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The Study of the Apocrypha by the Preacher

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Luther had a better appreciation of the apocryphal writings of the Old Testament than the English translators. He carefully translated them and appended them to the Old Testament canon. He did more than that. He recommended these strange and non-inspired books, which have no place in the Old Testament Bible, as "useful reading." To-day these writings have almost come to be regarded as obsolete in our circles. Many of our children have never seen them; we pastors scarcely find time to read them occasionally.

A new interest in these all but forgotten non-inspired books was stimulated during the recent quadricentenary of the first printed English Bible. They were exhibited along with some of the earlier translated editions of the English Bible. This is true especially of the Authorized Version of the Apocrypha, completed in 1611 and revised by a group of Oxford and Cambridge scholars in 1894. The names of Bishop Westcott, Dr. Hort, and Dr. Moulton are a sufficient guaranty of the scholarly fidelity and accuracy of the new version of these books. Their reappearance in popular and inexpensive form (Oxford University Press, 1929) as part of the world's classics has stimulated many college and high-school teachers to recommend them to students of literature as supplementary reading.

There is no lack of aids for the study of the Apocrypha and the apocryphal era by the pastor who is expected to be informed in this somewhat obscure field of Hebrew history and literature. The most elaborate work, which will meet the most critical demands of the student of apocryphal times and literature, appeared under the title *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English.* Its author is the Englishman R. H. Charles, Litt. D., D. D. The two comprehensive volumes appeal primarily to the student of what is called "Apocrypha" as well as of the body of literature, mainly of an apocalyptic character, which goes under the name of "Pseudepigrapha" (the Book of Enoch, the Sibylline Oracles, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Psalms of Solomon, the Book of Jubilees, and six others). This great work of Charles first appeared in the early nineties, but it is unsurpassed even to this day. The only drawback of these two volumes is their expensiveness. A German work of similar title by Kautzsch (*Die Apocryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*) was published during the period of revived interest in the apocryphal writings. Its footnotes bristle with scholarly research and painstaking textual comparisons, which lead the student far afield. But like Charle's two volumes Kautzsch's books are too expensive and too exhaustive for the busy pastor. A usable and inexpensive book dealing with the origin, teaching, and contents of the apocrypha is written by W. O. E. Oesterley, warden of the Society

of the Apocrypha, London Diocese (Fleming H. Revell Co., 1914).* The book is divided into two parts: Prolegomena to the Apocrypha and Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha. The author justifies the first part of his book with the statement that an intelligent reading of this body of ancient literature necessitates an acquaintance with a number of topics which do not at first sight seem to show a direct connection with the apocryphal writings (The Hellenistic Movement; Hellenistic Influence upon the Jews of Palestine and of the Dispersion; The Apocalyptic Movement; The Scribes; The Pharisees and Sadducees; The Origin of the Old Testament Canon). The second half of the book deals with the title, the authorship, and the contents and doctrinal teaching of the books of the Apocrypha. Briefly, Oesterley's book is all a busy student needs for supplementary reading in the field of apocryphal literature of the Old Testament.

The question recurs, however, Is it worth while? Will it repay the minister to make a somewhat careful study of this collection of writings not inspired? We think it will, and we shall point out in this article a few reasons why it will.

The value of a study of the Apocrypha and the era in which they were written will be found in its historical bearings. There is a historical gap between the close of the prophetic age and the beginning of the New Testament dispensation. Malachi's prophetic utterances were the last of that long row of inspired books which constitute the Old Testament canon. According to the best sources of information Malachi lived ca. 433—424 B. C. That leaves some four hundred years up to the coming of Christ unaccounted for. Without the Apocrypha and the history surrounding them this period would be a complete blank to us. What knowledge of American history would we have if there were a gap between the times of Jefferson and Lincoln?

What did happen in this period of Jewish history? First of all we see the spiritual disintegration of God's people under foreign domination. The reader will recall that the decline of Israel as God's people had its beginning in the final years of King Solomon's reign. "And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord. . . . And the Lord said unto Solomon . . .: "I will surely rend the kingdom from thee," 1 Kings 11, 6. 11. There followed the division of the kingdom of David and Solomon into two parts. The Kingdom of Judah outlasted the northern half by more than a century. In 586 B. C. Judah was conquered by the armies of Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, and a large number of its people were taken away as captives. These captives, it seems, were allowed to settle in fertile sections near the

* Cp. *An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha.* By *W. O. E. Oesterley.* New York: The Macmillan Co. 1935. 345 pages. (Ed. Board.)

city of Babylon and to carry on their own manner of life. Two generations later the Babylonian Empire was overthrown by Cyrus, king of the Medes and Persians, and a decree was issued permitting the Jews to return to their native land. Only a small number (Ezra 2, 64) took advantage of the opportunity, so that later Nehemiah and Ezra, lamenting the ruined state of Jerusalem, urged the Babylonian Jews to give up their more comfortable life in Babylon in order to help rebuild the destroyed walls and homes of their native land. With the walls rebuilt and the Temple repaired and with the inducement afforded by patriotic and vigorous leadership, there seems to have taken place a steady movement of return to Jerusalem and its surroundings. But any possible hopes of a worldly kingdom were doomed to disappointment. Palestine remained under Persian domination for over two centuries (538—332 B. C.) in spite of several disastrous attempts to throw off the yoke. Finally the Persian Empire crumbled and fell into the hands of the fiery young conqueror from Macedon, Alexander the Great, 331 B. C. But instead of liberty the Jews only gained an exchange of foreign potentates. After Alexander's sudden death the Ptolemies of Egypt extended their kingdom northward; so the Jews were catapulted into the hands of the Egyptian monarchs (320—198 B. C.). Then they passed as the spoils of war to Syria, whose kings, Greek by descent and called the Seleucidae, ruled over them from Antioch. These rulers treated the Jews brutally. An organized effort was made by King Antiochus Epiphanes to wipe out the Jewish faith. His soldiers pillaged and burned every place which bore the semblance of a house of worship. Antiochus reigned from 175—164 B. C. His tyrannical treatment of the Jews led to the successful rebellion under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, who inspired the Jews by his fiery patriotism against the attempted Hellenization of Antiochus. An intensive nationalism was created by his victories. Judas Maccabeus sought to safeguard the hard-earned victory by gaining the favor of the nation which at that time was quickly rising to a position of world dominance —Rome. "Now Judas heard of the fame of the Romans, that they are powerful and strong and willingly agree to all things that are requested of them, and that whosoever have come to them they have made amity with them, and that they are mighty in power. And they heard of their battles and their noble acts which they had done in Galatia, how they had conquered them and brought them under tribute, and how great things they had done in the land of Spain . . . and had conquered places that were very far off from them and kings that came against them from the ends of the earth, . . . and that they had defeated in battle Philip and Perseus, . . . and how Antiochus, the great king of Asia, was routed by them . . . and the country of the Indians and of the Medes and of the Lydians. . . .

So Judas chose Eupolemus, the son of John, . . . and Jason, the son of Eleazar, and he sent them to Rome to make a league of amity and confederacy with them" (1 Macc. 8). This interesting chapter then goes on to give the terms of the treaty the Roman senate made with this delegation of Jews. It was in effect a mutual-protection treaty, drawn up most advantageously for the Romans, as subsequent chapters of Maccabees reveal. But Jewish independence was short-lived. Shortly after his alliance with Rome, Judas was surprised by the overwhelming armies of Demetrius and decisively defeated. "And Judas was slain, and the rest fled away, . . . and all the people of Israel bewailed him . . . and said: How is the mighty man fallen that saved the people of Israel!" (1 Macc. 9). The successors of the first generation of the Maccabees were ambitious, cruel, inefficient, and even indifferent to the religion of their people, and independence gave way to civil war and civil war to intervention. The Romans, finding the Jews unable to keep their trade routes to the Orient open and patrolled and vainly reminding the Jewish leaders of their treaty obligations, marched their legions into Judea under Pompey in 63 B. C. and captured Jerusalem after a desperate resistance. From then on the Roman grip on the country was never broken.

Now let us see what happened to the religion of God's people during these centuries. In the first place, the continuous domination of the Jews by pagan powers which crumbled and rose again led many of them to a world outlook which slowly, but surely became pessimistic. God's kingdom seemed far off. The more they meditated over their national misfortune, the more they gave the prophetic utterances concerning the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom a temporal or an apocalyptic meaning. The day of the deliverance of God's people according to the apocryphal writers would mean the punishment of Babylonia, Persia, Syria, and Rome. It would also be the day of the destruction of Satan. "His kingdom shall appear throughout all creation. Then Satan shall be no more, and all sorrow shall depart with him" (Assumption of Moses, 10, 1).

Many of us are surprised to hear the disciples asking Jesus even after His resurrection: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?" Acts 1, 6. Yet the view of the temporal restoration of Israel by a temporal Messiah was so deeply grafted into the minds of the Jews during the apocryphal era that Jesus, even with all His emphasis on the true character of the kingdom of God and the mission of His Messiahship, did not eradicate it. That Jews in the days of Jesus still thought of the restoration of the Kingdom in terms of a victory over Rome and a recovery of lost political power is evident when we glance at the literature from

200 B. C. to 100 A. D. The earthly restoration of the Kingdom would come first and would last five hundred or a thousand years; then would begin the spiritual kingdom. The spiritual kingdom is the new heaven and the new earth. But not the new heaven and the new earth as Christ preached it and as the New Testament teaches it; to these apocalyptic-minded Jews the newness was in effect only a transformed Jerusalem transplanted somewhere in the stratosphere or thereabouts. It had all the earmarks of the old Solomonic city itself: the walls were there, the homes, and even the Temple. Some one has said that these Jews of the apolyptic era not only conceived of heaven as the transplanted Jerusalem, they even took the Jerusalem furniture with them on their journey to it, so mundane was their belief in the world to come.

The doctrinal teaching of the Apocrypha offers the best reasons why these books should be kept separate from the canonical writings and not be used as sources of religious authority. We know that they contain many statements which are legendary, erroneous, or even contrary to Biblical doctrine. The additions to the Book of Daniel are easily discernible as fiction of a fantastic character. The Book of Baruch contains many false statements about the record of Jeremiah. In the Book of Tobit an angel of God gives a young man instructions for practising witchcraft, in 2 Macc. 12, 43 ff. and 14, 41 ff. both intercession for the dead and the act of suicide are spoken of with approval. (This explains why the Roman Church in the Council of Trent, 1545—1563, decreed that these books must be considered of equal authority with the canonical books of the Bible and acknowledges them as sources of doctrine.) It is true that the more important of these books were recognized by official Judaism of that period as containing good orthodox teaching concerning the doctrine of God, of the Law, of sin, of grace and free will, of the Messiah, of the future life, of angels, of demonology, and of wisdom. But a closer examination of the Apocrypha, including the pseudepigraphic works, such as the Book of Enoch, the Sibylline Oracles, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Book of Jubilees, the Psalms of Solomon, the Assumption of Moses, the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, and the Ascension of Isaiah, leads the reader to the conclusion that the background of these books in the domain of doctrine is not solely the Old Testament, but also Persian and Greek influences in certain directions. Not only did these foreign influences flow in upon Judaism as God's prophets predicted they would, but Judaism even went out to meet them. Thus Fairweather correctly says: The hitherto unbroken river of Old Testament ideas and doctrines divided itself at this point into three separate streams, . . . causing the tributaries of Persian and Greek ideas by which these streams were fed to be of a composite character exceedingly difficult to analyze

so as to say definitely, This is Jewish; that is Persian, or, This is Jewish; that is Greek. (Hastings, D. B., V., p. 275.)

Some scholars see in the apocryphal writings a number of points of contact with the teachings of the Bible set forth in the New Testament. But their claim that doctrinally we have in this body of literature the background of the New Testament, is altogether unjustifiable. The parallels between the Apocrypha and the New Testament writings are more than offset by their doctrinal contrasts. To say that St. Paul, for example, dipped into this rabbinical literature and there found his material for the doctrine of sin, faith, and works is not consistent with the facts. Undoubtedly the apostle, who was trained in rabbinic Judaism, was familiar with these uncanonical books. But that does not justify the conclusion that he embodied their doctrinal teachings or eschatological content in his letters. On the contrary, many examples can be cited which show how diametrically opposite to the doctrines of the Apocrypha are those of the apostle concerning the Law, works, and justification by faith.

Take, for instance, the teaching concerning the Law. The position assigned to the Law in the apocryphal writings represents the pharisaic belief and practise regarding it. It was a dead letter. Jesus reinterpreted it and expounded to His people its true God-given meaning. St. Paul saw clearly by inspiration of God this difference between Jesus' and the pharisaic, or rabbinical, meaning of the Law, so that here we have a contrast between Apocrypha and New Testament which is fundamental. A non-pharisaic conception of the Law is found in the Apocrypha only in one or two instances, as, for example, 2 Esdras 3, 22; 9, 36, where the Law is represented as inadequate to save from sin. But nothing in the apocryphal books, so far as we know, approximates St. Paul's interpretation of the meaning of the Law which he presents in Rom. 2, 17—29 and 3, 19.

The doctrine of good works, the merit acquired thereby, of justification before God, as found in the Apocrypha represents the pharisaic doctrine of justification by the deeds of the Law, which is in sharp contrast to the teachings of the New Testament on the subject. In the Book of Tobit, for example, we are told: "Give alms of thy substance. . . . If thou have little, be not afraid to give alms according to that little; for thou layest up a good treasure for thyself against the day of necessity, because alms delivereth from death and suffereth not to come into darkness. Alms is a good gift in the sight of the Most High for all that give it" (Tobit 4, 7—11; 12, 9). See also 14, 11, where the aged Tobit assures his son of what alms can do "and how righteousness does deliver." In Ecclesiasticus the writer assures us that good works atone for sin (Ecclus. 3, 3. 14. 15) and that he who accomplished good works is righteous (*tzaddik*), *i. e.*, one who

is justified in the sight of God (cf. 9, 17); his state of justification is due to his good works (cf. 3, 31; 11, 27; 17, 22; 29, 9; 31, 9. 10, etc; 2 Esdras 8, 33). Contrast the words of St. Paul with these quotations. Rom. 3, 20: "By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified in His sight"; Rom. 3, 28; Gal. 3, 2. It would be unusual to find a passage in the Apocrypha where the thought is expressed that God is merciful even to those who have a poor record of good works. The prayer in 2 Esdras 8, 32: "For if Thou hast a desire to have mercy upon us, then shalt Thou be called merciful to us, namely, that have no works of righteousness," is remarkable and does not at all typify the teaching of the Apocrypha on the subject of God's grace.

Much more could be written to show the wide contrast between the New Testament teaching concerning the Messiah, his true character as He revealed Himself to us, the hereafter, angelology, the resurrection of the dead, etc., and the teaching of the apocryphal writings on these points. But this would carry us too far afield. Oesterley's latest book (*An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha;* Macmillan, 1935) covers the subject in great detail. The tendency of extreme theologians of our day is to harmonize the teachings of the Apocrypha with the doctrines of the New Testament or to make them appear as a true background for the New Testament. The pastor of to-day cannot afford to let this sinister development go by unchallenged. We shall always be compelled, therefore, to regard the apocryphal books as such as are to be read for "example of life and instruction of manners," but not "to establish any doctrine."

Finally, in these days of wide-spread reading, when college and high-school graduates sit in the pew and not infrequently give evidence of some acquaintance with the literature of Bible lands, the value of the Apocrypha to the minister is further seen by considering their literary interest. As literature these writings have a rich variety of form. Unlike the canonical books, the apocryphal writings show plainly the modifying influence of Hellenic thought and culture. This as well as the absence of the influence of inspiration differentiates the non-inspired from the inspired Jewish literature. In the Apocrypha we have poetry, history, gnomic literature, or that of proverbial sayings. So will the narrative parts of the Apocrypha, whether they be found in the real history, as in the books of the Maccabees, or in the legendary, as in the story of Bel and the Dragon, or in the entertaining story of Tobit, or in the fascinating and intensely nationalistic "Jewish domestic novel" of Judith, have a value for any reader who delights in the more primitive literary forms. The pictures these books give of Jewish life and manners in the age just before Christ will commend themselves to all who want to know what conditions of life prevailed in Jewry before the advent of Jesus in the fulness of time. Likewise the poetical strains in the Apocrypha

must have interest for any one who delights in religious poetry. Take for example the Song of the Three Holy Children. Certainly the writer of this song must have been acquainted with Psalm 146, of which it is an echo. There is glow, uplifting power, and rich devotion in its verse. Or take as another specimen the description of wisdom, Wisdom of Solomon, 7, 22; 8, 1, of which Dr. Westcott once said: "This magnificent description of wisdom must rank among the noblest passages of human eloquence." The distinctive feature of the apocryphal books as literature, if not also as religious thought, will be found in the gnomic books, the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus. In gnomic poetry the Hebrew literature is especially rich, for the Hebrew language enables pithy sentences to be concentrated into a few pregnant words. In Ecclesiasticus will be found also specimens of a grim humor and biting irony, of which the following examples may be pointed out: the itch of the scandal-monger to tell his tale (9, 10—12), the folly of the man that "buildeth his house with other men's money" (21, 8). Who cannot appreciate the wit in this: "A slip on the pavement is better than a slip with the tongue"?

This will go to show that the apocryphal books do have a place as valuable reading even for the busy and overworked pastor of to-day. Nothing should ever be done to create the impression that they are put on the same level with the canonical books. But now that modern research has shed much additional light on the apocryhal era in connection with the study of New Testament background, a repeated perusal of these books will be of great value to us pastors.

An interesting and profitable course of lectures might grow out of a study of the apocryphal books. Such a course would treat of the history of the books themselves; of the history of the Jewish nation between the Old and the New Testament; of the essential difference between these books and the inspired writings; of the origin and rise of the religious parties, or sects, Pharisees and Sadducees; of the development of rabbinic Judaism, etc.

Valparaiso, Ind. H. H. Kumnick.

Are We Using Our Septuagint?

The Septuagint challenges our interest from practically every angle from which we may approach its study. Its *history*, which for centuries was the subject of strange speculations, has only recently been cleared of the accumulation of these theories. Shorn of these mythical accretions, the story of the Septuagint may be reduced to the following facts. The instigation came from Ptolemy Philadelphus, King of Egypt, ca. 283—247 B. C., who desired a translation of the Jewish holy books for the great library founded by his father. The work was not done at one time, as has been stated, much less by a