

“The Books Themselves Do Not Claim Inspiration”

Objection #1: “The Deuterocanon never claims to be inspired. Therefore, they cannot be part of the sacred canon of Scripture.”

Answer: Must every inspired text claim inspiration? A quick perusal of the Protocanon of the Old and New Testament reveals that only a few texts do so. In fact, most of the Protocanon do not show any hint that they were written under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The claim of inspiration, therefore, is not an essential prerequisite for inspiration. Otherwise, most of the books in our Bible would be rejected.

What about those books that do claim inspiration? The claim of inspiration does not mean that a document is inspired. Both the Muslim *Koran* and the *Book of Mormon* claim inspiration. Should Christians consider them inspired? Is the Book of Baruch (which many early Christians believe to be part of the Book of Jeremiah) really less likely to be Scripture than *the Book of Mormon* because of the claim alone? If we take this objection seriously, we are forced to admit just that.

No one can seriously entertain this objection as a legitimate test for canonicity. Rather, it is usually used as tag-on argument to other more worthy objections. The “claim of inspiration” objection is more of an insinuation than an argument. It makes Catholics and Orthodox look as if they are claiming something more for these books than the books do for themselves. Which is true, but the same can be said for most of the Protocanon! Indeed, if we are looking at the numbers, the Deuterocanon (without its claim of inspiration) is more like the Protocanon whose majority of text do not claim inspiration.

The objector, however, errs in stating that *all* of the Deuterocanon does not claim to be inspired. The Book of Sirach (sometimes called Ecclesiasticus) does claim that. Both Protestant and Catholic scholars note that at least in two places, Sirach indicates that his book contains wisdom from the Lord and that it has a place among the other books of Scripture. The book’s prologue seems to believe that Sirach had gained a wide range of acceptance among the Jews.¹ Another place in Sirach makes a similar claim, as the Protestant scholar W.O.E. Oesterley states:

“... [That] Ben-Sira reckoned his book as Scripture is clear from his words: ‘And I, last of all, came as one that gleaneth after the grape-gatherers. By the blessing of the Lord I made progress, and, as a grape-gatherer, filled my winepress. Consider that I laboured not for myself alone, but for all who seek instruction. Hearken unto me, ye great ones of the people; and ye rulers of the congregation, give ear to me’”² (Sirach 33:16-18)

If Oesterley and others are correct, Sirach does understand itself to be of divine origin and objection #1 fails to exclude the Book of Sirach from the canon.³

¹ “The strongest argument for its [Sirach’s] canonicity is found in its Prologue; it supposes that book to have been received as canonical by the Palestinian coreligionists of the translator.” John E. Steinmuller, *The Companion to Scripture Studies; General Introduction* (London: B. Herder, 1950), 63; Also see *IBD*, 1,499.

² W. O. E. Oesterley, *An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha* (London: SPCK, 1958), 121.

³ While remaining uncertain about whether the translator of Sirach believed his grandfather’s text was inspired, Dr. Lee M. McDonald offers two other sections in Sirach which indicates that perhaps he did:

“Notice, for example, that the grandson wrote that ‘by becoming familiar also with his book [Sirach’s] those who love learning might make even greater progress in living according to the law’ and that those who read this book would be ‘disposed to live according to the law.’ He translated the work so that it might be used for edifying reading and, like his grandfather had earlier believed, he also believed that the writing was from the Lord. Observe that Ben Sira writes: ‘All wisdom is from the Lord, and with him it remains forever’ (Sir 1:1 NRSV) and then the author proceeded to write such wisdom as he believed comes from God. We know that the book was used in a ‘canonical’ fashion... and was cited as ‘scripture’ or as an authoritative book at various times over the following several hundred years in Jewish writings and also in

Objection #2: “1 Maccabees explicitly denies, in at least two places, that a prophet did not exist during its time:

1 Maccabees 4:45-46 “The happy thought came to them to tear it down, lest it be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it; so they tore down the altar. They stored the stones in a suitable place on the temple hill, until a prophet should come and decide what to do with them.”

1 Maccabees 9:27 “There had not been such great distress in Israel since the time prophets ceased to appear among the people.”

If there were no prophets, then these cannot be prophetic books. Therefore, the Dueterocanon cannot be included in the canon of Scripture.”

Answer: If you look closely at the two passages quoted above, you will see that the objector is reading his own interpretation into the texts. 1 Maccabees 4:45-46 does not state that it was composed during a no-prophet period in Israel, rather it merely records that the Maccabees wished to wait until a prophet told them what to do with the stones of the Temple. There is nothing in this text to suggest that Israel no longer had any prophets; only that there wasn't a prophet available at the time when the altar was torn down. As the Protestant exegete Rudolf Meyers points out:

“On the restoration of the temple by Judas Maccabeus the stones of the desecrated altar were set aside to be used only when a prophet arose to make the necessary intimation. This is usually regarded as a sign that there was no current prophecy, but this understanding is not quite correct. Exposition should rather assume that the author regards the present appearance of a prophet as possible (2 Macc. 10:1ff does not carry the prophecy motif). In terms of this basic religious attitude 1 Macc. agrees with [Sirach] and his grandson. It need be no surprise that such views were possible at a time when neo-prophecy was already emerging pseudepigraphically, for the differing outlooks did not cancel one another out, but existed together for a long time. *The Rabb. theory that there is no present prophecy, as we shall see later (-> 982), did not prevail until the [post apostolic] period.*”⁴

The same can be said of 1 Maccabees 9:27. Does this text really say that all prophecy ceased in Israel sometime before Maccabees? The meaning of “since the prophets cease to appear in Israel” is less than definite. It does not tell us when the prophets ceased nor does it indicate whether this was a temporary condition or whether this was a constant condition that spanned from that time down to the time of Maccabees. In other words, this reference is so general that really nothing specific can be drawn from it.

The assumption behind this objection is that somehow sacred history stops and God ceases to reveal Himself to His people whenever an anointed prophet is not alive in Israel. Such a notion is obviously not true. We know from the protocanon that inspired texts can be written about events during which there were no prophets in Israel. For example, Asaph writes in Psalm 74:8, “They said in their hearts, Destroy them all! Burn all the shrines of God in the land!” Now we see no signs, *we have no prophets*, no one who knows how long.”⁵ Similarly, the writer of Lamentations speaks of a time when there were prophets, but no revelation. “Sunk into the ground are her gates; he has removed and broken her bars. Her king and her princes are among the pagans; priestly instruction is wanting, *And her prophets have not received any vision from the LORD.*”⁶ The same argument could even be made from the New Testament's Epistle of Jude when he writes, “I now feel a need to write to encourage you to contend for the faith that was once for

the early church fathers...” Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 36

⁴ R. Meyers, “&□◆❖□◆◆,” - “Supplement on the Canon and the Apocrypha,” TDNT, 3.980, FN 64

⁵ Emphasis mine.

⁶ Lamentations 2:9, Emphasis mine

all handed down to the holy ones” (Jude 10). Isn’t Jude handing down the faith in his letter? Following the logic of our objector, Jude could not be inspired Scripture since he states that the faith has already been handed down to the people. We know that God can reveal “prophetic” knowledge to His People through his anointed officers other than prophets. For example, in the Gospel of John, the high priest is said to have uttered a prophecy about the Messiah:

“But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.’ Now this he did not say on his own initiative; *but being high priest that year, he prophesied* that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”⁷

Here was have an example of an anointed officer, other than a prophet, giving public revelation to the people of Israel. Being written in the Gospel of John further validates this prophecy of Caiaphas. Therefore, even if there were no anointed prophets in Israel during a given period, it does not mean, *ipso facto*, that God does not give public revelation that will eventually be included in Scripture. We will take up this argument again in more detail later when we address the idea that only prophets can write inspired or prophetic writings.

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⁷ John 11:49-52