do not marry, yet Mashiach accuses them of not knowing the Scriptures. The **only** source of

this information is the Book of Enoch where YHWH instructs Enoch to return to the messengers who transgressed and cohabited with earthly woman and tell them what punishment awaits them. Enoch is instructed to tell them,

Wherefore have you forsaken the lofty and holy heaven, which endures forever, and have lain with women, have defiled yourselves with the daughters of men; have taken to yourselves women, have acted like the sons of the earth and have begotten giants. You being spiritual, holy and possessing a life which is eternal, have polluted yourselves with women, have begotten in carnal blood; have lusted in the blood of men, and have done as those who are flesh and blood do. These however die and perish. Therefore I have given to them women, that they might cohabit with them, that sons might be born of them, and that this might be transacted on earth. But you from the beginning were made spiritual, possessing a life which is eternal, and not subject to death forever. Therefore I made not women for you because being spiritual your dwelling is in heaven. (En.15:2-7).

Mashiach's reference to Scripture had to be this passage from Enoch, there is no other source for this information. Not only is Mashiach confirming the book of Enoch to be Scripture but He chastised the Sadducees for not reading this book. It is clear from Mashiach's discourse with the Sadducees that He considered Enoch to be Holy Scripture so what right has man to contradict Mashiach. Henceforth this article will consider Enoch in terms of the holy book of Enoch.

The citations of Enoch by the prophets and by the Book of Jubilees show that at the close of the second century B.C. and during the first century B.C., this book was regarded in certain circles as inspired. When we come down to the first century A.D., we find that it is recognized as Scripture by Mashiach and therefore by the apostles as confirmed in Jude verses 14-15. In the next century this recognition is given in the Epistle of Barnabas (16:5) and in the third century by such Church fathers as Clement and Irenaeus: after which the Book of Enoch fell into discredit and gradually passed out of circulation. It is most probably because of an elaborate angelology and their influence on sacred time and worship, together with a recognition of a solar calendar and a 364 day year, that this book was later rejected because such teaching was an obstacle to those in authority wanting to advance their own philosophies and agendas.

The Credibility of the Book of Jubilees

The book of Jubilees is a catalogue of heavenly protest against human philosophies that threatened true religion and to inculcate a return to religious practice corresponding with what is divinely ordained on 'heavenly tablets.' But for religion to be subject to heavenly forces was/is unacceptable to people desirous of control remaining in their hands.

With respect to the measurement of sacred time the book of Jubilees parallels much of what is said in the holy book of Enoch. Like the book of Enoch, the book of Jubilees was dictated by a divine source being the 'angel of presence' and therefore has every entitlement to be considered of equal stature as the book of Enoch which, according to Mashiach Himself, is Holy Scripture. As with the book of Enoch, the book of Jubilees was also cited by Church fathers: Jerome in his epistle 'ad Fabiolam,' Epiphanius and by Didymus of Alexandria thus the early Church considered it a worthy document.

When we read the preamble to the book of Jubilees it goes a long way to explaining its rejection by those in authority. The preamble claims the book to be '*The history of the division of the days of the Torah, of the events of the years, the year-weeks, and the jubilees of the world*', the basis of which, like Enoch, is a solar calendar, a year of 364 days governed by the equinoxes: all of which was unacceptable to the religious leaders of the day. Because Jewish religion today adheres to different philosophies the book of Jubilees is considered in the same vein as that of Enoch and excluded from the canon.

As with Enoch, Mashiach also quoted from the Book of Jubilees when He warned the people against fornication (Matt.5:32).

The Credibility of the Book of Yasher

Dr. Ken Johnson states that due to a Roman officer under Titus the book of Yasher along with several other texts survived the destruction of Jerusalem and made it to Spain. The Sephardic Rabbinate kept the texts safe and in the year 1613 AD the first Hebrew copy of the book of Yasher was printed and published in Venice, Italy. The first English translation was completed in 1840 AD.

There are two direct references to the book of Yasher in the Scriptures; 2Sam.1:18 and Jos.10:13 but this is not the only association that can be found and it would be a stretch to use these references as an endorsement of the book of Yasher. However, in his epistle to Timothy, Paul makes the following exclamation,

Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. (2Tim.3:8).

How did the apostle know the names of these two magicians of the court of Pharaoh? They are not mentioned anywhere in the Scriptures. The only way Paul could have learnt these names is from reading the book of Yasher, only in Yasher can these names be found. Obviously the apostle considered Yasher to be worthy of some merit. Not only must he have read the book of Yasher but he quoted from it, obviously He must have considered it *'profitable for teaching'* (2Tim.3:16). Unlike the books of Enoch and Jubilees there is no proof that the book of Yasher was considered by the ancients as divinely inspired but it was accepted in the same vein as the writings of Josephus, Pliny etc. and whilst no one considers these writings to be Scripture many theologians, scholars and religious leaders deem them to be an authoritative source of clarification and confirmation of Scripture and several reputable people encourage that Yasher be considered in the same vein as these other writings.

That said there are within the book of Yasher several confictions with the Scriptural narrative and at such times we must always accede to the authority of Scripture. Such confictions preclude any claim for the book to be divinely inspired and Dr. Ken Johnson's comment is worthy of note,

The ancient scrolls of this book were in poor condition when the book was printed in Hebrew in 1613 AD. This text is not inspired by God and was simply an extremely accurate history book, highly recommended by Scripture itself. The text does show some signs of corruption. There are obvious scribal errors- and more than likely embellishments – added to the original text. We must remember this scroll may be over 3500 years old. (Ken Johnson 'Ancient Book of Jasher Biblefacts Annotated Edition P.6')

Other comments of note are;

“...the book is, with the exception of some doubtful parts, a venerable monument of antiquity; and that, notwithstanding some few additions have been made to it in comparatively modern times, it still retains sufficient to prove it a copy of the book referred to in Joshua, ch. x, and 2 Samuel, ch. 1.” (Moses Samuel – Hebraist and Rabbinic Scholar).

“There can be little doubt that the book of Jasher was a national epic... The time is ripe for a fresh investigation of such genuine sources of Scripture, particularly against the background of the Dead Sea Scrolls.” (Dr. Cyrus Gordon).

As there are several copies of the book of Yasher in circulation and several are clearly false representations, it is important to ensure you are reading a credible copy.

Conclusion

We must remember that the various scrolls of Scripture were not all written at once, the Scriptures evolved and we must read the Scriptures with this understanding: the book of Enoch was dictated before the giving of the

Torah at Sinai, Jubilees was dictated to Moshe obviously before his death and must therefore have preceded the prophets, writings etc. When we recognise and accept this premise we can reconcile the books of Enoch and Jubilees with Holy Scripture without any contradiction. Quite the contrary, these two books provide great clarity on what was to be accepted, much later, as the Canon of Scripture.

We must also remember that what YHWH originally created concerning sacred worship, sacred service and sacred time subsequently became corrupted and the synchronization upon which these elements depended was destroyed through sin. The books of Enoch and Jubilees elaborate this issue in far more detail than is provided in the Scriptures. The Scriptures do not fully explain either the origin, complete nature or ramifications of sin on YHWH's creation. An example is the exclusion of the effect of sin upon the heavenly host and its effect on earth, all of which is described in detail in the books of Enoch and Jubilees. But because the information does not align with certain agendas it has been castigated and thrown aside.

The situation today is that we have a Jewish cannon, a Catholic Canon and a Protestant canon and if we wish we can add an Ethiopian cannon. Such inconsistency invalidates any claim supporting the exclusivity of the canon, as does the unearthing of new material. The Dead Sea Scrolls are challenging understanding and beliefs but once again where agendas are put at risk, the Dead Sea Scrolls are debauched in the same way as the books of Enoch and Jubilees.

The truth will only be found if it is searched for with an open minded, unbiased, unaligned disposition and a willingness to consider all that is available pertaining to the issue. Anything less will prejudice understanding and opinion. As Skiba says, "The first step in dealing with authenticity is to read the material with an open mind. One cannot effectively investigate the matter unless he is familiar with it;" As the Proverb says,

He that answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him. (Prov.18:13).

Thus, those who denounce the apocryphal works without having spent the time to research what is contained therein are, according to the above verse, foolish. If the material was good enough for Mashiach what right have we to reject it?

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