

# CRITIQUE OF NORMAN GEISLER'S "APOCRYPHA" ARTICLE IN THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS<sup>1</sup>

By Gary Michuta

[www.handsonapologetics.com](http://www.handsonapologetics.com)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	3
PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT.....	3
FORMAT.....	4
GEISLER'S ANSWERS TO CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS.....	5
THE NEW TESTAMENT.....	5
THE SEPTUAGINT AND THE APOCRYPHA.....	5
REVEALING ADMISSION BY THE NEW AMERICAN BIBLE.....	6
USE OF THE CHURCH FATHERS.....	7
THE FATHERS AND THE APOCYPHA.....	9
CATACOMB ART APOCRYPHA THEMES.....	11
BOOKS IN THE GREEK MANUSCRIPTS.....	11
ACCEPTANCE BY EARLY COUNCILS.....	12
"ACCEPTANCE BY THE ORTHODOX CHURCH".....	16
ACCEPTANCE OF THE COUNCILS OF FLORENCE AND TRENT.....	17
"APOCRYPHAL BOOKS IN THE PROTESTANT BIBLE".....	19
"APOCRYPHAL WRITINGS AT QUMRAN".....	19
POINT 1 - THE PESHER ARGUMENT.....	20
POINT 2 - THE SPECIAL PARCHMENT AND SCRIPT ARGUMENT.....	20

---

<sup>1</sup> Geisler, Norman L. "Apocrypha, Old and New Testaments." *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999., pp. 28-36.

"SPECIAL" PARCHMENT AND SCRIPT? .....	20
THE SPECIAL HEBREW SCRIPT .....	21
FINDING THE SOURCE .....	21
"MORE LIGHT..." ON THE SPECIAL SCRIPT .....	22
COULD THIS BE THE SPECIAL PARCHMENT AND SCRIPT? .....	24
CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS IN SUMMARY .....	27
ARGUMENTS FOR THE PROTESTANT CANON .....	27
PROPHETICITY .....	27
NONAUTHENTICATED PROPHECY .....	30
JEWISH REJECTION .....	31
REJECTION BY JEROME.....	34
REJECTION BY SCHOLARS.....	36
THE MISTAKE AT TRENT .....	37
DOCTINAL ARGUMENTS: CANONICITY .....	39
GEISLER'S CRITERIA .....	41

## INTRODUCTION

In preparation for my latest book on the Deuterocanon, *The Case for the Deuterocanon: Arguments and Evidence* (Nikaria Press, 2016), I investigated the claims of numerous Protestant apologetics websites and blogs to see why they believe that the Deuterocanon (i.e., Sirach, Wisdom, Baruch, Tobit, Judith, 1st and 2nd Maccabees and sections in Esther and Daniel) is not Scripture, but mere apocrypha.

One of the most frequently quoted arguments was Dr. Norman Geisler's "Apocrypha" article in his *Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker Academic, 1998). Given the popularity and uncritical acceptance of Geisler's work, I decided to write this "short" critique.

I put "short" in quotes because the critique is fairly lengthy, since Geisler's article touches on several complex topics. In order to keep this critique reasonably short, I will be referring the reader to two of my books on the Deuterocanon for more detail, [Why Catholic Bibles Are Bigger: The Untold Story of the Lost Books of the Protestant Bible](#) and especially [The Case for the Deuterocanon: Evidence and Arguments](#).

## PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

In order to avoid needless repetition, it's good to address some of the methodological flaws that run throughout Dr. Geisler's work.

The most serious and common flaw is what I call *canonical duplicity*. This error occurs when some standard is proposed to disqualify the Deuterocanon that would also disqualify the some or all of the Protocanon. Hence, there is a duplicity or double-dealing in regards to the canon. A legitimate test ought to affirm *all* the books of the Protestant Bible (i.e., the Protocanon) while disqualifying *all* of the books of the Deuterocanon. If it cannot do this, it's not a legitimate test.

Another serious argumentative flaw is the *argument from silence*, which is unfortunately a very common feature in all Protestant apologetics against the Deuterocanon. The "argument from silence" occurs when the absence of evidence is interpreted as positive evidence of a rejection. Although it is possible, under special specific circumstances, for silence to be used as positive evidence, Dr. Geisler never attempts to establish such circumstances.

The article also occasionally engages in what is called the *furtive fallacy*, which occurs when unseen or hidden nefarious motives are proposed, not as a possibility, but as the actual causes of a historical event. Geisler commits this fallacy during his treatment of Catholic councils.

Finally, Geisler rarely cites sources and when he does so they tend to be secondary sources and sometimes sources that have been heavily criticized by their Protestant peers. In fairness to the author this is an encyclopedia article and I'm sure space limitations played a role in what he could and could not include. Furthermore, I'm sure that when the article was first penned these sources appeared to be solid. As they stand now, however, are considered antiquated or less authoritative. The most egregious use of sources come from Catholic sources where Geisler misrepresents their content.

With these points in mind, we will now turn our attention to Geisler's arguments as given in his article on the "Apocrypha" in his *Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker Academic, 1998).

## FORMAT

The general structure of the article is:

*Roman Catholic View* - This section includes a definition of "apocrypha," a list of books of the "Apocrypha," which includes books that were not affirmed at the Council of Trent such as (i.e., 2 and 3 Esdras) and that most Catholics and Protestants would generally not understand falling under that title.

*Apocrypha as Scripture* - this section is comprised of eleven points that Catholics commonly propose to affirm the inspiration of the Deuterocanon.

*Answers to the Catholic Argument* - Here author proposes a point by point rebuttal of the eleven points given above.

*Argument for the Protestant Canon* - A positive case is proposed for the Protestant canon, which is divided into the Historical Argument, Non-authenticated Prophecy, Jewish Rejection, Early Church Council Rejection, Early Fathers' Rejection, Rejection by Jerome, Rejection by Scholars, Mistake at Trent; Doctrinal Arguments, New Testament Apocrypha, Reasons for Rejecting (the NT Apocrypha).

*Conclusion and Sources* - Final summation and list of sources.

For the sake of brevity, we will skip over Geisler's *Roman Catholic View* and his *Apocrypha as Scripture* sections and begin with his *Answers to the Catholic Argument*, since it recaps the points made in the previous two sections.

## GEISLER'S ANSWERS TO CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS

Dr. Geisler's response to the eleven "Catholic arguments" he proposed in the previous section are as follows:

### THE NEW TESTAMENT

#### **GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUMENT 1 - The New Testament "reflects the thought" and references the Deuterocanon.**

Geisler begins with the New Testament's use of the Deuterocanon. He concedes at the outset that there "may be allusions" to the Deuterocanon in the New Testament (he later cites Hebrews 11:35's references the Maccabean martyrs as an example).<sup>2</sup> This concession, however, is followed by that assertion that "not once is there a definite quotation"<sup>3</sup> of the Deuterocanon in the New Testament. Even if this were true, there are other ways to use Old Testament book in an authoritative fashion. For example, Hebrews 11:35b references the Maccabean martyr as being among the figures who were "attested to" (Hebrews 11:2, 39). The word translated "attested to" is a biblical metonym used elsewhere in Hebrews to reference the witnesses of the biblical record, including quotations (cf. Hebrews 7:8, 7:17; 10:15, 11:4, 5). In some way, their reference within this context is much more demonstrative of Second Maccabees being Scripture than a quotation. Geisler's insistence that on quotations, therefore, seems arbitrary.

He also notes that the New Testament alludes to the Pseudepigrapha and pagan poets as well, which is true. However, this merely sidesteps the fact that the New Testament does use the Deuterocanon in an authoritative manner.

Finally, he states that the New Testament may refer to some truth in a given work, but it does not endorse the whole book which may otherwise contain errors. If a quotation only affirms that which is quoted then what becomes of Dr. Geisler's "propheticity" argument (that he will propose later) that supposedly authenticates books through quotations and references? If this point is true then Geisler's case for the Protestant OT canon falls apart.

### THE SEPTUAGINT AND THE APOCRYPHA

**GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUMENT 2** - Here the author takes aim at what I call the *tacit approval* argument, which runs like this: The New Testament authors used the Septuagint as their preferred or normative Old Testament text. The Septuagint contained the Deuterocanon. Therefore, the New Testament authors tacitly approved to the Deuterocanon. Dr. Geisler's presentation of this argument is poorly done and stands in need of further qualification. That aside, Dr. Geisler concedes the first premise and weakly opposes the second premise stating that it is not certain that the first century Septuagint (an early Jewish Greek translation of the Old Testament, which we will refer to as the LXX)

---

<sup>2</sup> As a side note, the literary and lexical links between Hebrews 11:35 and 2 Maccabees are really beyond doubt, both of my books (especially *The Case for the Deuterocanon*) give all the details. Later, we will see how Dr. Geisler's apparent inattention to detail causes him to needlessly stumble on this point. p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 29.

included the Deuterocanon. The reason being that "The earliest Greek manuscripts that include them [the deuterocanonical books] date from the fourth century A.D."<sup>4</sup>

I quote this sentence because it can be very misleading. It sounds as if Geisler is saying that there are manuscript of the LXX prior to this period that omit the Deuterocanon and that the first to include it comes from the fourth century AD.

The reason for this misimpression is his description of these documents as "manuscripts." What is he speaking of is more properly referred to as a codex (plural, codices), which is the ancient equivalent to the modern bound Bible. The codex format is very valuable in regards to the canon research because, unlike a manuscript, it speaks to the contents of the Bible. The earliest codices of the OT that we possess today came from the fourth century. Therefore, what Geisler is actually saying is that the Deuterocanon is present in the earliest available LXX codices.

While not all of the codices include the whole of the Deuterocanon, they are all Deuterocanonical friendly in that none of these codices restricts itself to the Protestant canon. Therefore, the Great Greek Codices do support the possibility of the first century LXX including these books they most decisively argue against a first century Protestant-like OT canon.

Dr. Geisler then states that even if these books *were* in the Septuagint in the first century, Jesus and his apostles never quoted them. Again, why restrict use to quotations? As we have said, there are other ways a text can authoritatively use a book such as references, applying texts to current circumstances, allusions, etc.. None of these are technically quotations, yet they all have just as much evidentiary valuable as a quotation. Nevertheless, Geisler has already conceded that the Deuterocanon is alluded to in the NT, which speaks favor of their presence in the first century LXX.

### **REVEALING ADMISSION BY THE NEW AMERICAN BIBLE**

Dr. Geisler next makes a rather surprising claim:

"Even notes in the currently used Roman Catholic New American Bible (NAB) make the revealing admission that the Apocrypha are 'Religious books used by both Jews and Christians which were not included in the collection of inspired writing.' Instead, they '...were introduced rather late into the collection of the Bible. Catholics call them 'deuterocanonical' (second canon) books' (NAB, 413)."<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Geisler is being deceptive. Here is the article referenced by Dr. Geisler with the words he quoted in red:

"APOCRYPHA. **Religious books used by both Jews and Christians which were not included in the collection of inspired writings.** In the Protestant Church [sic], this term designates the books of Tobit, Judith, Maccabees, Wisdom, Baruch, and Ecclesiasticus,

---

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

**APOCRYPHA.** Religious books used by both Jews and Christians which were not included in the collection of inspired writings. In the Protestant Church, this term designates the books of Tobit, Judith, Maccabees, Wisdom, Baruch, and Ecclesiasticus, which were introduced rather late into the collection of the Bible. Catholics call them "deuterocanonical" books.

which were introduced rather late into the collection of the Bible. Catholic call them 'deuterocanonical' books."<sup>6</sup>

It's odd that Dr. Geisler would appeal to a bible help as if it were a standard academic work. As a bible help found in a Catholic translation, it's intended for a Catholic audience. It is here that a true statement becomes, in Geisler's hands a "revealing admission."

As Geisler notes elsewhere in his article, Roman Catholics and Orthodox do not use the term "Apocrypha" for the seven books since we believe it to be inspired Scripture, but rather we "...prefer to call them 'deuterocanonical,' or books of 'the second canon.'"<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Geisler should have known, therefore, that when the *Catholic* New American Bible refers to the "Apocrypha," it is referring to *true* apocrypha that is pseudepigraphic writings (e.g., uninspired books such as the *Book of Enoch*, *the Assumption of Moses*, etc.), *not* the Deuterocanon. It is to *these uninspired extra-biblical works* that the NAB says are "Religious books used by both Jews and Christians which were not included in the collection of inspired writings."

We know this to be the case because of the following sentence, which Dr. Geisler omits, the NAB remarks, "In the Protestant Church [sic], this term [Apocrypha] designates the books of Tobit, Judith, Maccabees, Wisdom, Baruch, and Ecclesiasticus..." As you can see, the dictionary first defines "Apocrypha" according to Catholic usage (i.e., the Pseudepigrapha) then notes that *the same word* is used by Protestants to refer to deuterocanonical books.

Not only did Dr. Geisler omit the second line, but he even inserted his own words "Instead, they..." between the quotes so as to make it appear that the Catholic New American Bible is saying that the Deuterocanon was "...not included in the collection of inspired writings" by Jews and Christians!

As you can see from the original, Dr. Geisler insertion and use of the ellipsis changes the entire meaning of the dictionary article and does a great disservice to his readers.

## USE OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

**GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUMENT 3** - Some early fathers quoted and used the Deuterocanon in public worship.

Geisler asserts that the citations from the Church father's in support of the Deuterocanon's canonicity is "selective and misleading." A rather strange assertion since the Catholic side presented in Geisler's Point 3 doesn't cite any particular father.

---

<sup>6</sup> For those who wish to see the actual text. If found this definition in the Saint Joseph Edition of the New American Bible (Catholic Book Publishing Co.: New York), 1991 on page 412 (not 413).

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* 28.

He then concedes two very important points: "Some fathers did seem to accept their inspiration," and others "used them for devotional or homiletical (sic) (preaching) purposes, but did not accept them as canonical."<sup>8</sup>

Let's put these two concessions in perspective. In regards to "some fathers did seem to accept their inspiration," my book *The Case for the Deuterocanon: Evidence and Arguments* includes a survey of the early Church fathers from the first four centuries of the Church. In it, I record 209 instances in the writings of 33 Church fathers who quote the Deuterocanon as being inspired Scripture. I also found 236 instances in the writings of 39 fathers who used the Deuterocanon to confirm doctrine. Geisler wisely conceded that "*some* fathers" accepted the Deuterocanon's inspiration because to say that only "some" accepted them is actually a gross understatement.

In regards to the use for "...(preaching) purposes," Christian worship is modeled after Jewish worship in that there is a station in the liturgy for the reading of sacred Scripture. Therefore, its use in "worship" is actually quite significant. It is a public proclamation from a special station within the liturgy that manifests that a book is the word of God. Geisler has conceded more than I think he realized.

Dr. Geisler simply states that these fathers did not accept them as canonical without providing any evidence to support it.

Next comes a quote from Roger Beckwith's *The Old Testament Scripture in the New Testament Church*. Unless you've followed scholarly debates over the canon, you probably never have heard of this book. Needless to say, Beckwith's book has been severely criticized by his peers. The only reason I bring this up is that Dr. Geisler cites Beckwith as "[a]n authority on the *Apocrypha*" (emphasis his). It's true that Dr. Beckwith has done some very good work and made some contributions to the scholarly debate. However, my own study of the first edition of this work confirms what his critics assert, namely, that it has suffers from numerous serious flaws.

Beckwith's point about the misidentification of Deuterocanonical texts is valid to some extent. People make mistakes. They are human. Moreover, identifying quotations in ancient documents is not as easy of a task as it may seem. Quotations are often accommodated to the context of the passage. They can also come from different sources (*Septuagint, Old Latin, etc.*) and different versions (i.e., Theodotion, etc.) or they may include textual variants that do not appear in our current critical editions. Sometimes two texts are so similar that the context needs to be studied in order to determine which one fits the author's argument better. Given these difficulties, it's not surprising that scholars occasionally misidentify a source. However, these mistakes are fairly rare and certainly not a prevalent as Beckwith and Geisler makes it appear.

Geisler concludes: "Frequently in references, the fathers were not claiming divine authority for any of the eleven books infallibly canonized by the Council of Trent"<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*



Simple quotations will *always* outnumber formal and explicit quotations. Continuously introducing quotations with "As the Scripture says..." quickly became laborious and tedious to the reader. Informal quotations will always be more numerous than formal quotations. But even informal quotations can be illuminative. For example, when a writer quotes a deuterocanonical text, without any qualification, among protocanonical texts, this suggests that he saw them on equal footing. This occurs so often in the writings of the early Christian writers that I did not make a complete survey of all their occurrences.

As a side note, did you notice that Geisler refers to the seven deuterocanonical books as "eleven books" canonized by Trent? This is a confusing inconsistency within the article since elsewhere he speaks of seven and sometimes eight books. At times he counts the Deuterocanon as "pieces of literature," but other times he doesn't. This inconsistency is odd given that this such a short article. Nevertheless, it does not promote clarity for the reader.

## THE FATHERS AND THE APOCYPHA

**GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUEMENT 4** - Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria accepted the Deuterocanon as canonical Scripture.

The section begins by stating that "some individuals" in the early Church held the Deuterocanon in "high esteem" and others "were vehemently opposed to them."<sup>10</sup> Notice how the author understates the former and exaggerates the latter. Earlier Geisler stated that "Some fathers did seem to accept their *inspiration...*"<sup>11</sup> (emphasis mine), but here they were only held in "high esteem."

On the other hand, he mischaracterizes Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Origen, as being "vehemently opposed" to the Deuterocanon. Although, Jerome most certainly was opposed.

Athanasius, for example, distinguished the Deuterocanon from the Apocrypha in his 39th Festal Letter and even listed the deuterocanonical book of Baruch as among "those that are canonized." Furthermore, Athanasius uses the Deuterocanon explicitly as Scripture. For example he says:

"For since they were endeavouring to invest with what Scripture calls the incommunicable name [Wisdom 14:21] and honour of God them that are no gods but mortal men, and since this venture of theirs was great and impious, for this reason even against their will they were forced by truth to set forth the passions of these persons, so that their passions recorded in the writings concerning them might be in evidence for all posterity as a proof that they were no gods." (Athanasius, [Against the Heathen, 1, 17, 3](#)).

"And Dionysius accordingly acted as he learned from the Apostles. For as the heresy of Sabellius was creeping on, he was compelled, as I said before, to write the aforesaid letter, and to hurl at them what is said of the Saviour in reference to His manhood and His humiliation, so as to bar them by reason of His human attributes from saying that the Father was a son, and so render easier for them the teaching concerning the

---

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p. 29.

Godhead of the Son, when in his other letters he calls Him *from the Scriptures* the word, wisdom, power, breath [Wisdom 7:25], and brightness of the Father [Wisdom 7:26]" (Athanasius, [On the Opinion of Dionysius](#), 9)(Emphasis mine).

This doesn't sound like opposition, much less vehement opposition.

Likewise, Cyril of Jerusalem divides religious literature into three divisions and he places the Deuterocanon in a second category, like Athanasius, distinct from the Apocrypha. Cyril also quotes from the Deuterocanon elsewhere in the same writing.

An even worse fit is Origen of Alexandria. It's true in the preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms* he omits the Deuterocanon from the list, but this list was an attempt to reproduce what rabbinical Judaism in his day accepted as Scripture. Think about this. If I made a list of the OT books Protestant accepted - and I rightly omitted the Deuterocanon from that list - should I, based on that fact, be considered vehemently opposed to the Deuterocanon? Of course, not. I'm simply recording what others believe. Why is this not also true with Origen's list?

Elsewhere, Origen, like Athanasius and Cyril, quoted from the Deuterocanon explicitly as Scripture. Here is just one example among many:

"Finally, see if you can easily find a place in holy Scripture where the soul is properly mentioned in terms of praise: it frequently occurs, on the contrary, accompanied with expressions of censure, as in the passage, "An evil soul ruins him who possesses it [Sirach 6:4]." Origen, [First Principles](#), 2, 8, 2).

Earlier Dr. Geisler stated that "...[f]requently in references, the fathers were not claiming divine authority for any of the...[Deuterocanon]."<sup>12</sup> Yet Origen, Cyril, and Athanasius who do claim divine authority are counted among those who vehemently opposed the Deuterocanon! If this is vehement opposition, I can't imagine how acceptance would look like.

He is correct on St. Jerome. This fourth century father did explicitly reject the Deuterocanon, he consigned it to the Apocrypha, and his use of these books is consistent with his rejection. If there is anyone in the early Church who did vehemently oppose the Deuterocanon it was he.

In regards to the Dr. Geisler's comment concerning the Protestant scholar J. N. D. Kelly [erroneously given as J. D. N. Kelly] findings that "the great majority of fathers" ranked the Deuterocanon as Scripture in its fullest sense was "out of sync with the facts," all I can say is that was Dr. Geisler whose position was "out of sync with the facts." My own survey of the early Church fathers of the first four centuries of the Church confirms Kelly's conclusions.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> The survey is reproduced in the *Case for the Deuterocanon: Evidence and Arguments*, p. 107-245. The section includes individual quotations and references to the primary sources.

## CATACOMB ART APOCRYPHA THEMES

**GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUMENT 5** - The art in the early catacombs depicts scenes from the Deuterocanon.

Geisler notes that these depictions do not prove canonicity, and frankly he's right. They don't. The most it demonstrates is that the early Christians knew the Deuterocanon and held it in high esteem.

## BOOKS IN THE GREEK MANUSCRIPTS

**GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUMENT 6** - The early "manuscripts" (*Aleph*, *A*, and *B*) intermix the Deuterocanon with the other Old Testament books.

We have already discussed Geisler's unfortunate use of the word "manuscripts" for codices, which also is used in Beckwith's treatment on the subject as well. Geisler begins by stating, "None of the great Greek manuscripts (*Aleph*, *A*, and *B*) contain all of the apocryphal books." (emphasis his).<sup>14</sup> He can only say this because earlier he had defined "Apocrypha" to include works that are not part of the Deuterocanon. In other words, if "Apocrypha" is understood as it is commonly used today to refer to the seven deuterocanonical books then this statement is false.

*Codex Alexandrinus* (*A*) includes all seven deuterocanonical books, Baruch (with the Epistle of Jeremiah), Tobit, Judith, 1st and 2nd Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus) as well as longer forms of Daniel and Esther. Dr. Geisler must have known this since he later references page 194 of Beckwith's book, which gives a list of all the deuterocanonical texts found in *Alexandrinus* (*A*)!<sup>15</sup>

Beckwith also notes, as does Geisler, that all of the Great Codices (*Aleph*, *A*, *B*), include Tobit, Judith, Wisdom and Sirach, but Beckwith adds, "...and integrated them into the body of the Old Testament, rather than appending them at the end" (Beckwith, p. 383). Dr. Geisler mysteriously passes over Beckwith's comments even though *the same point* is proposed in his "Catholic Arguments" section.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* 30.

Codex Sinaiticus (early 4th century, defective)	Codex Alexandrinus (5th century)
1. Pentateuch (defective)	1. Pentateuch
2. Judg. (defective) Chron. (defective) Ezra - Neh. ESTHER TOBIT, JUDITH 1 & 4 MACCABEES	2a. Josh. Judg. + Ruth Sam. Kings Chron.
4. Isa. Jer. + Lam. ---(defective) ---(defective) THE TWELVE	4. The Twelve, Isa. Jer. + Baruch + Lam. + Ep. Jer. Ezekiel Sus. + Dan. + Bel and Dr.
3. PSS. PROV. ECC. SONG OF SOL. WISD. ECCLES. JOB.	2b. ESTHER TOBIT, JUDITH 1 ESDRAS, EZRA - NEH. 1-4 MACCABEES 3. Pss. JOB, Prov. Ecc. Song of Sol. Wisd., Eccles.

<sup>15</sup>

The intermixing of the Deuterocanon with the Protocanon is a very important clue as to how the early Christians understood these books. The absence of any qualification or distinction shows that the early Christians saw both groups as part of the same corpus. None of these Codices restricted themselves to the Protestant canon and none of them append the Deuterocanon as a kind of add-on to the Old Testament like the early Protestant Bibles.

## ACCEPTANCE BY EARLY COUNCILS

**GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUMENT 7** - The council of Rome and also the North African councils of Hippo and Carthage all affirmed the Deuterocanon as canonical Scripture.<sup>16</sup>

Here Geisler makes two assertions: These councils were local and therefore not binding on the whole Church and the Old Testament canon was "not under the province of the Christian church to decide."

I would like to address these two points in reverse order.

In regards to the Old Testament not being "under the province of the Christian church to decide," it is important to quote the entire paragraph from Geisler, so that we may see his reasoning:

"It is also important to remember that these books were not part of the Christian (New Testament period) writings. Hence, they were not under the province of the Christian church to decide. They were the province of the Jewish community which wrote them and which had, centuries before, rejected them as part of the canon."<sup>17</sup>

Geisler simply asserts these things as fact without providing any substantiation for them. Indeed, some of these assertions appear patently false. For example, the sharp distinction between Christians and Jews in the first century is artificial. Jesus and Apostles were Jewish and members of the "Jewish community which wrote them." The earliest Christians were Jewish as well. The New Testament never makes such a dichotomy. It doesn't view the Old Testament as "their writings" but *our* writings. 2 Peter 3:16 includes Paul's letters in the same category as "the other scriptures" (i.e., the Old Testament).

Even worse, Dr. Geisler fails to identify which "Jewish community" had this authority. First century Judaism was comprised of various sects and schools, many of whom held to different collections of sacred books. If the Old Testament is the province of the "Jewish community," which "Jewish community" was it? Was it the Sadducees? They apparently, like the Samaritans, only accepted the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). Was it the Essences? They appear to have rejected Esther and accepted Tobit, Sirach, the Book of Enoch, and other books as well. Was it their province? How about the Pharisees? They had two schools (Shammai and Hillel). The school of Shammai denied the sacredness of Esther, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, while the school of Hillel accepted all three. Which

---

<sup>16</sup> The councils mentioned are apparently the council of Rome (383) and the North African councils of Hippo Regius and Carthage (AD 393 and 419). It should be noted that there is some doubt as to the status of the Council of Rome. The *Decretum Damasi*, even if it is not from a council, are thought to contain the fundamental assertions of Pope Damasus (AD 305-384).

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

Jewish community is the correct one? The answer, of course, is that the Old and New Testament province was in the hands of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and his disciples.

Dr. Geisler statement that the "Jewish community" had rejected the Deuterocanon canon "centuries before" Christ. There really is nothing to support a pre-Christian closure of the OT canon. The fact that there were disagreements among the various first century Jewish sects strongly argues against any authoritative closing. Moreover, if the canon was closed centuries before Christ, how does one explain books like the Deuterocanon that claim inspiration and their place among the Scriptures.

Later, Geisler will introduce Romans 3:2 to establish his exclusive Jewish jurisdiction over the Old Testament canon, we will treat it here.

Romans 3:2 reads: "First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God" (NASB)

Nestle-Aland 27th edition reads, "...*prōton men [gar] hoti episteuthēsan ta logia tou theou.*"

A close look at Romans 3:2 shows that St. Paul is not speaking about an exclusive Jewish jurisdiction over the Old Testament, but quite the opposite. In Romans 3:2, Paul states that the Jews "*were entrusted* with the oracles of God" (emphasis mine). In the Greek, the word translated "were entrusted" is an aorist, passive, indicative. The aorist indicates that the "entrustment" by God happened in the past. The Jews *were at one time entrusted* with the oracles of God, but that was something in the past. Christians are now possess the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11).

As we already mentioned, if "the Jews" were entrusted with the canon, which sect of Judaism enjoyed this commission? First century Judaism was not monolithic. It was comprised of various sections, groups, and schools and several of them had their own opinion on the content of sacred books. The Sadducees, Samaritans, Pharisees, Essenes, and others held to different "canons" (if we can use this term at such an early date) of the Old Testament. However, Christianity held to only one canon. Who decided which one of these "canons" Christians should adopt? There is only one norm that sets all the norms of Christianity, namely Jesus Christ and His inspired Apostles. Jesus certainly has province over the whole of Scripture since God is its primary author. Therefore, whatever Old Testament collection Jesus and His Apostles handed on as part of the original sacred deposit of faith *is* the authentic canon of Scripture. Geisler's appeal to a theoretical pre-Christian closing and the exclusive jurisdiction or province idea seems to propose another norm alongside Christ, our ultimate norm. But Christ is the norm that sets all norms. Christ says that "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). Wouldn't this authority include province of what constitutes the word of God? And when Christ commissioned the apostles to teach the nations "...to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:20), would this not also include knowledge of the Old Testament canon?

In regards to the authority of local councils, Geisler does goes into depth on this point. First, he claims that local councils are not binding on the whole Church and seems to suggest that ecumenical councils, however, are binding. The problem here is that the North African councils were accepted by the general

imprimatur of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicene thereby giving it, which Philip Schaff called, "quasi-ecumenical" status.<sup>18</sup>

Geisler also states that local councils "...often erred in their decisions and were later overruled by the universal Church."<sup>19</sup> I don't see how this point is pertinent, since no ecumenical council ever over-ruled the African code's canon of Scripture.

He then proposes that Hippo and Carthage erred because it followed Augustine, who had erred on the canon. Why did Augustine err on the canon? Geisler provides four reasons:

- (1) Augustine recognized that the Jews didn't accept the Deuterocanon;
- (2) Augustine said in *The City of God* that Maccabees was accepted because of "the extreme and wonderful sufferings of certain martyrs." Hardly a method for determining canonicity;
- (3) Augustine was inconsistent since "he rejected books not written by prophets, yet he accepted a book that appears to deny being prophetic (1 Maccabees 9:27);"<sup>20</sup>
- (4) Augustine believed that the Septuagint was inspired. Therefore, he "seems" to have based his acceptance of the Deuterocanon on his erroneous belief.

It's strange that Dr. Geisler speculates on how Augustine arrived at his canon when Augustine actually explains who to know the canon quite plainly in his work, [\*On Christian Doctrine, 2, 8, 12\*](#). Augustine writes:

"Now, in regard to the canonical Scriptures, he must follow the judgment of the greater number of Catholic churches; and among these, of course, a high place must be given to such as have been thought worthy to be the seat of an apostle and to receive epistles."

There's no mention of the Jews, or the Maccabean martyrs, or books written by prophets, or the inspired Septuagint. Augustine anchors the canon in the consensus of the early Church giving priority to those with apostolic ties. In other words, he understood that the canon of Scripture was part of the deposit of faith handed on to the Church by the Christ's inspired Apostles. That deposit is made manifest by the near universal usage of these books by the Church, especially those known to be the seat of an apostle or to receive letters.

Let's examine each of Geisler's points.

1) Augustine recognized that the Jews didn't accept the Deuterocanon.

Again, we have the same unqualified "the Jews" statement. It is more accurate to say, "Augustine recognized that the Jews *of his day* [that is post-Christian rabbinical Judaism] rejected the Deuterocanon." However, the rabbinical post-Christian rejection of the Deuterocanon has no more

---

<sup>18</sup> Schaff, Philip, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 14, 439.

<sup>19</sup> Geisler, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*.

bearing on Christian belief than their rejection of the New Testament. While Augustine understood the rabbis to have their canon, he is equally clear that Christians have their own and it included the Deuterocanon.

2) Augustine said in *The City of God* that Maccabees was accepted because of "the extreme and wonderful sufferings of certain martyrs." Hardly a method for determining canonicity.

It's amazing how much mileage this off-handed comment gets in Protestant apologetics. What's even more amazing is that someone as brilliant as Dr. Geisler would think that Augustine would be so dumb. As we have seen in Augustine's work *On Christian Doctrine*, the canon was part of the deposit of faith that Christ and his inspired Apostles gave to the Church. The canon was not something put together by individuals. Since Augustine gives the briefest of explanation here - and no where expounds further on the point - we are left to guess what exactly he meant. For me, the best way to understand this (in light of Augustine's views elsewhere about the canon being part of the deposit of faith), is that he is speculating as to why the apostles (or the first Christians) accepted Maccabees. He knew that Hebrews 11:35 references the Maccabean martyrs. Perhaps Augustine put two and two together. Since Hebrews 11:35 speaks about the Maccabean martyrs, it was the martyrdoms portrayed in Second Maccabees that played a role in its initial acceptance. Speculative? Yes. However, I think it is much more consonant with Augustine's thought on the canon than Geisler's explanation.

(3) Augustine was inconsistent, since "he rejected books not written by prophets, yet he accepted a book that appears to deny being prophetic (1 Maccabees 9:27)..."

Notice that Dr. Geisler uses two similar words, prophets and prophetic. The two words are not identical. Every book written by a prophet is prophetic, but not every prophetic book is written by a prophet (at least not by someone publicly known to be a prophet). The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, for example, are prophetic (i.e., inspired, revelatory), but neither were written by someone publicly known to be a prophet. Ezra was a priest and a scribe (Ezra 7:6-7, 11-13, 21-22; Nehemiah 8:4, 9, 13, 12:26-27, 36) and Nehemiah was the personal cup-bearer of King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11, 2:1). The same can be said for other protocanonical books as well. Therefore, even if 1 Maccabees 9:27 was stating that prophets no longer exist, First Maccabees could still be a prophetic work.

However, 1 Maccabees 9:27 does not say anything of the sort. It refers to a time ('the day') that no prophet was seen in Israel. This is a reference to the absence of prophets during the Babylonian exile (Psalm 74:9, Lamentation 2:9, Dan 3:38 Theodotion), which was only temporary since there were post-exilic prophets arose afterwards.

(4) Augustine believed that the Septuagint was inspired. Therefore, he "seems" to have based his acceptance of the Deuterocanon on his erroneous belief.

As to Augustine's view of the inspiration of the Septuagint, we know that it was not a determining factor from what he wrote in his work, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book 2, 8, 12 (quoted above).

What Augustine actually *does* say about the canon in *On Christian Doctrine* is deadly to Geisler's position in regards to usage. Augustine witnesses that by the end of the fourth century a majority of Christians, not just a few fathers who used them for devotional or homiletic material, held the Deuterocanon to be canonical Scripture. Moreover, this consensus was rooted in the ancient practice of those churches known to be historically connected to the Apostles. Augustine's observations and methodology fits perfectly with J. N. D. Kelly's findings, but directly contradicts Geisler assertions.

Another odd twist is found in the concluding paragraph of this section. Commenting on the Council of Rome (AD 382), Geisler states that this council did not list Baruch "thus listing only six, not seven, of the Apocrypha book later pronounced canonical."

Aside from the fact that now there are seven, not eleven books pronounced canonical, we have several problems. First, the document mentioned is not that of the Council of Rome, but a decree of Pope St. Damasus I. Modern critical editions do not list it as part of that council. Second, it was already a well-established and ancient practice to count Jeremiah, Baruch, Lamentations, and the Epistle as one book. Occasionally, one or two of those books were singled out, but all were considered part of Jeremiah. Augustine himself says, after quoting Baruch 3:36-38, "Some critics attribute this passage, not to Jeremias, but to the scribe, Baruch; the more prevailing opinion ascribes it to the former."<sup>21</sup> Given the historic continuity of the conventional grouping of these books into Jeremiah, that the Decree of Damasus affirmed Baruch and the Epistle in its decree.

## "ACCEPTANCE BY THE ORTHODOX CHURCH"

**GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUMENT 8** - The Eastern Orthodox accepts the Deuterocanon and shows it to be a common belief among Christians, not something unique to Catholicism.

This section labors under ambiguity. Geisler claims that "the Greek church" has changed its position on the Deuterocanon. He states that the synods of Constantinople, Jaffa, and Jerusalem declared the Deuterocanon to be canonical, which is true. But as late as 1839 "*their* Larger Catechism" (emphasis mine) omitted the Deuterocanon because it did not exist in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>22</sup> Here, once again, Dr. Geisler gives his readers a false impression.

When one speaks of the "Orthodox Church" you are really speaking about several autocephalous churches (i.e., Greek, Russian, Byzantium, etc.). Dr. Geisler seems to be aware of this when he singles out the *Greek* church, which would be the Greek Orthodox church. Indeed, the three synods listed (*Constantinople, Jaffa, and Jerusalem*) are Greek Orthodox synods, although the Synod of Jerusalem (1672) is practically a pan-Orthodox council, since the patriarchs of Greece, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Moscow all signed the Confession of Dositheos, which affirmed the Deuterocanon. The reason for these synods was to reaffirm the Faith against the errors of Calvinist missionaries to the east, and particularly the writings of Cyril Lucar that espoused them.

---

<sup>21</sup> *City of God*, 18.33.

<sup>22</sup> Geisler, p. 31.



However, the *Longer Catechism* (1839) - known also as the *Catechism of St. Philaret (Drozdov) of Moscow* - is not a Greek Orthodox, but Russian Orthodox catechism, a different autocephalous entity. Therefore, Geisler's charge that the Greek Church had changed is incorrect. It is the Russian Orthodox in so far as this catechism is concerned that had changed. It is my understanding that the Russian Orthodox Church has moved back in union with the Greek Orthodox in regards to the canon, although it still holds the *Catechism* in high regard because it was written by a saint.

Is this a sign of indecision on the part of the Orthodoxy? I would say no. It's clear that the Protestant canon was not part of the Orthodoxy. Its momentary reception by some was due to Protestant missionaries, which produced the odd relic of the *Longer Catechism*.

## ACCEPTANCE OF THE COUNCILS OF FLORENCE AND TRENT

**GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUMENT 9** - The council of Trent reaffirmed previous councils, especially the council of Florence, which met before the Protestant Reformation (AD 1442).

Unfortunately, this section is marred by inflammatory rhetoric and tends to wonder off the subject. Why Dr. Geisler stoops to this is beyond me. Regardless of its cause, it essentially commits the furtive fallacy (also known as the conspiracy fallacy) mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Dr. Geisler states that "some" Catholic scholars claim that Florence "made the same pronouncement." Only "some" Catholic scholars hold this? It is a matter of record: Trent adopted Florence's canon. The council fathers even recalled the original Decree from the Council of Florence in order to verify its authenticity. Why does Dr. Geisler shy away from affirming this point? It seems that if he concedes that Florence affirmed the Deuterocanon in 1442, seventy-four years before the Protestant Reformation, that it would undermine his claim that Trent's canon was "an obvious polemic against Protestantism."<sup>23</sup>

He then asserts that the "...Council of Florence had proclaimed the *Apocrypha* inspired in order to bolster "the doctrine of Purgatory which had blossomed." Where is the evidence for this assertion? We possess the *Acts of the Council of Florence*.<sup>24</sup> Where in the official Acts of the council is there a discussion about affirming Maccabees in order to bolster the doctrine of Purgatory? It's not there. I looked.

A problem with Geisler's theory is that the discussions regarding purgatory took place with the *Decree in Behalf for the Greeks* (Bull "Laetenur coeli," July 6, 1439), not the *Decree in Behalf of the Jacobites* (Bull "Cantata Domino," February 4, 1442), which affirmed the canon of Scripture. These are two different decrees concerning two different subjects. There is nothing in the *Decree in Behalf of the Jacobites* that mentions purgatory. Indeed, the decree's canon is introduced by the words:

"It professes one and the same God as the author of the Old and New Testament, that is, of the Law and the Prophets and the Gospel, since the saints of both Testaments have

---

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> *Acta Sacri Oecumenici Concilii Florentini ab Horatio instiniano: Bibliothecae Vaticanae Custde Primario; collecta, Disposita, Illustrata* (Romae, 1638).

spoken with the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, whose books, which are contained under the following titles it accepts and venerates.<sup>25</sup>

After listing all of the protocanonical and deuterocanonical books of the Old and New Testaments, Florence concludes this topic with a condemnation of the Manicheans. There's nothing even a hint of purgatory in this context.

Even in regards to the discussion on purgatory with the Greeks, the issue at the center of the dispute was not the existence of purgatory or the Christian practice of prayers for the dead. Rather, it centered around the nature of punishment in purgatory, specifically the nature of purgatorial fire. According to the *Acts of Florence*, Catholics did appeal to Second Maccabees, but it was superfluous because it didn't speak directly to the issue at hand (namely the nature of purification). Therefore, Dr. Geisler's assertion is totally foreign to the Council and its history.

He then jumps to Indulgences and Martin Luther. While claiming that Trent's decree as an "obvious polemic," and "a clear polemic against Luther's teaching," he provides no documentation to support it.

Again, if he actually read the *Acts of Trent* or the diaries of those who participated in the council, he would have known that such a claim was utterly baseless. Again, it's a matter of record, not opinion. The stated purpose of addressing the issue of the canon and sacred tradition was to first define what are the sacred sources so that they can be used to address other doctrinal issues. Protestant confessions use the same method as well (i.e., the *Westminster Confession*, etc.).

Had Dr. Geisler consulted primary sources at Trent, he would have discovered that a majority of fathers believed the issue of the canon had been long settled by previous councils and papal pronouncements such as the council of Florence and the North African councils. The historic canon was adopted without any additional comment.

Geisler concludes:

"The official infallible addition of books that support prayers for the dead is highly suspect, coming only a few years after Luther protested this doctrine. It has all the appearance of an attempt to provide infallible support for doctrines that lack a real biblical basis."

If one buys into Dr. Geisler's furtive fallacy, I suppose it would give the "appearance" that such is the case. But that's only if one takes Dr. Geisler's word for it. The Acts of Trent and Florence as well as other primary source material doesn't support any of Dr. Geisler's assertions, in fact, there is much to argue against it. I treat the issue of Trent and the canon in detail in my book, *Why Catholic Bibles Are Bigger*. I would also contest Geisler's assertion that the council made its decision "only a few years" after Luther's protest. Luther's first protest was in October of 1517. The decree was made April 8, 1546. Is twenty-nine years "only a few years?"

---

<sup>25</sup> Denzinger, Henry, and Karl Rahner, eds. *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*. Translated by Roy J. Deferrari. St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1954., p. 226-227.

## "APOCRYPHAL BOOKS IN THE PROTESTANT BIBLE"

**GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUMENT 9** - Protestant bibles included the Deuterocanon as late as the nineteenth century indicating that even Protestants accepted these books.

This is a strange argument. It's difficult to believe that any Catholic would take this as serious point. Some Protestant Bibles still include the "Apocrypha," so the statement itself is erroneous. The 1820s did tip the scales against such Bibles when the *British and Foreign Bible Society* decided to cut funding to any society who wished to print the Bible with the so-called "Apocrypha." If there is any significance to Protestant Bibles including the "Apocrypha," it is that the earliest Protestant didn't remove it until much later. Why continue to include these books in the Bible if they weren't inspired?

The Anglican scholar Dr. John Hey gives the best answer:

"At the Reformation, when men had been brought up to revere them [the Deuterocanon], it would have been both imprudent and cruel to set them aside"<sup>26</sup>

The earliest Protestants were all former Catholics. They knew that these books belonged in the Bible. They couldn't allow these books to remain as they were, intermixed with the Protocanon and holding the same authority because their teachings contradicted Protestant teaching. Therefore, they were segregated them from the rest of the Bible, placed them in an appendix between the Old and New Testaments titled "Apocrypha," and gave notice to the reader that these books could not be used to confirm doctrine. It wasn't until much later, when their former place in the Christian Bible had been forgotten, that Protestants began to remove the "Apocrypha" all together.

Geisler also notes that some Catholic scholars also did not accept the Deuterocanon. He mentions Xemenes and his *Complution Polyglott* and Cardinal Cajetan likewise spoke against the Deuterocanon. In both cases, they did so because they were devout followers of St. Jerome, who erred on the issue of the Deuterocanon.

## "APOCRYPHAL WRITINGS AT QUMRAN"

**GEISLER'S ANSWER TO ARGUMENT 11** - Fragments of the deuterocanonical books in Hebrew were found in Qumran, so they were considered canonical.

Geisler makes two comments in this regard:

(1) He states that although fragments of deuterocanonical books were found in Qumran, no commentaries (*peshirim*) on the Deuterocanon were found.

(2) Geisler also states that since the deuterocanonical fragments were not "found in the special parchment and script indicates that the *Apocryphal* books were not view as canonical by the Qumran community" (emphasis his).

---

<sup>26</sup> John Hey, *Lectures on Divinity delivered in the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Parker, 1797), vol. 4, 490).

## POINT 1 - THE PESHER ARGUMENT

Geisler's first point is pretty straight forward. The Qumran community must not have accepted the Deuterocanon because they did not write any commentaries (*peshirim*) on these books. Sounds pretty solid, until you discover that there were only 15 commentaries (*peshirim*) discovered at Qumran on the books of Isaiah (4Q161, 4Q162, 4Q163, 4Q164, 4Q165), the Psalms (1Q16, 4Q171, 4Q173) and on the minor Prophets (1QpHab on Habakkuk; 1Q14 on Micah; 1Q15 and 4Q170 on Zephaniah; 4Q166 and 4Q167 on Hosea; 4Q169 on Nahum). In other words, only seven of the thirty-nine protocanonical books received a commentary (*peshir*). One could argue that there may have been more written that didn't survive the ages. Fair enough. But arguments need to be based on the evidence that we do have rather than the evidence we don't have. Be that as it may, Dr. Geisler's argument makes it sound as if all of the Protocanon received a commentary when in fact very few books enjoyed that privilege.

This is another example of *canonical duplicity* where Deuterocanon cannot be considered Scripture because it didn't meet condition X (X being a *peshir*) while the fact that a good portion of the Protestant Old Testament cannot satisfy condition X is ignored. Clearly, Qumran accepted more than these seven books as sacred texts. Let's move to Dr. Geisler's second point, special script and parchment.

## POINT 2 - THE SPECIAL PARCHMENT AND SCRIPT ARGUMENT

Geisler's second point is that, "...only canonical books were found in the special parchment and script indicates that the Apocryphal books were not viewed as canonical by the Qumran community."<sup>27</sup> Since Qumran failed to yield deuterocanonical fragments in a "special script" or written on "special parchment" that was reserved for biblical texts, it is argued, they must not have accepted as Scripture.

Geisler never explains what is this "special script" and "special parchment." Most Dead Sea Scrolls researchers believe that the Qumran sect actually held to a much larger "canon" (if that word can be used at this early date) than the Protestant Bible, including such books as Tobit, Sirach, Enoch, and others. If there was a special biblical script or special parchment that gives a strict demarcation between sacred and profane texts, I would think, it would be a defeater for Qumran's larger canon, yet none of the scholars I've read on the subject (i.e., Tov, VanderKam, Lim, *etc.*) mention it. Since Dead Sea scroll scholarship is a huge field, it's quite possible I missed this point. Therefore, I began looking into the issue more thoroughly.

### "SPECIAL" PARCHMENT AND SCRIPT?

My initial search found nothing. In regards to a "special parchment," I found that only three types of materials were found at Qumran: papyrus, parchment (leather), and copper. Copper is the rarest. It is used only for one scroll and it contains non-biblical material. Qumran yielded copies of biblical texts in *both* papyrus *and* parchment, although most biblical texts tend to be written on parchment. In regards to the deuterocanonical fragments: Sirach ([2Q18](#)) is written on parchment and Tobit ([4Q197-200](#)) is written on papyrus and parchment. The Epistle of Jeremiah ([7Q2](#)) was found only on papyrus. Therefore, there is nothing here to distinguish the deuterocanonical fragments from the other fragments (biblical

---

<sup>27</sup> Geisler, p. 31.

or non-biblical). It's possible there could have been different kinds of parchment used, but I was unable to find anything from the sources I consulted. The "special parchment" idea was a dead end.

### THE SPECIAL HEBREW SCRIPT

What about the special Hebrew script exclusively used for biblical texts? Hebrew texts at Qumran are written in either square script or paleo-Hebrew.<sup>28</sup> Both protocanonical and deuterocanonical texts are written in square. Only a few, [15 to be exact](#), are written with paleo-Hebrew script. Most of these come from the Pentateuch (1Q3, 2Q5, 4Q11, 4Q12, 4Q22, 4Q45, 4Q46, 4Q101, 6Q1, 6Q2, 11Q1) and one from Job (4Q101). There is also a paleo-Hebrew fragment from a work similar to Joshua, 4Q paleo paraJoshua (4Q123), which can best be described as a paraphrase of Joshua 21. Scholars are still debating whether this fragment comes from a re-written book of Joshua known as the *Apocryphon of Joshua*, or a variant of the canonical book of Joshua. Therefore, the jury is still out as to whether it can be classified as a biblical text. There are three others (4Q124, 4Q125, 11Q22) that have eluded identification. Therefore, it is likely that paleo-Hebrew was not used exclusively for biblical texts. However, even if paleo-Hebrew was this "special Hebrew script" it could not function as an indicator since a majority of biblical fragments are in square script without only the Pentateuch and Job (possibly Joshua) being affirmed. This also seemed like a dead end. Where then did Geisler find this information?

### FINDING THE SOURCE

Unable to find anything, I turned my attention to Geisler's other works since he makes the same point over and over again. Perhaps he describes what these special features are.

The earliest that I could find is in his book, [Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences](#), co-authored by Ralph MacKenzie (Baker Publishing Group, 1995), which says:

"...But the fact that no commentaries were found on an apocryphal book and that *only canonical books, not the Apocrypha, were found in the special parchment and script indicates that the Qumran community did not view the apocryphal books as canonical.* The noted scholar on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Millar Burroughs [sic], concluded: 'There is no reason to think that any of these works were venerated as Sacred Scripture' (p. 165)"(Emphasis mine).

Citations to Mansoor and Burrows are included in his footnotes. No clues there.

In the current Encyclopedia article, he wrote:

"*Apocryphal Writings at Qumran*...The fact that no commentaries were found for an Apocryphal book, and *only canonical books were found in the special parchment and script indicates that the Apocryphal books were not viewed as canonical by the Qumran community.* Menahem Mansoor lists the following fragments of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: Tobit, in Hebrew and Aramaic; Enoch in Aramaic; Jubilees in Hebrew; Testament of Levi and Naphtali, in Aramaic; Apocryphal Daniel literature, in Hebrew and

---

<sup>28</sup> There also is a special Qumran Hebrew, but this doesn't affect our discussion.

Aramaic, and Psalms of Joshua (Mansoor, 203). The noted scholar on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Millar Burroughs [sic], concluded: 'There is no reason to think that any of these works were venerated as Sacred Scripture' (Burroughs [sic], 178)." (Emphasis mine)<sup>29</sup>

In his [The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible](#) co-authored by Joseph Holden (Baker Academic, 2013), Geisler says essentially the same thing in a slightly different fashion:

"Interestingly, there were no commentaries found in the caves at Qumran on any book within the Apocrypha. *Only the canonical books were found, written on special parchment in the sacred script.* Based on the finding at Qumran, the Apocrypha was not viewed as canonical by the Qumran community" (p. 90)(Emphasis mine).

Here Geisler's canonical indicators are described as "special parchment in the sacred script." No sources are cited.

However, in his book [To Understand the Bible Look for Jesus: The Bible Student's Guide to the Bible's Central Theme](#) (Wipf & Stock Pub, Reprint 2002), Geisler gives a little more information in a footnote against the "Apocrypha:"

"Even the Messianic cult at Qumran possessed Apocryphal books but apparently did not esteem them of equal value with the sacred Scriptures. Millar Burrows, *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking, 1958), p. 178 says of the Apocrypha, 'There is no reason to think that any of these works were venerated as Sacred Scripture.' *Scholars cite several different lines of evidence for viewing the Apocrypha as noncanonical* in Qumran: (1) the absence of any commentaries on the Apocryphal books, (2) *the failure to find any Apocryphal books written on the more valuable writing materials like parchment*, (3) and even *the failure to find any Apocryphal books written in the special (taller) script, as were the canonical books*" (p. 23, FN 1).

Finally, here are some clues! The Burrows quotation (spelled correctly this time) is given followed by a bit more descriptive account of what constitutes the special writing material and script. The "canonical" texts, he says, were "written on the more valuable writing materials like parchment" and the special script is describes as being "taller" (apparently in comparison to the "shorter" script used for profane sources). The most important clue, however, was the placement of the Burrows quote. Could it be that Geisler got his information from Burrows?

### **"MORE LIGHT..." ON THE SPECIAL SCRIPT**

I quickly jumped on my favorite used book website and ordered Burrows' book to see if it could point me in the right direction. When I received it, I immediately became aware of a very serious problem. Burrows' book was past its freshness date and when I say "past its freshness date" I mean "way past its freshness date," even when Geisler quoted it back in the 90s.

---

<sup>29</sup> p. 31.

Burrows' work was completed in 1957 and published in 1958. The scrolls were discovered in 1947 and excavations continued until 1956. The book, therefore, was published when Dead Sea Scroll research was still in its infancy. Solid conclusions were still a long time off, as Burrows himself states in the preface:

"The interpretation and even the publication of the [Qumran] texts, it is true, have only begun. No complete account will be possible for many years. Enough progress has been made, however, to warrant a survey of the *present state* of the Dead Sea Scroll studies" (p. xi)(emphasis mine).

The "present state" being 1957. Anyone familiar with the history of the *DSS* publication knows that this is a very serious problem. As Burrows notes, it would take many years (read decades) before scholars would be able to sift through all the data, publish theories, and engage in critical peer review and debate before solid explanations and interpretations can be made. Burrows' book comes before any of this takes place. In fact, much of his information comes through second hand knowledge gleaned from those who had access to the fragments at that time.

I immediately turned to page 177 titled "The Apocrypha and Other Post-biblical Works; Languages and Paleography" to see what Burrows has to say about the "Apocrypha" and its status at Qumran. The answer is "not much." After discussing the different languages the Deuterocanon may have been originally written in, he states:

"The Qumran fragments of Sirach and Tobit have not yet been published, and not much information about them has been released. One of the Aramaic copies of Tobit is on papyrus; the other one and the Hebrew copy are on leather. The Ecclesiasticus fragments also are of leather. It may be assumed, in the absence of information to the contrary, that all these manuscripts are non-canonical in format and script" (p. 177).

That's it. However, even in this short paragraph reveals several surprising things:

First. Dr. Geisler repeatedly stated in his articles that the "Apocrypha" was *not* written on special parchment. Indeed, the footnote in the *To Understand the Bible...* even states that they did not find any of the Deuterocanon "...written on the more valuable writing materials like parchment." But Burrows, even at this early date, knew that both Tobit and Sirach *were* found on parchment (leather)!<sup>30</sup>

Second. Burrows states that when he wrote this chapter the fragments of Sirach and Tobit had "not yet been published, and not much information about them has been released." This is not surprising given the date of the book. It does explain, however, why Burrows has so little to say about the Deuterocanon. There really wasn't any data for him to look at.

---

<sup>30</sup> "Most of the DSS were written on animal skin-based material that can be roughly described as a hybrid of parchment and leather." ("The Temple Scroll: Reconstructing An Ancient Manufacturing Process," Roman Schueltz in *Science Advances* 06 Sep 2019: Vol. 5, no. 9).

Third. Burrows' conclusion that the Deuterocanonical fragments were in a "non-canonical" format and script was *not* a statement of fact. He assumed, since he didn't possess any evidence to the contrary, that the "Apocrypha" wasn't found in a special format and allows he admits that this assumption is open to future correction.

Most surprising of all is that Dr. Geisler's quotation from Burrows did not come from this section!

After continued reading, I located the quote. Immediately after the paragraph quoted above, Burrows turns his attention to "other" manuscripts - namely the Pseudepigrapha and the sectarian writings - that were also found at Qumran. Of regards to *these* documents, Burrows wrote with the word quoted by Geisler in red:

"The large number of *other works* represented by scrolls or fragments in the caves of the Wady Qumran is clear from the brief account of them already given (pp. 27-36). *Some of them*, we have seen, were already known in Greek or other translations and *were commonly included among the books called Pseudepigrapha*. *Many others were entirely unknown* until they appeared in the remains of the Qumran library. **There is no reason to think that any of these works were venerated as sacred Scripture**" (p. 177-178) (Emphasis mine).

As you can see, Burrows was not commenting on the Deuterocanon, as Geisler repeatedly states, but on the books "...commonly *included among the books of the Pseudepigrapha*" as well as previously unknown works. Dr. Geisler has once again - like he did in his "Revealing Admission By the New American Bible" cited earlier - has turned a comment on the Pseudepigrapha into a rejection of the Deuterocanon.<sup>31</sup>

### **COULD THIS BE THE SPECIAL PARCHMENT AND SCRIPT?**

The fact that Burrows did mention a special canonical "format and script" indicates that they must have discussed the format and script earlier in the book. I scanned the previous chapter and sure enough Burrows does indeed discuss Qumran and these formats.

After discussing the then current hypotheses as to why no fragments of the book of Esther were found, Burrows states the following:

"New evidence of a distinction between sacred and other literature at Qumran, which affords also a means of determine how each book was regarded, has recently been brought forward" (p. 175).

---

<sup>31</sup> Geisler's comments doesn't seem like a mistake since both Burrows and the NAB Dictionary explicitly distinguish the Deuterocanon (Apocrypha) from the Pseudepigrapha. Both Geisler's use of the ellipsis (in the quotation from the NAB dictionary) and a single quote devoid of context (in the Burrows' quotation) forces the reader to trust Dr. Geisler that he is providing the correct context of these remarks.



Again, this "new evidence" that was "recently" brought forward was in 1957. What was this "new evidence?" Strangely enough, it has nothing to do with the canonicity of the Deuterocanon *per se*, but the canonicity of the book of Daniel! Burrows writes:

"If reliable, this is important, because it indicates that one of the books in the Jewish and Hebrew canon, the book of Daniel, was not regarded as sacred Scripture in the Qumran community. The official publication of the fragments excavated in Cave 1 includes a transcription of the Daniel fragments acquired by Archbishop Samuel in 1948. Commenting on them, Barthelemy remarks that in the other biblical manuscripts of Cave 1 the height of the columns is double the width, whereas the height and width of the columns in these Daniel fragments are approximately equal. Pieces of a copy of Daniel written on papyrus, Barthelemy adds, have been found in Cave 6, whereas the other biblical manuscripts in Hebrew are made of leather" (p. 175-176).

If I didn't know better, I would say that this is the "taller" script and special (leather) parchment mentioned by Geisler in his "*To Understand the Bible...*" footnote. Did Geisler get his "special script" and "special parchment" idea from Burrows? I hope not because that would raise several problems:

First. Burrows' "new evidence" of a biblical distinction was put forward before the publication and full disclosure of the fragments took place.

Second. Burrows doesn't state that the special format idea was a fact, but only a theory put forward by some scholars. Moreover, Burrows qualifies his acceptance of this theory with the words "If reliable..." where Geisler states it as a fact.

Third. Dr. Geisler suggests that Qumran accepted the later rabbinical canon (i.e., the Protestant canon), but Burrows' comments suggests that they did not accept the protocanonical book of Daniel. Someone could respond by saying, "Well, maybe Daniel was later found in this format. Therefore, it was considered canonical." If so, it would also show that "canonical" books can be in either format, which calls into question whether it is a reliable an indicator.

Fourth. Burrows himself notes that the special script and parchment may not be a reliable indicator of canonicity. In the next paragraph, Burrows references Frank M Cross Jr., who states that subsequent discoveries (before 1958) had already called into question whether a strict demarcation of "canonical" texts via the use of parchment and script could be made. Burrows wrote:

"Cross points out that since Barthelemy wrote this statement a papyrus manuscript of I-II Kings from Cave 6 has been identified. He agrees, however, that the practice of the Qumran scribes in copying biblical manuscripts was fairly uniform. They usually wrote on leather, usually made the columns twice as high as they were wide, and usually used either the old Hebrew script or the formal "bookhand" of the square script, though a very few biblical scrolls in a cursive script were found in Cave 4. Recognizing therefore that there were exceptions to the standard procedure, Cross notes..." (p. 176).

Indeed, not only were papyrus fragments of the books of Kings found on papyrus ([6Q4](#)), but also Deuteronomy ([6Q3](#)) and Psalms ([6Q5](#)). Where Dr. Geisler deems the special "taller" script and parchment as definitive in regards to canonicity, Burrows states that this is not true in all cases. Therefore, even if Geisler did not get this idea solely from Burrows, he should have known (reading Burrows) that these special formats could not be used as a strict rule, as his articles on the "Apocrypha" suggest.

Later, I ran across a more recent book that touches on the special format idea. It is Emmanuel Tov's work *Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible and Qumran: Collected Essays* (Mohr Siebeck, 2008) within a section titled: *Special Procedures for Biblical Texts?* Tov writes:

...the corpus of texts from the Judean Desert, when taken as a whole, shows that the scribes made little distinction when copying sacred and nonsacred manuscripts, and more specifically biblical and nonbiblical manuscripts. In some circles a limited or even rigid distinction was made between these two types of manuscripts...However, this distinction is not reflected in the Judean Desert texts when taken as a whole. (p. 126)

Tov continues:

"When reading the instruction in rabbinic literature regarding the writings of sacred texts, the impression is created that these instruction are specific to sacred texts, but from the Qumran text it is now evident that in most instances identical procedures were also applied to nonsacred texts. The only differences between the copying of biblical and nonbiblical texts that are visible in the text from the Judean Deserts are:

- Biblical texts from the Judean Deserts were almost exclusively written on parchment
- Biblical texts were inscribed on only one side of the parchment unlike an undetermined (small) number of nonbiblical opisthographs from the Judean Desert.
- a de luxe format was used especially for biblical scrolls.
- a special stichographaic layout was devised for the writing of several poetical sections of many biblical scrolls, as well as one nonbiblical scroll. (p. 127)

As you can see, Tov carefully qualifies these distinctions much like Cross did in the Burrows book. Ironically, Tov's last point indicates that a special format for biblical texts was used for Sirach. In a later work, Tov writes:

A stichographic layout is evidenced in 30 Judean Desert texts of two poems in the Torah (Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32), Psalms (especially Psalm 119), Proverbs, Lamentations, and Job... In the Judean Desert texts, there is a special layout for poetical units that is

almost exclusive to biblical texts (including Ben Sira [2QSir and MasSir]), and is not found in any of the non-biblical poetical compositions from the Judean Desert..."<sup>32</sup>

So it appears that special format was "almost exclusively" used for biblical poetical texts and that Sirach was found in this format, not only at Qumran but also in Masada. This observation by Tov is a defeater for Geisler's special script argument since there is evidence (from Qumran and Masada) that a special biblical script was used that seems to affirm the sacredness of a deuterocanonical book.

## CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS IN SUMMARY

Skipping over Geisler's "Catholic Arguments in Summary," we move to his positive case for the Protestant canon.

## ARGUMENTS FOR THE PROTESTANT CANON

Geisler then switches gears and proposes a positive case for the Protestant canon. I think he deserves credit for doing this since most Protestant apologists prefer to sit back and attempt to poke holes in the Catholic position rather than construct a positive case.

What's his case? First, he argues that the Protestant canon and the "Palestinian canon" are essentially the same, which is true. But he is laboring under an antiquated theory that is no longer tenable (Palestinian versus Alexandrian canon). The argument collapsed back in the 1950s and it has been largely abandoned in scholarly circles, although it still makes it rounds in popular circles.

He then states "Therefore, their canon [the Palestinian canon] was recognized as the orthodox one. It was the canon of Jesus (Geisler, *General Introduction*, chap. 5), Josephus, and Jerome. it was the canon of many early church fathers, among them Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Athanasius."<sup>33</sup>

Sadly, Geisler just makes these sweeping claims without backing. He claims that it was the canon of Jesus and provides a reference to his *General Introduction*.<sup>34</sup> As for the Jewish Historian Josephus, Josephus never mentions a "canon," but does speak about sacred histories. Unfortunately for Geisler, his description appears to be missing two protocanonical books. He is correct on Jerome. We've already seen that Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem were not "vehemently opposed" to the Deuterocanon, but quoted it as Scripture and used it to confirm doctrine.

Geisler divides his defense of the Protestant canon into the historical and doctrinal arguments.

## PROPHETICITY

This is the very heart of Geisler's argument. His argument goes through a number of strange twists and turns, so in fairness to him, we should reproduce his own words and comment on them.

---

<sup>32</sup> *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress Press, 2012), p. 201-202.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> Geisler, Norman L., and William E. Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Rev. and expanded. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986. pp. 76-89.

First he states:

"Contrary to the Roman Catholic argument from Christian usage, the true test of canonicity is propheticity. God determined which books would be in the Bible by giving their message to a prophet. So only books written by a prophet or accredited spokesperson for God are inspired and belong in the canon of Scripture."<sup>35</sup>

Geisler places into opposition two potentially complimentary positions. God, obviously, inspires a work. Christian usage manifests the public recognition of that fact. The two are potentially complimentary. Geisler tries to avoid Christian usage by appealing to prophets, but as we will see ultimately he is forced to appeal to some sort of public recognition is also needed.

We have also mentioned the problem of an "accredited spokesperson" earlier. All Scripture is prophetic in the sense that it reveals something about God, but not all Scripture is written by someone known to be a prophet. So what do we do with books that were written by people known to be something other than a prophet (priest, scribe, king, etc.)? Geisler states:

"Of course, while God *determined* canonicity by propheticity; the people of God had to *discover* which of these books were prophetic. The people of God to whom the prophet wrote knew what prophets fulfilled the biblical tests for God's representatives, and they authenticated them by accepting the writings as from God."<sup>36</sup>

Notice that he is not talking about contemporaries of the prophets who wrote, but the people of God at some future date afterwards who recognized that the author "fulfilled the biblical tests" and they authenticated them. What Geisler called "propheticity" is really nothing other than reception, which he denies to Christians (even Jewish Christians) since he believes the OT is exclusively in the provenance of "the Jews."

Geisler attempts to authenticate the Protestant canon using what I call a "golden chain" argument where later writings confirm earlier ones. He uses this to authenticate the book of the Old and New Testament.

Geisler constructs his chain as follows:

1) Moses is confirmed by Joshua (Josh. 1:7) and other books citing Moses' books (1 King 2:3, etc.). -- Ok, that's five books confirmed. But their confirmation is valid only if they themselves are confirmed prophetic by other prophetic books.

2) Later prophets are confirmed through citations from earlier ones. Geisler provides six citations.

Jeremiah 26:18 quotes Micah.

---

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p. 32.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

Ezekiel 14:14 mentions Noah, Daniel, and Job.

Daniel 9:2 mentions the book of Jeremiah

Jonah 2:2-9 hymn of thanksgiving parallels and allusions to several Psalms

Micah 4:1-3, I was unable to see exactly why this was quoted. He doesn't mention any prophets although it does make allusions to several books.

But what prophet confirms Ezekiel, so as to confirm Daniel, who in turn confirms Jeremiah and Micah?

Ezekiel mentions Noah, Daniel and Job. All three of these individuals appear in three different protocanonical books (Genesis, Daniel, Job, respectively). But when Ezekiel mentions these three people, does it follow that he is authorizing the propheticity of the books that speak of them? There's nothing in the context that suggest as much. Moreover, earlier in his apology Geisler (rightly) contested pictures of Tobit and Judith in the catacombs as proofs of the inspiration of the books of Tobit and Judith. If there mere reference of a character in a book suffices to confirm the book then perhaps pictures of Tobit and Judith are evidence for their respective books? If not, Daniel and Job are left unauthenticated.

Jonah makes parallels and allusion to the Psalms authenticating their "propheticity." If this is acceptable, why are allusions and parallels in the New Testament to Deuterocanon do not prove their propheticity? Where is Geisler's insistence on a clear and direct quotation?

Even if we grant all the books mentioned, Geisler has only been able to confirm twelve books (five of Moses, Joshua, and six additional ones) leaving the remaining 27 books unauthenticated.

The New Testament doesn't fair much better. Geisler argues that Paul quoted Luke (1 Timothy 5:18) and Peter confirms the writings of Paul (2 Peter 3:15-16). But what later prophetic work confirms 2 Peter? If 2 Peter is not confirmed, who authenticates Paul who in turn confirms Luke? Geisler says Revelation is filled with all sorts of images and ideas from the rest of Scripture. True, but what does that prove? According to Geisler's methodology, Revelation must be authenticated by a later prophet before it can be used to authenticate other books.

The problem with the "golden chain" argument is that it has no anchor. Had Moses affirmed Joshua and Joshua others, and so on into future, it may have worked. Since Joshua didn't do this, the "golden chain" is forced to work backwards, from the future to the past, always leaving the last member unauthenticated and others along the way (such as Matthew, Mark, John, Hebrews (if it is not written by Paul and confirmed by Peter's blanket endorsement), the three letters of John and Jude) unauthenticated.

One can also see how Geisler's insistence of direct quotations and formal quotations are thrown to the wayside and replaced with broad and superficial "recognition" so as to include as many protocanonical books as possible - and ignoring the fact that if the same criteria were equally applied it too could confirm several deuterocanonical books.

Moving from a proof for the Protestant canon, Geisler then changes direction and explains why the Deuterocanon fails the "propheticity" test.

## **NONAUTHENTICATED PROPHECY**

Geisler's argument can be boiled down to the following points:

### **None of the Deuterocanon claims to be written by a prophet.**

Again, this is an argument from silence. Does every prophet need to state that he is a prophet in the book he is writing? What about prophetic books that were written by people who were not publicly recognized as a prophet (e.g., Ezra, Nehemiah, etc.). So too, the Deuterocanon could have been written by people not publicly recognized as a prophet. Moreover, Geisler claims that it was the subsequent community who authenticates whether the writer is a prophet, so even by Geisler's own standards the point is irrelevant.

### **"Indeed, Maccabees disclaims being prophetic (1 Macc. 9:27)."**

We have already discussed 1 Maccabees 9:27 earlier. Moreover, what would Geisler make of protocanonical passages that also speak of the absence of prophets (Lamentation 2:9). Is Jeremiah denying he's a prophet?

### **"There is no new Messianic truth in the Apocrypha"**

I've heard it claimed that every book of Scripture speaks about Jesus. That may be true, but not every book speaks of Him as the messiah. The Deuterocanon does contain predictions of Jesus including His Divinity, Incarnation, and passion. Why is this evidence to be dismissed and only "new" information about Christ as Messiah be admissible?

### **"Even the Jewish community, whose books these were, acknowledged that the prophetic gifts had ceased in Israel before the Apocrypha was written."**

Again, we have the sweepingly unidentified "Jewish community." Ignoring the fact that Jesus, his apostles and first disciples, and most early Christians were also part of "the Jewish community, whose books these were," he needs to specify who this "community" was. The earliest rejection of the Deuterocanon occurred long after Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, long after Pentecost, long after the deaths of Peter and Paul, the destruction of the Temple, the death of the last apostle, and even after the completion of the New Testament. The "Jewish community" Geisler is referring to is post-Christian Rabbinic Judaism that rejected the Deuterocanon sometime in the first decades of the second Christian century!

It was only then that rabbinic literature began to speak of prophecy being taken from the prophets and given to the sages. The "cessation of prophecy" is late and ill-founded. I give a detailed account of all the evidence both for and against this theory in my book, "The Apocrypha Apocalypse."

### **"Apocryphal books were never listed in the Jewish Bible with the Prophets or any other section."**

Of course, Geisler here is speaking of the Rabbinical Bible, which is post-Christian. And the earliest rabbinic list comes from the beginning of the second Christian century. But post-Christian rabbinic evidence can hardly serve as a proof that the same state of affairs existed over a century earlier, before the destruction of the Temple, when Judaism was comprised of competing sects.

Moreover, why restrict the evidence to lists? Is there evidence of these books once being placed within the divisions of Scripture? There is evidence of deuterocanonical books being placed within the third division called the Writings. See my book *The Case for the Deuterocanon* for details.

**"Not once is an apocryphal book cited authoritatively by a prophetic book written after it."**

Since the Deuterocanon were among the last Old Testament books to be written, there couldn't be any later books to confirm them. Again, "golden chain" type arguments always fail to establish an anchor. However, the New Testament does use them in an authoritative way.

### **JEWISH REJECTION**

Geisler asserts that there is an "unbroken line of rejection" of the Deuterocanon "by Jewish and Christian teachers." I can't imagine what he could mean by an "unbroken line." Perhaps this is just rhetorical. The names he provides hardly constitutes an "unbroken line" of "rejection."

**Philo, Geisler claims, "...quoted the Old Testament prolifically from virtually every canonical book. However, he never once quoted from the Apocrypha."**

The appeal to Philo is a great example of how bad arguments from silence really are. Yes, Philo does quote the Old Testament quite a bit, roughly 2050 Old Testament quotes in all. But some 2000 of those 2050 quotations come from the Books of Moses, the Pentateuch. Leaving only 50 quotations from the rest of the Old Testament. Not surprisingly, Philo not only fails to quote from the Deuterocanon, but also from the books of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Some of these titles may sound familiar since they weren't quoted in the New Testament either! What does this silence show? Geisler believes it shows that Philo rejected them. But what about the other books Philo is silent on? Are they rejected too? Geisler's first link in the chain of rejection, therefore, doesn't exist.

**Geisler says that Josephus "explicitly excluded the Apocrypha" from his twenty-two books computation.**

First, Josephus doesn't name his books so it's impossible for Geisler to be so certain some of them weren't part of his twenty-two books. Second, Josephus is listing the books that chronicle Jewish history from creation to Artaxerxes. The deuterocanonical book that chronicle history records the time after Artaxerxes. Therefore, they wouldn't be included even if they were inspired histories. Third, Josephus does not state that all prophetic writings ceased after Artaxerxes, so as to exclude subsequent writings from being authored by prophets. Indeed, he claims that such histories did indeed continue - contra Geisler - "From Artaxerxes until our time everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets

ceased."<sup>37</sup> The exact succession had failed, but he does claim that all prophets ceased or even a succession of prophets ceased. Third, Josephus numerous times states that he wrote his Antiquities of the Jews based on the sacred books. Antiquities uses the deuterocanonical sections of Esther and also First Maccabees.

Geisler continues by citing later rabbinical texts (Seder Olam Rabbah, 30 and Bava Bathra 12b) what supposedly speaks of a cessation of prophets. A closer examination of these texts (and others like them) shows that there was no agreement as to whether prophecy and prophets ceased or when this cessation supposedly happened.

**He concludes, "Thus, the Jewish fathers (rabbis) acknowledged that the time period during which their Apocrypha was written was not a time when God was giving inspired writings."**

FINALLY, he distinguishes rabbinical Judaism from pre-Christian Judaism! Great. Here is the problem. If these rabbis are right then Christianity is wrong. Why? The New Testament was written after the spirit of prophecy ceased!

### **Jesus and the New Testament Never Quote Them**

Next, he once again reminds his readers that Jesus and the New Testament writers never quote the Deuterocanon as Scripture. Unless he can show us somewhere in the New Testament where it says "Only the books explicitly quoted as "Scripture" is Scripture, his insistence on formal quotations seems to be *ad hoc*.

Geisler's parenthetical remark concerning Hebrews 11:35 commit a blunder that I would not have expected someone with a doctorate to make. He wrote:

"(e.g., Heb. 11:35 may allude to 2 Maccabees 7, 12, though this may be a reference to the canonical book of Kings; see 1 Kings 17:22)."

Seriously? Here is Hebrews 11:35:

"Women received *back* their dead by resurrection; *and others* were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection" (emphasis mine).

Verse 35 is offering two different examples. The first is that through faith women receiving back their dead by resurrection, which plainly refers to the widow of Zarephath and the Shunammite woman who received their children back from the dead (1 Kings 17:17–24; 2 Kings 4:32–37). The second example is differentiated from the first by the words "and others..." (ἄλλοι δὲ).<sup>38</sup> This second group were tortured, refused release, so that they will be resurrected to life. The identification of this second group as the

---

<sup>37</sup> Greek: "...ἀπὸ δὲ Ἀρταξέρξου μέχρι τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς χρόνου γέγραπται μὲν ἕκαστα, πίστεως δ' οὐχ ὁμοίας ἡξίωται τοῖς πρὸ αὐτῶν διὰ τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι τὴν τῶν προφητῶν ἀκριβῆ διαδοχὴν.

<sup>38</sup> This is the preferred reading of the Nestle-Aland (27th edition) and there are no significant variants and the Latin Vulgate.



Maccabean martyrs, as described in the book of Second Maccabees, is really beyond doubt. See both of my books for the details.

Confusing these two examples shows a shocking lack of attention and one wonders how much time Dr. Geisler spent investigating Hebrews 11:35 before he wrote this article. If he didn't notice this simple detail, it's no wonder he missed the fact that the inspired author is referencing the Maccabean martyrs as being attested to *in Scripture*.

Geisler then appeal to the "Jewish scholar in Jamnia," which is a post-Christian rabbinic school that rejected the Deuterocanon. Since Dr. Geisler believes that the Old Testament canon was under the exclusive custodianship of some sect of "the Jews" he apparently believes also that this state of affairs continued long after the destruction of the temple in AD 70! Apparently, they were stripped of all divine authority except for the canon, which so happens to correspond to Geisler's canon.

### **Early Church Council Rejection**

Geisler's next point under the heading of "Early church council rejection" is confused to the point of being misleading. He wrote:

"No canonic list or council of the Christian church accepted the Apocrypha as inspired for nearly the first four centuries . This is significant, since all of the lists available and most of the father of this period omit the Apocrypha. The first councils to accept the Apocrypha were only local ones without ecumenical force."<sup>39</sup>

Earlier, we saw how Geisler makes the statement that the earliest LXX "manuscript" to contain the Deuterocanon came from the fourth century concealing the fact that that "manuscript" was the earliest possible "manuscript" that *could* have contain the Deuterocanon. He does a similar thing here.

Why were the first councils to accept the "Apocrypha" only local councils in the fourth century? Because no council before them addressed the issue of the canon of Scripture and gave a list!<sup>40</sup> In other words, the earliest known conciliar list affirmed the Deuterocanon.

We also spoke to the issue of whether these councils had ecumenical force. I don't know much about Geisler's background, but I imagine that a council having "ecumenical force" meant little to him. Indeed, if they were ecumenical would he accept them? If not, then why bring this up?

As for previous lists, Geisler and many others like him assume that every list of Old Testament books must be presenting an objective description of the canon that was to be accepted by all Christians. They weren't. Some lists gave the author's own subjective assessment of which books were most certainly authentic. Others attempted to reproduce the rabbinic canon - not because it was accepted by

---

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p. 33

<sup>40</sup> To be accurate, the local council of Laodicea (343/381) did meet earlier forbade the reading of private psalms and uncanonical books in the liturgy (canon 59). It did not, however, give a list of books. The canon that does list the books (canon 60) is considered spurious. Therefore, the earliest council known to provide a canonical list is Hippo Regius (393). It's list is preserved in Carthage III (397).

Christians - in order to effectively evangelize the Jews by using the books *they* accept, still others offered pastoral advice to new Christians, etc.. The issue is not so cut and dry as Geisler and others makes it appear.

Under "Early fathers' rejection" Geisler list those who "spoke out against the Apocrypha." Yes, they did. But did they speak out against the Deuterocanon? The first Christian to assign the Deuterocanon to the Apocrypha was St. Jerome in the late fourth century. Dr. Geisler leans heavy on Jerome because Jerome is the earliest father who truly adopted the Protestant position on the Deuterocanon.

### REJECTION BY JEROME

Geisler is correct that Jerome "spoke out" against the Deuterocanon. He railed against them in his prefaces to various Old Testament books in his Latin Vulgate translation. I won't go into too much detail. One problem, if indeed it is a problem because this paragraph is a little confusing, is his comment on Jerome's comments in *Apology against Rufinus*, 33. Geisler's statement could be misconstrued as meaning that Jerome told Rufinus that his opinion that the Deuterocanon is Apocrypha was that he "followed the judgment of the churches." In other words, that the opinion of Jerome was the generally accepted view of antiquity. If this is so, it's clearly quoting out of context.

Dr. Geisler wrote:

"Third, he stated in his work *Against Rufinus*, 33 that he had "followed the judgment of the churches" on this matter. And his statement "I was not following my own personal views" appears to refer to "the remarks that they [the enemies of Christianity] are wont to make against us."<sup>41</sup>

Section 33 from Jerome's *Apology against Rufinus* is reproduced below with sections quoted by Geisler in red:

"In reference to Daniel my answer will be that I did not say that he was not a prophet; on the contrary, I confessed in the very beginning of the Preface that he was a prophet. But I wished to show what was the opinion upheld by the Jews; and what were the arguments on which they relied for its proof. I also told the reader that the version read in the Christian churches was not that of the Septuagint translators but that of Theodotion. It is true, I said that the Septuagint version was in this book very different from the original, and that it was condemned by the right judgment of the churches of Christ; but the fault was not mine who only stated the fact, but that of those who read the version. We have four versions to choose from: those of Aquila, Symmachus, the Seventy, and Theodotion. The churches choose to read Daniel in the version of Theodotion. What sin have I committed in following the judgment of the churches? But when I repeat what the Jews say against the Story of Susanna and the Hymn of the Three Children, and the fables of Bel and the Dragon, which are not contained in the Hebrew Bible, the man who makes this a charge against me proves himself to be a fool

---

<sup>41</sup> Geisler, p. 33

and a slanderer; for I explained not what I thought but what they commonly say against us. I did not reply to their opinion in the Preface, because I was studying brevity, and feared that I should seem to be writing not a Preface but a book. I said therefore, "As to which this is not the time to enter into discussion." Otherwise from the fact that I stated that Porphyry had said many things against this prophet, and called, as witnesses of this, Methodius, Eusebius, and Apollinarius, who have replied to his folly in many thousand lines, it will be in his power to accuse me for not having written in my Preface against the books of Porphyry. If there is any one who pays attention to silly things like this, I must tell him loudly and freely that no one is compelled to read what he does not want; that I wrote for those who asked me, not for those who would scorn me, for the grateful not the carping, for the earnest not the indifferent. Still, I wonder that a man should read the version of Theodotion the heretic and judaizer, and should scorn that of a Christian, simple and sinful though he may be" (emphasis mine).

As you can see, the first portion of this passage, quoted by Geisler, does not concern the Deuterocanon *per se*, but rather Jerome's use of Theodotion Daniel instead of the Septuagint version. Very early on, the Septuagint version of Daniel fell into disuse and was replaced by the Theodotion version, which included the two deuterocanonical sections. This is very different from what Geisler insists Jerome said.

Jerome wrote:

"The churches choose to read Daniel in the version of Theodotion. What sin have I committed in following the judgment of the churches?" (emphasis mine).

Jerome followed the judgment of the churches in regards to using Theodotion Daniel, not whether the Deuterocanon was apocrypha and "...exhibit no authority as Scripture."

In regards to Geisler's second point that Jerome stated that his rejection of the Deuterocanon was not his own view, it simply is false. As we have read in the passage from *Apology to Rufinus*, Jerome states that the arguments in his *Preface* against the deuterocanonical portions of Daniel were "...not what I [Jerome] *thought* but what they commonly say against us." This is a totally different context than the earlier remarks. Jerome did reject the Deuterocanon. There's no doubt about that. Jerome is not saying that he was following the churches in rejecting the Deuterocanon (as Geisler believed), but that the arguments that he included in that Preface were not his own, but the enemies of the Church. Big difference.

Jerome rejected the Deuterocanon, not on any of these arguments, but on the basis of manuscript evidence. Unlike the Greek translations, there was only one Hebrew text that circulated in his day. From this, he believed that it must be identical to the original and anything not found in it was apocrypha. But what he couldn't have known was that there were several earlier versions of the Hebrew text in circulation before the second Christian century and that rabbinical Judaism adopted one text as their normative text allowing all the others to fall into disuse and disappear. However, the discoveries at Qumran revealed this earlier situation and proved that Jerome's rejection HAD BEEN BASED ON AN ERROR.

The section concludes with a statement that Jerome's use of the Deuterocanon in his writings does not prove that he accepted them. This is true. However, Geisler errs by saying that Jerome's use of the Deuterocanon mirrors the early Church. The fact of the matter is no other early Church father has as many qualified or negative quotations as Jerome. Jerome did indeed reject the Deuterocanon as apocrypha and his usage bears this out.

## REJECTION BY SCHOLARS

Once again Cardinal Cajetan is called as a witness for the Protestant canon being accepted by Catholic scholars before the Protestant reformation. We've already responded to this point by noting that their opinion was based on Jerome. Cajetan, like many other theologians during this period, blindly followed Jerome in all biblical matters. Since Jerome's rationale concerning the rejection of the Deuterocanon has been demonstrated to be wrong, there's really no value in calling Jeromists during the pre-Reformation period as witnesses. All it shows is that some theologians in the middle-ages, like the Protestants, followed Jerome and were wrong.

Geisler continues:

"Luther, John Calvin, and the other Reformers rejected the canonicity of the Apocrypha. Lutherans and Anglicans have used it only for ethical/devotional matters but do not consider it authoritative in matters of Faith."

The picture Geisler wishes to paint is that everyone, or nearly everyone, held that the Deuterocanon was Apocrypha and that Trent ignored this largely held opinion by affirming it as Scripture. But this isn't true, even for Protestants. Martin Luther did not always hold this view. Prior to his rejection of the Deuterocanon at the *Second Leipzig Disputation* (July 8, 1519), Luther used the Deuterocanon as Scripture capable of confirming doctrine in public theological disputations.

As the Protestant scholar Sir Henry Howorth notes, Luther appears to have used the Deuterocanon as authoritative canonical writings in his conflict with the Church prior to 1519. Howorth writes:

The Dominicans, the great champions of Papal claims, continued to attack Luther, and especially did they do this at Rome, where one of them, Silvester Maccolini surnamed Prierias, the official censor made an especial assault upon him.... Luther answered [Prierias] in the words of Augustine that the only authority he could accept in the matter was the Canonical Scriptures. What Luther actually meant at this time by the phrase "eis libris, qui Canonici appellantur" is not quite clear, for we now find him in the Resolutions commenting on the Thesis published in 1518 quoting Sirach (Luther's Works, Weimar, Ed. I. 603) while in his answer to Pierias he quotes Tobias (667) in each case apparently as authoritative.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> H. H. Howorth, "The Bible Canon of the Reformation," *International Journal of the Apocrypha*, 20, Series VI, Jan. 1910-17, p. 12.

## IX.

Dicere, quod opera extra Christum sint quidem mortua, sed non mortalia, videtur periculosa timoris Dei remissio. 25

Quia sic homines fiunt securi ac per hoc superbi, quod est periculosum. Quia sic Deo assidue aufertur et differtur sibi debita gloria, cum omni studio sit eo festinandum, ut quantocius ei sua reddatur gloria. Ideo consulit Scriptura: Ne tardes converti ad Dominum. Si enim offendit, qui subtrahit gloriam, quanto magis offendit, qui subtractam continuat et in hoc ipso 40

These were not the only theological debates that Luther cited the Deuterocanon to provide

proof. Luther quotes Sirach 5:7 [8] in Theses 9 the famous *Heidelberg Disputation* (May, 1518) explicitly as Scripture.<sup>43</sup>

It was during Luther's debate on Indulgence and Purgatory in July of the following year that he deemed the Deuterocanon incapable of being entered into debate so as to serve as proof because, according to Jerome, it was not canonical.

Geisler's supposed "flip-flop" occurred, but not at the council of Trent. It happened at Leipzig in 1519. There is also strange twists and inconsistencies with Calvin and the Church of England as well.

Geisler's conclusion that all who rejected the Deuterocanon did so primarily because they "lack evidence that they were written by accredited prophets of God" is again out of sync with the evidence. Luther first anchored his rejection of the Deuterocanon in Jerome, as did Cajetan. The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church likewise appeals to Jerome. Luther later changed his view to the idea that a book is canonical insofar as it is "apostolic," but what he means by that is not the same as what Geisler argues. Calvin believed the Deuterocanon lacked the assured foundation needed for Faith. His view comes closer to Geisler's view, but I don't think it exactly matches. Geisler's summation, therefore, isn't entirely accurate.

## THE MISTAKE AT TRENT

Here Dr. Geisler returns to the realm of conspiracy with the Council of Trent. This time, it is the secretive mutilation of the *Apocalypse of Esdras* (a.k.a. 2 [4] Esdras). Without producing a shred of evidence to back his conspiracy theory, Geisler accuses Trent's canon of being "...a polemical overreaction and an arbitrary decision involving a dogmatic exclusion." Why does he say this? Two reasons: Trent needed Scripture to justify the existence of Purgatory, so it needed 2 Maccabees to be inspired because it

---

<sup>43</sup> "...For in such a way God is constantly deprived of the glory which is due him and which is transferred to other things, since one should strive, with all diligence to give him the glory – the sooner the better. **For this reason the Bible advises us**, 'Do not delay being converted to the Lord.' [Sirach 5:8]." The translator's footnote reads: "This quotation is from Sirach 5:8. The Vulgate Bible contained the apocryphal books." What's odd is that Luther did not say "the Bible advises us" but "Ideo consulit Scriptura..." (the Scripture advises). By translating "*Scriptura*" as "the Bible" (something the translator does not do elsewhere) the reader is given the impression that Luther was not quoting Sirach as Scripture, but as simply one of the books found in the Vulgate. The Latin does not bear this out. [*Luther's Werke*, Weimar ed., volume 1, p. 358]

affirmed "prayers for the dead" and Trent also rejected the *Apocalypse of Esdras* (a.k.a. 2 [4] Esdras) because the *Apocalypse* rejected prayers for the dead.

In regards to the first point, 2 Maccabees isn't the only text that establishes Purgatory. Johan Eck during the *Second Leipzig Disputation* cited several such passages. Therefore, Geisler's insistence that Trent *needed* Second Maccabees to be canonical is ridiculous.

Geisler's second point contains within a number of dubious assertions:

- 1) Trent rejected the *Apocalypse of Esdras* (2 [4]Esdras).
- 2) The motivation for its rejection was doctrinal.
- 3) The *Apocalypse of Esdras* rejects prayers for the dead.
- 4) The rejection of "prayers for the dead" constitutes a rejection of Purgatory.

Let's address each point:

***Trent rejected the Apocalypse of Esdras [2 [4] Esdras].***

Trent's canon is descriptive, not exhaustive. It affirmed the canonicity of the books listed, but didn't speak to the other books found in the Latin Vulgate. If Trent's canon really was a dogmatic polemic, as Geisler argues, it's strange that it didn't do what Geisler claimed it did, namely, explicitly and definitively reject the *Apocalypse of Esdras*. This point alone destroys Geisler's conspiracy theory.

***The motivation for its rejection was doctrinal.***

The Acts of Trent and the diaries and letters of those who participated in it show that the council fathers anchored the canon in previous conciliar and papal decrees on the canon. *All* of these previous decisions included Second Maccabees and *all* omit the *Apocalypse of Esdras*. Again, there is not a shred of evidence in support of Geisler's claim.

***The Apocalypse of Esdras rejects prayers for the dead and that this "rejection" constitutes a rejection of Purgatory.***

I imagine that few people who read Geisler's article took the time to look up the passage quoted. If they had read the context, they'd notice a big problem. 2 [4]Esdras 7:101-107 reads:

"I answered and said, 'If I have found favor in your sight, show further to me, your servant, whether on the day of judgment the righteous will be able to intercede for the ungodly or to entreat the Most High for them— fathers for sons or sons for parents, brothers for brothers, relatives for their kindred, or friends for those who are most dear.' He answered me and said, 'Since you have found favor in my sight, I will show you this also. The day of judgment is decisive and displays to all the seal of truth. Just as now a father does not send his son, or a son his father, or a master his servant, or a friend his dearest friend, to be ill or sleep or eat or be healed in his place, so no one shall ever pray

for another on that day, neither shall anyone lay a burden on another; for then all shall bear their own righteousness and unrighteousness."

Geisler believes that this passage rejects prayers for the dead, but it's clear that this passage does nothing of the sort. The question it addresses is "...whether on the day of judgment the righteous will be able to intercede for the ungodly or to entreat the Most high for them..."

Praying for the dead concerns Christians' prayers *before* the day of judgment, not during or after it. The passage is concerned whether, on the day of Judgment, the righteous can "intercede for the ungodly" (i.e., those who are destined for Hell or the reprobate). That answer is a definitive no; "for then all shall bear their own righteousness and unrighteousness." It has nothing to do with the final sanctification of the elect in Purgatory.

It is Catholic teaching that the prayers of the righteous cannot change the ultimate destiny of one who has died. Our prayers are efficacious for the elect who are undergoing their final sanctification before entering heaven. It benefits only those who leave this world in godliness, not the ungodly and 2 Maccabees 12:46 bears this point out:

"But if he did this [offered prayers and money for sacrifices for the dead] with a view to the splendid reward *that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness*, it was a holy and pious thought" (emphasis mine).

The *Apocalypse of Esdras* and Second Maccabees are talking about two different things. The *Apocalypse* is answering the question of whether the righteous can intercede for the ungodly (unrighteous) on the day of judgment. The answer is in the negative. However, Second Maccabees speaks about prayers and offerings that can be made for those "...who had gone to rest in godliness" (before the day of judgment) and its answer is positive. Indeed, the question posed by the *Apocalypse of Esdras* actually presupposes the efficacy of prayers for the dead, its point was to point out its limits.

Dr. Geisler should have known this.

Given these facts, Geisler's conspiracy theory that "some monk" purposefully destroying part of an apocryphal work because he thought it rejected purgatory is silly in the extreme. It's even sillier to think that Trent "deep-sixed" this rather bizarre pseudepigraphical work specifically because it contested Purgatory (which it doesn't) or that it was ever in the running of being a canonical work to begin with.

## DOCTINAL ARGUMENTS: CANONICITY

The next section consists of a series of comparisons between the "incorrect view of the canon" and the "Correct view" (Geisler's position).

### **Comparison #1 - Incorrect view: Church determines Canon. Correct view: Church Discovers Canon.**

I believe both options are incorrect. If what is meant is that by determining the canon is that a book receives its authority by means of the Church's approval then it is incorrect. But that's not Catholic

teaching. The First Vatican council rightly rejected the "subsequent approval" theory.<sup>44</sup> A book is canonical in virtue of its inspiration. However, the Church does make known the true canon. Geisler's statement that the Church "discovers" the canon is wrong, if he meant that the canon was unknown and only "discovered" through some sort of investigation. My view is that the Church received the Canon from Christ and the Apostles, who guarantee its inspired status. This collection is made manifest through the Church's use and subsequent decrees.

**Comparison #2 - Incorrect view: Church is the Mother of Canon; Correct view: Church is the Child of Canon.**

Of the two choices, it seems that the "incorrect view" is more correct than the "correct view." The Church cannot be the "child" of the canon because it existed before the New Testament was completed. Obviously, a child cannot precede its mother. Moreover, the church being the "child" of the canon cannot be right because several groups that called themselves "Christians" held to different canons. If the Church is the "child" of the canon then how do we know that we come from the right parent? You cannot rule out any of these "churches" because of some doctrine that is incompatible with Scripture because it is the canon of Scripture that is in question. Therefore, the Church must precede the canon and be identifiable apart from the canon. This seems closer to, if I'm restricted to the analogy used, to a Mother rather than a child.

**Comparison #3 - Incorrect view: Church is Magistrate of Canon; Correct view: Church is Minister of Canon.**

Here I think the words magistrate and minister are two sides of the same coin. Magistrate is generally defined as "a civil officer who administers the law." If the law is the canon then it is the magistrate since it makes known the canon. Minister is a person charged to administer given duties. Both are correct in their own way.

**Comparison #4 - Incorrect view: Church Regulates Canon; Correct view: Church Recognizes Canon.**

If by "regulate" it is meant "alter" then the first view is indeed incorrect. However, if it means to establish a normative collection then it is correct. The Church does indeed also "recognizes" the canon. Of course, Geisler is here equivocating on the word "Church." In the first case, he means the Catholic Church, which for Catholics is a visible identifiable society that came from the apostles. In the second "correct" instance the same word "church," means what most Protestants generally conceive of the "church" (i.e., an invisible collection of likeminded believers who have a personal relationship with Christ). In the latter sense, the "correct view" is essentially saying that an invisible collection of like-minded believers who have a personal relationship with Christ recognizes the Canon. But how can this be? Is it really up to individual Christians to "recognize" the canon for themselves?

**Comparison #5 - Incorrect View: Church Is Judge of Canon; Correct view: Church Is Witness of Canon.**

---

<sup>44</sup> First Vatican Council (1870), On Revelation, D 1788.



Here again, I think both miss the mark. The Church manifests the true canon. In this sense only can it be said to "witness" to the canon and to judge (not the canon itself, as Luther believed) but to judge those opinions that claim that the canon should be otherwise.

#### **Comparison #6 - Incorrect View: Church Is Master of Canon; Correct View: Church Is Servant of Canon.**

I find this comparison not helpful. Christ is the ultimate norm for all Christians. He is the norm that sets all norms, including the canon. Therefore, the Church (i.e., the historic visible community) receives this norm from Christ and his Apostles as part of a deposit of Faith. It is the master of the canon only in the sense that it is charged by Christ and his apostles to guard and preserve this deposit. It is the servant of the canon only in the sense that it has no right to alter it.

Geisler seems to reject this idea because he continues in this section to state:

"When we speak of church as being a "witness" to the canon after the time it was written we do not mean in the sense of being an eyewitness (i.e., relating first-hand evidence). The proper role of the Christian church is discovering which books belong in the canon can be reduced to several precepts..."

Here we see two very different approaches to the canon. Catholicism views the canon as a collection given from Christ to the Church. It knows the canon because it knows the treasures that Christ has given it. In this sense, it is a witness in a way very close to being an eyewitness (i.e., relating first-hand evidence). Therefore, the Catholic Church knows the canon deductively.

However, this is *not* what Geisler believed. He believed that the Christian (Protestant) church discovers the canon inductively, that is through a series of evidences that form a general conclusion. Those familiar with inductive and deductive approaches knows that the deductive yields conclusive results where the inductive approach only provides highly probable results. Therefore, Protestant who attempt to discover the canon via "several precepts" will only come to a *probable* result. It will *never* yield the certitude needed for Scripture to be the foundation of Faith.

### **GEISLER'S CRITERIA**

Let's look at each of Geisler's precepts that yields this probable canon.

#### **1) Only the People of God contemporary to the writing of the biblical books were actual eyewitnesses to the evidence.**

Geisler's statement simply isn't supported by the facts. There were several books that did not gain acceptance until generations later. For example, the sacredness of the books of Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs were still be debated well into the Christian era. Moreover, Geisler needs to identify what he means by "the People of God." Also, how would a Protestant know who represents the "People of God" without appealing to Scripture, since it is the point contested? Which Jewish sect or sects represent this body since several of them held to different views of the canon? Is the "People of God" the Sadducees? The Essenes? The Pharisees? If the Pharisees, which school of the Pharisees is meant? The school of Shammai appears to have rejected the three books mentioned above while the school of

Hillel accepted all three? If the "People of God" is the Christian Church than Geisler's next point is in error.

## **2) The later church is not an evidential witness for the canon.**

If the Church received the true and authentic Christian canon from Christ's inspired apostles, does not its possession of the same constitute evidence? Would it not be counted as contemporaries who were the "actual eyewitnesses to the evidence?"

## **3) Neither the earlier nor later church is the judge of the canon.**

Here Dr. Geisler sneaks in a boat load of presuppositions that are neither rooted in Scripture or common sense. First, he sets the entire question of canon as something to be determined. But earlier, he lists this as the "incorrect view" that the "Church Determines Canon." But isn't "discovery" just another way of "determining" something? He claims that "...[o]nly God can determine the criteria for our discovery of what is his Word." But we've already seen that his "propheticity" arguments are neither grounded in Scripture nor are they logically or practically coherent. What is especially disconcerting is that he assumes that God has reveals the means by which we can discover the contents of Scripture as a whole. Scripture never addresses the canon as such. Therefore, his words seem baseless.

## **4) Both the early and later church is more like a jury than a judge.**

Here again we see that Geisler's approach is inductive, which only yield probable results. The canon is not an objective reality that was received and passed on, but rather the result of an inductive investigation. In the end, Geisler's approach can only give a probable, perhaps highly probable, list of what very well *could* be inspired infallible Scripture.

Moreover, his so-called "evidence for *propheticity* (such as miracles)" does not affirm all the books of the Protestant Bible! And the early Church fathers didn't look to miracles or any other such things as "evidence" of propheticity or canonicity. When the question of the Old Testament canon came to the fore, Augustine and the North African councils looked to the original deposit of Faith manifested in Church usage. In *Against Faustus*, Augustine argued: "If you acknowledge the supreme authority of Scripture, you should recognize that authority which from the time of Christ Himself, through the ministry of His apostles, and through a regular succession of bishops in the seats of the apostles, has been preserved to our own day throughout the whole world, with a reputation known to all." (*Against Faustus*, 33.8-9)

Also, according to Geisler's "propheticity" idea, the "witnesses" cannot be contemporaries of the prophets since one test of a true prophet is that what is prophesied comes to pass. But not all prophecies have been fulfilled and won't be until the end of time. How does that work in Geisler's system? As we noted earlier, Geisler still relies on "the people of God" who lived long after the prophets' lives to determine which books were truly prophetic.

The real difference between the Roman Catholic approach and Geisler's methodology is that the former regards Jesus Christ as the ultimate norm that sets the norm of Scripture. This norm is made known and

manifested through the practice of His Body, the Church, a visible identifiable historic community. Geisler attempts to create another norm using the canonical texts to prove their own canonicity supplemented by appeals to post-Christian Jewish and rabbinical literature. The Old Testament canon was something received, not constructed or "discovered" as if it were an arcane riddle hidden for the ages.

*(c) Copyright 2015, Gary Michuta. All Rights Reserved. Updated and edited 7/25/20 (version 2.0).*