

Thy Word Is Like a Garden, Lord*Edwin Hodder (1837–1904)*

Thy Word is like a garden, Lord,
 With flowers bright and fair;
 And every one who seeks may pluck
 A lovely cluster there.
 Thy Word is like a deep, deep mine;
 And jewels rich and rare
 Are hidden in its mighty depths
 For every searcher there.

Thy Word is like a starry host:
 A thousand rays of light
 Are seen to guide the traveler,
 And make his pathway bright.
 Thy Word is like an armory,
 Where soldiers may repair,
 And find, for life's long battle day,
 All needful weapons there.

O may I love thy precious Word,
 May I explore the mine,
 May I its fragrant flowers glean,
 May light upon me shine.
 O may I find my armor there,
 Thy Word my trusty sword;
 I'll learn to fight with every foe
 The battle of the Lord.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Canonicity, the Old Testament, and the Apocrypha***Kevin T. Bauder*

When Protestants talk about the Bible they mean the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. To these, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy add several other apocryphal or deuterocanonical books, plus additions to multiple biblical books. Even more apocryphal books exist, but they are not recognized as Scripture by any branch of professing Christianity.

Obviously, at some point choices had to be made about which writings would be recognized as Scripture and which would not. The process of recognizing some books and rejecting others is known as *canonization*, and the collection of recognized books is known as the *canon*. No doctrine of Scripture is complete without a discussion of canonization and canonicity.

The word *canon* was originally the name for a particular kind of straight reed. People would cut this reed to length and use it as a measuring rod. Eventually the word became a metaphor for any standard of measurement. Then it was applied to the collection of things that measured up to the standard. When we talk about the canon of Scripture, we are talking about the collection of writings that measure up to the standard of being recognized as the word of God. To say that a document is canonical is to say that it is God's word and consequently that it is authoritative for faith and practice.

What is the standard for canonicity? The short answer is *inspiration*. A writing is canonical if and only if it has been inspired by the Holy Spirit. Properly speaking, human beings can never declare a writing to be canonical. Even the declarations of church councils do not make a document canonical. All they can do is to recognize its canonicity. Its canonicity depends entirely upon whether it has been inspired.

Consequently, discussions about canonicity are really discussions about inspiration. To know which writings are canonical, we must simply discover which writings have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. How can we do that? This question will have different answers depending upon which testament we are asking about.

We in the Church have received the Old Testament canon directly from Israel. We know very little about how Israel decided which writings to rec-



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ognize. Perhaps Ezra was involved, but even if that is true, Ezra is already described as a “scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel” and a “scribe of the law” (Ezra 7:11–12), so the writings of Moses must already have been recognized. From the attitude of the Samaritans we can guess that questions were raised as to whether the Pentateuch was more authoritative than other documents.

In any event, by the time of the New Testament, Israel seems fully to have accepted the present canonical books of the Old Testament. Jesus and the apostles quoted widely from every section of the Old Testament and from nearly every individual book. They used all parts of the Old Testament as authoritative Scripture. These were the documents that Paul had in mind when he wrote that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16).

The same cannot be said for the apocryphal books. Certainly Jesus and the apostles knew about these writings, which were produced during the intertestamental period. Several of the apocryphal writings were included with the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that was produced in Alexandria. The Jews of Jesus’ day were well acquainted with these books. Most saw the books as profitable, though not authoritative.

Nevertheless, Jesus and the apostles never quoted or alluded to any apocryphal book in any authoritative way. Indeed, with the possible exception of Jude’s quotation of a prophecy from Enoch (Jude 14–15; see 1 Enoch 1:9), they never cited any apocryphal book at all. Even Jude was not necessarily quoting 1 Enoch. What he quoted was a genuine prophecy from the historical Enoch that also shows up in 1 Enoch. In other words, the New Testament provides no warrant at all for viewing any apocryphal book as inspired. The New Testament writers did not recognize any of the apocrypha as canonical, and without their stamp of approval, neither should we.

The post-apostolic church was also hesitant about these books. Various church fathers knew about them and referenced them from time to time, but no consensus developed that they should be included with Scripture. When Jerome translated his Latin Vulgate during the late Fourth Century, he refused at first to include apocryphal books. Even when he finally agreed to insert some of them, he kept them in a separate category of “ecclesiastical” and not canonical books.

Jerome’s view became the consensus position for a thousand years. Certain apocryphal books were recognized as useful for their spiritual, moral, devotional, or historical value, but they were not considered to be canonical as Scripture. In fact, no part of the apocrypha was ever declared formally to be canonical until the post-Reformation Council of Trent (1546). Later,

the Eastern Orthodox Church declared some of the apocryphal books to be canonical at the Synod of Jerusalem (1672).

Bible believers may still benefit from some apocryphal writings as historical or devotional materials. The testimony of Jesus and the apostles as well as the mainstream of church history, however, weighs against their being recognized as Scripture. The New Testament endorses the authority and inspiration of the Old Testament, so it must be recognized as canonical. The New Testament never endorses the authority and inspiration of any apocryphal book. They must not be recognized as either inspired or canonical.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
