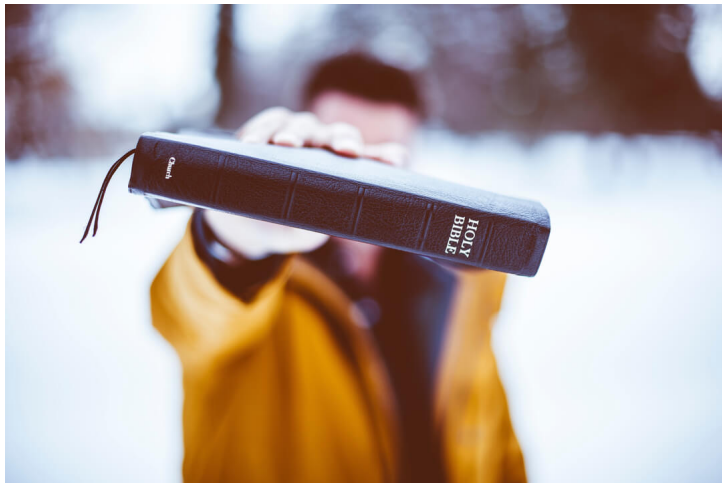


## PUBLIC CHALLENGE

I recently was “publicly challenged” on something that was said in one of my articles. And although I and many others strongly disagree with how Christ is portrayed through “publicly challenging” someone instead of privately going to them, addressing them personally in comments, or simply inquiring for more info first before attacking, I can still appreciate the zeal and a desire for truth. Unfortunately, sometimes I’ve noticed though that through our desire to find or divulge the truth at all costs, we can actually cause more damage to the kingdom and turn good people away from hearing the truth we are trying to share. The Bible says the **GREATEST** commandment is love and if we don’t operate in love then He compares us to a clanging cymbal. I would like to remind everyone that without the spirit of love infused into all that we do, we are that clanging symbol in our King’s ears. I have learned over time in my own life that all my knowledge amounts to nothing without love and I have no desire to learn a single thing more if I don’t already pass the test of love. Being mentored and yoked with those that are stronger than me in my areas of weakness has helped me to see the “egg on my face” in the times I couldn’t see it myself and humility had to become my close friend for change to actually happen in my life. I would encourage all of you to take whatever steps are necessary to make sure you pass the test of love before passing out your knowledge to others. Knowledge puffs up but love stays low and on its knees consistently.



So before I answer the question that challenged me, I can't help but put out a “*public challenge*” of my own, a self-audit, if you will, to all of us. Here's what I want you to ask yourself: When all is said and done and this life is finally over, will you be proud of how you portrayed the knowledge that you were given? When you are ranked on the following subjects: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, will you get an **A+** or an **F** or be somewhere in-between? Ask your

spouse to grade you and to be honest. Ask them to grade you on how you treat them, your children, and others (especially those online that you might never address the same way if you were in person). Make sure to grade based on the **FRUITS** of the Spirit as defined in Galatians chapter 5. And remember, there is nothing in Galatians about how right a person needs to be, how much knowledge they need to obtain, or how well they police the internet “exposing”

everything that they feel is not perfectly accurate or true. There is not even a knowledge fruit of the Spirit listed at all...LOL.

Unfortunately today, there are too many "reincarnated" zealots from the first century that are finding their self-esteem and prize in tearing down others, rather than working to build up the body of Christ. While I could, and probably should write a full article on this subject, it is sufficient enough to say that if one is not excelling and seeking to excel in the above-named gifts from Galatians 5, they are not portraying the image of Christ to the world they are seeking to teach. And if we are not portraying His image, what other image is left to portray?

*Ok, on to the question at hand.* This is what I wrote in my article that sparked the public challenge: "In the book of Jubilees, which was at one time considered Holy Scripture by many of the early Jews and Christians (most notably by the Ethiopian church), it has Noah being the very first human in recorded history celebrating the feast of Shavuot, but for different reasons. In Jubilees chapter 6 it records that Shavuot was the actual day that Yahweh initiated the rainbow covenant to never flood the earth again in His wrath. Let's take a look."

Here was the public challenge:

*"What evidence is there to substantiate Jim's claim that Jubilees was at one time considered Holy Scripture by many of the early Jews and Christians"? According to everything I've read, the Second Temple Judaisms never considered pseudepigrapha such as Jubilees, 1 Enoch, etc., "Scripture." There's evidence of a closed Hebrew canon, which would have excluded the pseudepigrapha, since 130 BCE (See the prologue to the original Greek translation of Wisdom of Sirach). Also, Josephus speaks of a closed canon in Against Apion, which likewise excluded the pseudepigrapha. Not even the Qumran community, which read and revered writings like 1 Enoch and Jubilees, considered them "Scripture" but grouped their pseudepigrapha in a separate appendix to the canon, indicating that these additional writings were not part of the canon as they saw it. Jim cites no source for his claim, and it seems to stand contrary to the evidence."*

First of all, I would like to address that I was not saying that I *personally* believe that it is Scripture, but my comment was that there were those in early Judaism and Christianity that did. Although it would be nice to wrap everything up in nice little packages and tie them off with cute little bows, this topic is not quite so black and white as some would like it to be; and definitely wasn't in the early centuries when there was much debate on Apocryphal books, Pseudepigrapha books, and so on.

Today we call the current accepted biblical books "*canon*." Those that are outside of canon but still carried much value and connection to the approved canonical text we call "*Apocrypha*," which in Greek means "*hidden things*." The *Pseudepigrapha*, in its most basic definition, were books attributed to or named after authors that did not write them. According to author R. K. Harrison in *Origins of the Bible*, he states that "By the end of the first century A.D., a clear distinction was being made in Jewish circles between writings which were suitable for use by the general public and exoteric works which were to be restricted [hidden] to the knowledgeable and the initiated"(1). In other words, although the Hebrew "canon" was already in place by the time

of Christ, there were many other Jewish works that were highly valued within Judaism and were quoted, read, studied and revered by many Jews and Christians. Even Jude quotes directly from 1 Enoch in his letter, proving that some NT authors considered at least parts of Apocryphal works authoritative in nature.

James H. Charlesworth in his work entitled, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, says this about this topic: "There is little doubt that 1 Enoch was influential in molding New Testament doctrines concerning the nature of the Messiah, the son of Man, the messianic kingdom, demonology, the future resurrection, final judgment, the whole eschatological theater, and symbolism" (2). He goes on to say that Enoch alone was so well read and studied by early Jews that one can find elements of Enochian concepts all throughout the Gospels themselves. Furthermore, Charlesworth continues by saying that "many authors of Pseudepigrapha believed they were recording God's infallible words. Early communities, both Jewish and Christian, apparently took some Pseudepigrapha very seriously" (3). And Enoch and Jubilees were at the top of the list.

Although some argue that there is "no evidence" that any Christians or Jews considered Enoch or Jubilees or any other Apocrypha books Scripture and that the biblical canon was closed long before Christ, this is a misleading statement. Yes, it is true that the Hebrew canon was most likely closed long before Christ, but that did not mean that everyone agreed in those decisions as the historical record clearly bears out. There were much flux and debate for centuries afterward on this very subject.

For example, there are many Church Fathers quoted from Apocrypha books. This fact shows that some within the early Christian Church gave at least some of the Apocrypha some sort of authority. No one quotes a source that they don't believe has strong merit or is not authoritative. It doesn't make them correct in their assessment, but it does show us how early Christians looked at those texts. Furthermore, even Augustine shows that there were still great differences of thought on this topic within the early Christian culture by endorsing the Apocrypha himself. Harrison states the following on this point: "A serious break with Hebrew and rabbinic tradition came with the writings of Augustine, who advanced the view that the books of the Apocrypha were of equal authority with the other writings of the canonical Hebrew and Christian Scriptures" (4).

Furthermore, the Ethiopic Church *still* considers to this day the books of Enoch and Jubilees as authoritative and canonical. This fact doesn't validate those books as such but does demonstrate that there are groups that did and still believe in their divine inspiration. And according to Oxford Bibliographies, "Jubilees is presented in this book [Crawford, Sidnie White, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008] as a text known before the Dead Sea discoveries that held scriptural status in the Qumran community." And in his book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, E. P. Sanders states that "*covenantal nomism*" is evident and significantly affected the study of the apostle Paul. In other words, these popular Jewish works were so well read by the early believers that it would have without a doubt affected their own viewpoints of theology, which did become Scripture. Inspired or not they were extremely influential to the early fledgling Church.



Although I do not have access to all the resources on this subject from my restricted situation, there can be *no doubt* that the consensus by scholars is not so black and white as some would like to suggest. Remember, there was no such word as Apocrypha or Pseudepigrapha in the first century days of Yeshua. These were terms later added hundreds of years later. Today we have a highly defined group of manuscripts that fit nicely into these named categories that WE created for OUR convenience. It was not so tidy in the days of antiquity; there was much debate on what was to be considered inspired. There were many Jews who believed Job, Esther, Ezekiel, Song of Solomon, and other books should not have been included in the Hebrew scriptures. At one time they too were given what we call "Apocrypha" status. I would imagine if we lived during that time period there would be well-meaning believers strongly advocating that the book of Esther was not inspired either.

Ironically, the books of the Apocrypha began their journey into their own category because there were books in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures: 100-200 years B.C.) that were not found in the Hebrew Scriptures. These extra six books that were added to the Greek Septuagint reveal to us today that the rabbis who translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek (the Septuagint) considered many of the books that we call today "Apocryphal" to actually be valuable enough to be included into the actual Septuagint scriptures. This, in part, is why the Catholic Bible contains some of these Apocryphal books.

Bottom line? The process of canonization was a tedious process that evolved over a very long time and even when it was "*canonized*," not every Jewish or Christian sect agreed. To believe

otherwise is to be naive to the inner workings of both Judaism, early Christianity, and human nature itself. It was a very messy process; divinely inspired, I believe, but a mess nonetheless.

Ultimately, looking back, the process of canonization can be trusted as there were very real protocols and standards by which each of the books was chosen or not chosen. And there were very real reasons why certain Apocryphal books were not chosen to be part of the canon (those reasons are beyond the scope of my response and deserve their own space). Those that have studied the progression and the development of the Protestant Bible would find it very difficult to say that the final results of such a process cannot be trusted just because they were "mere" men making those decisions. The Creator put His entire plan of reaching the world into the hands of 12 "mere" men. Moses and the prophets were also just men but they were used by Yahweh to accomplish His will. We can be *assured* that if His mission was put into the hands of mere men with great success, His very Word would also be trusted to men that would be steered by the Holy Spirit to arrive at His desired destination.

In the end, I personally completely support the 66 books of what we call the "**Bible**" (the Book). No other can truly be called "*inspired*" as Yeshua Himself validates the OT canon from His own words (Luke 24:44). But I also believe, like many of the early Jews and Christians, that there is much to learn from the Apocrypha and other extra-biblical books. But I will agree with the early framers that believed those works should only be reserved for the mature who are already so familiar with the inspired Writ that other parallel works could be digested as a healthy supplement.

Jim Staley

(1)-R.K. Harrison, *The Origins of the Bible*, 1992, pg. 84

(2)-James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Volume I, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, 1983, pg. 10

(3) *ibid.*, p. xxiv

(4) R. K. Harrison, *The Origins of the Bible*, 1992, pg. 84