

# **“Did the Early Church Fathers Accept the Apocrypha?”**

I have been searching for some time to find quotes from the earliest church fathers (first through fourth centuries) that will demonstrate that they did not accept the books of the Old Testament Apocrypha (presently accepted by the Roman Catholic Church) as scripture. Do such evidences exist? Where might I find them? What was accepted as authoritative Old Testament scripture in the time of Jesus? Did certain copies of the Septuigint include the Apocrypha? Thank you for your assistance.

Let me try to answer your questions in order:

## **Do such evidences exist? Where might I find them?**

F. F. Bruce uses extensive quotes from the early church fathers in both chapters five and six of his book *The Canon of Scripture* (InterVarsity Press, 1988). Chapter five includes church fathers in the east (Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Origen and Athanasius, etc), while chapter six looks at the Latin west (Tertullian, Jerome and Augustine). The record is mixed; some accepted the apocryphal books with qualifications, others were more critical. Few accept them outright.

## **What was accepted as authoritative Old Testament scripture in the time of Jesus?**

Both the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old Testament were authoritative in Jesus' time. Bruce argues that Jesus read from and used the Hebrew version while Stephen, a Hellenist, would have used the Septuagint.

## **Did certain copies of the Septuagint include the Apocrypha?**

The earliest extant copies we have of the Septuagint come from

the Christian era (5th and 6th centuries). Although they include the apocryphal books, Bruce argues that there is no evidence of a wider canon for the Alexandrian or Greek Jews than was accepted by the Palestinian Jews. In fact, Philo (20 B.C – 50 A.D.) a Hellenistic Jew, does not mention the apocryphal additions.

Don Closson

Probe Ministries