

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW.

- A. Scripture text: **Nehemiah 8:8**.
- B. Before we get into tonight's lesson let's review what we have previously discussed in this series on the Bible:
 - 1. The reasons for translation:
 - a. No one (in this congregation) speaks Greek and Hebrew.
 - b. Language usage and meanings change over time.
 - c. Translation is not an exact science.
 - 2. Values of comparing several translations:
 - a. Better understanding through synonyms.
 - b. Avoidance of a legalistic use of scripture.
 - c. Spending more time in God's word.
 - 3. How to pick a good translation:
 - a. Get one based on early Greek and Hebrew manuscripts.
 - b. Get one that is clear and intelligible to you.
 - c. Get one that is idiomatic in phraseology.
 - 4. A brief history of the English Bible:
 - a. The Vulgate.
 - b. John Wycliffe.
 - c. William Tyndale.
 - d. Miles Coverdale.
 - e. Thomas Matthew.
 - f. Richard Taverner.
 - g. The Great Bible.
 - h. The Geneva Bible.
 - i. The Bishop's Bible.
 - j. The Rheims-Douay Bible.
 - k. The King James (Authorized) Version.
 - 5. The early days of the Bible:
 - a. The language of the Bible (Hebrew, Aramaic, & Greek).
 - b. Uncials and cursive manuscripts.
 - c. Textual criticism; lower and higher.
 - d. The Restored Text versus the Received Text.
- C. Tonight's lesson we want to talk about three new areas of study:
 - 1. The Old Testament; its books and Hebrew texts.
 - 2. The canon of the Old and New Testaments; which books?
 - 3. The OT Apocrypha; why not these books too?
- D. In our next lesson we will begin to turn a critical eye on the newer translations. we shall briefly talk about 9 or 10 translations currently available looking at their good and bad points.

I. THE TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

- A. Our next task is to focus attention upon the text of the OT. It will not be necessary to go at length into the question of the OT text, for the principles followed in the restoration of the NT text largely apply to that of the Old.
- B. Text-data for the OT is not vast as compared with the multitude of witnesses on the Greek text, nor does the available data appear as impressive. Manuscripts of the NT date back to the fourth century, and several papyri documents reach back even farther. Extant materials on the OT, however, are not as old. The earliest Hebrew manuscripts are known as the Cairo Codex and the Leningrad Codex of the Prophets. The Cairo Codex includes the Former and Latter prophets and is dated at 895AD. The Leningrad Codex of the Prophets is slightly later, dating from 916AD. Another early Hebrew manuscript is the British Museum Codex of the Pentateuch. It has proved to be a very important witness on the OT text, yet it comes from the tenth or eleventh century. The oldest known manuscript

of the entire OT is the Leningrad Codex which was completed in 1008AD. Many other manuscripts, of course, are in existence, but these are the basic witnesses to the text of the OT. The latest edition of the current Hebrew Bible (Kittel's Biblia Hebraica) is based on these four Hebrew manuscripts, in particular the Leningrad Codex of the complete OT.

C. The Jewish scribes looked upon their copies of the Scriptures with an almost superstitious respect, which led them to give a ceremonial burial to any copy which was old or became worn. Their motive was to prevent the improper use of the material on which the sacred name of God had been inscribed. But however noble their intentions, this ancient custom has deprived us of the early Hebrew manuscripts which we might otherwise have, and thus has lengthened the gap between the available copies of the text and the OT autographs.

D. The Massorettes.

1. Recognizing the ever present possibility of scribal mistakes, and possessed with an almost inherent obsession to guard the letter of the Law, there sprang up at an early date various circles of Jewish scholars dedicated to the preservation of the OT text. At the head of the list is a school which was centered at Tiberias and is generally known as the Massorettes. Their school did not come into existence until about 500AD, but it is the most important one for the history of our Hebrew text.
2. The Massorettes are so named because of their acknowledged dependence on the authoritative traditions (Massorah) concerning the text. Their labors are spread out over a period of five centuries and their contributions are many. They are perhaps best known for their system of vowels and accents which they devised for the Hebrew text. It will be remembered that all the letters in the Hebrew alphabet are consonants.
3. The Massorettes were not concerned only with such things as details of proper pronunciation. More than this, they sought ways and methods by which they could eliminate scribal slips of addition or omission. This they achieved through intricate procedures of counting. They numbered the verses, words and letters of each book. They counted the number of times each letter was used in each book. They noted verses which contained all the letters of the alphabet, or a certain number of them, etc. They calculated the middle verse, the middle word, and the middle letter of each book (The middle verse of the Pentateuch is Lev. 8:7, while the middle verse of the Hebrew Bible is Jer. 6:7.) Some of these notations can still be found in our printed Hebrew Bibles. With these safeguards, and others, when a scribe finished making a copy of a book he could then check the accuracy of his work before using it.
4. Their labors were so productive and their contributions so large that our Hebrew text today is often referred to as "the Massoretic text." The extant Hebrew manuscripts noted above are outstanding specimens of the Massoretic text.
5. In looking at the Massoretic text and the Septuagint translation the Massoretic text is of greater value. Many variations exist between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text, but studies have revealed again and again that the Hebrew text is much more reliable than that of its Greek translation.

E. The Dead Sea Scrolls.

1. In March 1948 the discovery of some ancient manuscripts found in the vicinity of the Dead Sea was first reported. Since the first news of these scrolls, numerous others have been located in the same region. In all about 350 rolls, most of them fragmentary, have been uncovered. The most important of these manuscripts are two scrolls of the book of Isaiah. One is complete, except for a few words, and is known as Isaiah A; the other one, known as Isaiah B, is not complete but contains a considerable portion of material (Isa. 41-59). Isaiah A dates back to 100BC, or earlier, while Isaiah B is but a little later.

2. What do these scrolls reveal about our text? They tell us much, but chiefly that there has scarcely been a major change in the form of the Hebrew text. All scholars acknowledge these ancient scrolls as being remarkably like our text today.

F. Summary.

1. Our oldest Hebrew manuscripts date no farther back than the ninth century. This might prove to a difficult barrier for the OT text were it not for the safeguards devised and followed by the Massoretes and the strict rules observed by earlier Jewish scribes. Early versions of the OT and other sources are of great value since they attest to the reliability of our present text.
2. The Biblical documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls are nothing short of sensational. The most important are the two Isaiah scrolls which, although they exhibit many minor differences of spelling, etc., confirm beyond doubt the accuracy of our present Hebrew text.

II. **CANON OF THE SCRIPTURES.**

- A. The canonical writings, according to Jesus, are composed of the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Lk. 24:44). This threefold division is undoubtedly equivalent to the three divisions of the Hebrew scriptures--the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Jesus also gives some indication concerning the books included in the Old Testament canon. He once spoke of the time "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary" (Lk. 11:51), thus referring to the martyrs of the OT. The first martyr of the OT, of course, was Abel and the last martyr was Zechariah (cf. 2Chr. 24:20-21). It is to be kept in mind that the Chronicles is placed at the end of the Hebrew Bible. Thus the OT which Jesus knew was a collection of writings reaching from Genesis to Chronicles, with all of the other books in between, a collection which embraces the same books found in our OT today.
- B. Josephus clearly speaks concerning the number of books received as "Scripture" by the Jews. "We have not 10,000 books among us, disagreeing with and contradicting one another, but only twenty-two books which contain the records of all time, and are justly believed to be divine." Remembering that the Jews enumerated their books differently, that the twelve minor prophets were considered as one book and that others like Judges-Ruth, 1 and 2Samuel, 1 and 2Kings, 1 and 2Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Jeremiah-Lamentations were likewise counted as one book each, the twenty-two books mentioned by Josephus equal our present thirty nine books.
- C. The English word canon goes back to the Greek word *kanon* and then to the Hebrew *qaneh*. Its basic meaning is "reed," our English word "cane" being derived from it. Since a reed was sometimes used as a measuring rod, the word *kanon* came to mean a standard or rule. It was also used to refer to a list or index, and when so applied to the Bible denotes the list of books which are received as Holy Scripture. Thus if one speaks of the canonical writings, he is speaking of those books which are regarded as having divine authority and which comprise our Bible.
- D. Canon of the OT.
Good evidence exists in the NT which shows that by the time of Jesus the canon of the Old Covenant had been fixed. In the 3rd century AD, Origin confirms the testimony of Josephus on the twenty-two books of the OT.
- E. Canon of the NT.
 1. When the church of Christ was first established it had no thought of a NT. Its Bible was the OT and its new teachings were based on the authority of X as personally mediated through the apostles. Soon inspired men came to put in writing divine regulations directed both to churches and individuals. It was inevitable that these regulations would become normative, for Christians could not have less respect for them than for their Christ. Thus Paul's letters were carefully gathered into a single whole; next came a collection of the Four Gospels, and then all the others followed.

2. In the third century Origen names all of the NT books, but says that Hebrews, James, 2 and 3John, and Jude were questioned by some. Eusebius of the fourth century likewise names all of the NT books. He says, however, that some books (James, 2Peter, 2 and 3John and Jude) were suspected, but that they were accepted by the majority. In 367AD, Athanasius of Alexandria published twenty-seven NT books which were accepted in his time, and these are the same twenty-seven which are recognized today.

F. Summary.

1. It is sometimes said that the line of demarcation between the NT books and other Xian writings was not always clear, that the early church scarcely made distinction between the two. But there is little evidence to support this charge. As to the NT books, not long after they were written they were being read regularly in the church assemblies. They were held in high esteem by early Xians--the words of Jesus and His apostles could not be less authoritative than the Scriptures of the OT.
2. In this way the NT canon gradually took shape; so that within a century or two the NT books as they are known today had been collected and constituted the supreme authority for the primitive church.

III. **APOCRYPHAL BOOKS.**

- A. When one picks up a copy of the Catholic Bible he sees that there are several books included in its OT section which are not found in Protestant Bibles. These extra books are generally known as the apocrypha. The word 'apocrypha' has come into English language from the Greek and basically means "hidden." It was used very early in the sense of "secretive" or "concealed," but was also used in reference to a book whose origin was doubtful or unknown. Eventually the work took on the meaning of non-canonical, and thus for centuries the non-canonical books have been known as apocryphal books.

B. The Apocryphal Books of the OT.

The OT Apocrypha include either fourteen or fifteen books, depending on the method of counting, which were written in a period of 200BC, to 100AD. In the 1957 edition of the Revised Standard Version the titles and order of the books are as follows:

1. The First Book of Esdras (also known as Third Esdras).
2. The Second Book of Esdras (also known as Fourth esdras).
3. Tobit.
4. Judith.
5. The Additions to the Book of Esther.
6. The Wisdom of Solomon.
7. Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach.
8. Baruch.
9. The Letter of Jeremiah (which is sometimes in Baruch).
10. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the three Young Men.
11. Susanna.
12. Bel and the Dragon.
13. The Prayer of Manasseh.
14. The First Book of Maccabees.
15. The Second Book of Maccabees.

Three of these fifteen books, I and II Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh, are not considered canonical by the Roman Catholic Church.

- C. Since several of the apocryphal writings are combined with canonical books, the Catholic Bible numbers altogether forty-six books in its OT.

D. Contents of These Books.

For purposes of convenience the books of the apocrypha may be classified under the following headings:

1. Historical: 1Esdras, 1 and 2Maccabees.
2. Legendary: Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Additions to Daniel (Prayer of Azariah and Son of the Three Young Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon).
3. Prophetic: Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Manasseh, 2Esdras.
4. Ethical: Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom of Solomon.

E. Why These Books are Rejected.

A brief survey of these books has indicated something of what they are like. Some of the books of the Apocrypha, such as 1Maccabees and Ecclesiasticus, are truly worthwhile. The question, however, concerns not their usefulness but their place in relation to the authoritative Scriptures. Should they be rejected from the Bible, and if so, on what grounds? There are many valid reasons why the Apocrypha cannot bear acceptance as "Holy Scripture." These are:

1. These books were never included in the Hebrew canon of the OT,
2. These books, as far as the evidence goes, were never accepted as canonical by Jesus and His apostles.

These two reasons by themselves should be enough to discard the books of the Apocrypha from being considered canonical.

3. These books were not accepted as Scripture by such Jewish writers of the first century as Philo and Josephus; the Jewish council at Jamnia (90AD); and by such eminent Xians writers as Origen and Jerome.
4. These books do not evidence intrinsic qualities of inspiration. They contain historical, chronological and geographical errors; that tend to make them legendary and fictitious works.
5. These books have been shrouded with continual uncertainty.
6. These books cannot be maintained on a compromise basis, either they are or they are not canonical.
7. Objections to these books cannot be overruled by dictatorial authority. On April 8, 1546, in the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church pronounced the OT Apocrypha (except 1 and 2Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh) as authoritative and canonical Scripture. This was done even though that in previous periods of the Catholic Church's history they had rejected such books.

- G. Let it also be noted that the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (80-180AD) are not to be classified as NT Apocrypha. They are simply letters of edification and encouragement written by ordinary Xians; they do not profess apostolic wisdom and authority.

NEXT LESSON.

We will look at some of the modern English translations of Scripture beginning with the KJV.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

How We Got the Bible by Neil R. Lightfoot. Sweet Publishing Co., Austin, TX; paperback, 84 pages.