

“Only Prophets Write Inspired Books”

Objection #1: “The entire Old Testament was written by Prophets. Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, was called a prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15. Joshua, his immediate successor, had a vision of God. Samuel the Prophet wrote First and Second Samuel and the Books of Kings. David, who wrote the Psalms, was called a prophet in Nehemiah 12:24, 36: “David the man of God.” Asaph, who also wrote some of the Psalms, was called a “seer” in 2 Chronicles 29:30. All of the Major and Minor Prophets were prophets. God twice spoke to Solomon in a dream just as he did with the other prophets (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon wrote the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. As for the rest of the books of the Old Testament, there is no evidence that they were not written by prophets. Therefore, the whole Protestant Old Testament can be accounted for by means of determining whether the books were written by prophets.”

Answer: This has become a favorite argument among some modern Protestant apologists. Unfortunately for them, this objection fails both to establish their shorter canon and to provide some justification for removing the Deuterocanon.

In order to make this argument work, the objector must stretch the definition of a “prophet” to an extreme, especially with Joshua and Solomon. Is it true that everyone to receive a message from God in a dream is a prophet capable of writing inspired Scripture? If so, notice all the unexpected people in Scripture who pop-up as “prophets.” Israel’s son Joseph in the book of Genesis must be a prophet. Could he have written inspired scripture? What should we make of Joseph the spouse of Mary? The Gospel of Matthew states that he had dreams from God. Should we consider him a prophet like Isaiah and Malachi?¹ Yet, Scripture never calls either Joseph a prophet. Moreover, Pilate’s wife had a dream (apparently from God) that Jesus was innocent and that Pilate should have nothing to do with him. Was Pilate’s wife a prophetess?² Scripture never records her receiving this title. Scripture, likewise, is silent on the Joshua and Solomon being prophets.³

In regards to the rest of the Protestant canon, there is biblical evidence that they were written by people who were not publicly known as prophets. For example, Ezra (who wrote the book of Ezra and possibly Chronicles) is described in Ezra 7:6 as “a scribe skilled in the law of Moses.” In Ezra 7:10 and Nehemiah 8:9, Ezra is described as a priest and a scribe. It is only in later extra-biblical sources that Ezra is seen as a prophet. Scripture only speaks of him as priest and scribe. Scripture also describes Nehemiah as a cupbearer of the king and the governor of Judah (Neh. 1:11, 8:9). The Protestant theologian Dewey M. Beegle writes:

“The book of Ruth was passed on orally for a long period before it was put into written form. It is exceedingly doubtful that the prophets had a significant part in its oral transmission or its recording. It is just as doubtful that Esther or Job was written by the prophetic tradition. In the light of all this evidence, much of it from the biblical text itself, is one warranted in ascribing all the Old Testament canon to the prophetic tradition?”⁴

The Protestant Old Testament was written by prophets as well as scribes, priests, cupbearers and wise men. There is also several books whose authorship is unknown. Therefore, the Deuterocanon does not differ from the Protocanon of Scripture. The book of Barch was often assigned a place among the prophets

¹ Genesis 37:5, 9; Matthew 1:20; 2:12-13 respectively.

² Matthew 27:19.

³ In fact, Scripture seems to be quite conformable to differentiate Solomon and Nathan as King and Prophet respectively (cf. 1 Kings 1:10; 1:34; 2 Chronicles 9:29). If Solomon was a prophet, why not identify him as one along with Nathan?

⁴ Dewey M. Beegle, *Scripture, Inspiration and Infallibility*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973) 246-249; the same basic point is made by R.T. Beckwith, *The Origin of the Bible*, ed, Philip Wesley Comfort (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992) 55.

usually next to Jeremiah.⁵ Wisdom is assigned a place among the prophetic tradition of Solomon. Sirach was written by a inspired wise man. Maccabees is the product of sacred historians and the authorship of Judith and Tobit are unknown.

Some attempt to assail the inspired status of the Books of Maccabees because there are three places where it speaks of prophets being absent.⁶ As we have seen, even there were no prophets in Maccabees (a fact that I dispute), Maccabees still can be inspired because we know from the Protocanon that non-prophetic figures can write inspired Scripture.

Objection #2 – “The New Testament speaks of the Old Testament as the law and the Prophets. However, the Deuterocanon is not part of the law (Torah) nor is it part of the Prophets. Therefore, it is not part of the Scripture.”

Answer: This literalistic understanding of the division of Scriptures can lead to problems. For example, if only the Law and the Prophets are Scripture, what do we do with the books that are found in the category known as the Writings? The book of Nehemiah is not part of the Torah nor is it part of the Prophets. Is Nehemiah Scripture? Of course, it is. The phrase “the Law and the Prophets” ought to be understood as a simply a reference to the Scripture as a whole and not a strict delineation of what kinds of writings are to be accepted as a sacred text.⁷

Objection #3 – “The Deuterocanon does not contain any predictive prophecies. They do not proclaim the coming of the Messiah.”

Aside from the fact that not all of the Protocanon passes this test, the Deuterocanon do contain predictive and messianic prophecies. I will provide two here:

Baruch 3:36-38 “This is our God, and there shall no other be accounted of in comparison of him. He found out all the way of knowledge, and gave it to Jacob his servant, and to Israel his beloved. Afterwards he was seen upon earth, and conversed with men.”

Wisdom 2:10-22

“Let us oppress the poor just man, and not spare the widow, nor honour the ancient grey hairs of the aged. But let our strength be the law of justice: for that which is feeble is found to be nothing worth. Let us, therefore, lie in wait for the just, because he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our doings, and upbraideth us with transgressions of the law, and divulgeth against us the sins of our way of life. He boasteth that he hath the knowledge of God, and calleth himself the son of God. He is become a censurer of our thoughts. He is grievous unto us, even to behold: for his life is not like other men’s, and his ways are very different. We are esteemed by him as triflers, and he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness, and

⁵ Ironically, John Calvin called Baruch a “prophet” in an early edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The reference was removed in later additions. Nevertheless, it does show that even John Calvin understood that people who were not prophets could write inspired Scripture. In the case of Baruch, Calvin did not believe the Book of Baruch to be prophetic writings since, he claimed, the book of Baruch was not written by someone else. See Neuser, William H., “The Reformed Churches and the Old Testament Apocrypha,” *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective*, UBS Monograph Series No. 6 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 103

⁶ cf. Arguments from the Disputed Books – The Disputed Books do not Claim Inspiration for Themselves.

⁷ James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1983), 54-55. Barr points out a couple other alternative reasons why a book, normally not considered under the category of the Prophets may have been included anyway. He also points out that the first-century Jewish historian Josephus numbers the books of the Bible in three groups. However, his numbers only work if some of the books normally included in the category of the Writings (i.e. Esther, Chronicles, Job and Daniel) are placed in the category of the Prophets. If these books from the category of the Writings can be included among the Prophets, there is nothing for us to rule out the possibility of the disputed books (at least for a time) also being included in this second category.

he preferreth the latter end of the just, and glorieth that he hath God for his father. Let us see then if his words be true, and let us prove what shall happen to him, and we shall know what his end shall be. For if he be the true son of God, he will defend him, and will deliver him from the hands of his enemies. Let us examine him by outrages and tortures, that we may know his meekness, and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a most shameful death: for there shall be respect had unto him by his words. These things they thought, and were deceived: for their own malice blinded them. And they knew not the secrets of God, nor hoped for the wages of justice, nor esteemed the honour of holy souls.”

Baruch 3:36-38 was a popular passage quoted by the early Christians to prove the Incarnation. Wisdom 2:10-22 is a prophesy about the just Son of God who is persecuted by the wicked and put to a shameful death. Part of this verse is referenced in Matthew 27:43. The early fathers also saw other predictive prophecies concerning the end of time and the Church. These two, however, should more than suffice.

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