

## **New Testament Antilegomena, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha**

**I. New Testament classification** As with the Old Testament (see p. 29) the following fourfold classification of the New Testament includes:

- A. Homologoumena (books accepted by all)
- B. Antilegomena (books disputed by some)
- C. Pseudepigrapha (books rejected by all)
- D. Apocrypha (books accepted by some)

**II. The Homologoumena** (books accepted by all) Twenty of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament had no serious questions about their inspiration. This includes all of the books from Matthew through Philemon, plus 1 Peter and 1 John.

**III. The Antilegomena** (books disputed by some) Seven books of the New Testament were disputed in regard to their canonicity.

A. Hebrews This book was questioned because of its anonymity. In the East, where it was believed to be written by Paul, it was readily accepted. The church in the West was more slow to accept it because of questions about its authorship. Through the influence of Jerome and Augustine in the fourth century, the West finally accepted Hebrews as canonical.

B. James James was slow to be accepted by the church because of its statements on the relationship of faith and works which seemed to differ from Paul's epistles. Luther questioned its canonicity on this basis. Eusebius, Jerome and Augustine and the rest of the church, however, finally recognized its complementary nature to Paul's letters and hence its canonical status.

C. 2 Peter 2 Peter was the most disputed book in the New Testament. Its dissimilarity with 1 Peter and the claim that it was a second century work have caused many to doubt its authenticity. These objections, though, were overcome and the testimony of Origen, Eusebius, Jerome and Augustine on its authenticity won out.

D. 2 and 3 John These books were questioned because of their limited circulation and private nature. They simply did not enjoy the wider circulation of the other books of the New Testament. The strong similarities with 1 John, though, gave strong testimony that these letters were written by John the apostle.

E. Jude Jude's authority was questioned mainly because of its references to the pseudepigraphic work, Enoch. Quotation, however, of a secular source does not make a book noncanonical.

F. Revelation This book was clearly accepted in the early church but became questioned later because of its teaching of a millennium. This, however, was an interpretation matter, not an inspiration matter.

**IV. The Pseudepigrapha** (books rejected by all) The first few centuries of the Christian era saw the production of numerous fanciful and heretical works that were neither genuine or valuable. "These books indicate the heretical teaching of gnostic, docetic, and ascetic groups, as well as the exaggerated fancy of religious lore in the early church" (Geisler and Nix, p. 301). It has been estimated that there were about three hundred books of this nature. The following are well-known pseudepigraphic works:

A. The Gospel of Thomas (early second century) This gnostic gospel is a mixture of authentic sayings of Jesus and Gnostic teachings which only the enlightened few are supposed to be able understand. In this gospel Jesus fashioned twelve sparrows from clay and made them fly. He also cursed a young boy who withered like a tree. Eusebius (c. 260-340) said that this work should be "cast aside as absurd and impious" because its style and content clearly show it not to be apostolic ("Books That Almost Made It," in Christian History, issue 43, p. 31).

B. The Gospel of the Ebionites (second century) Made by a Jewish sect of Christians who stressed the law of Moses, the Gospel of the Ebionites teaches that Jesus was a mere man who God adopted at His baptism.

C. The Gospel of Peter (second century) This docetic work denied the humanity of Christ.

**V. The Apocrypha** (books accepted by some) None of these works are in modern versions of the Bible but they were sometimes quoted by the Fathers and appeared in some Bible translations.

A. Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (c. A. D. 70-130) Quoted as Scripture by Origen and Clement of Alexandria, this work parallels Hebrews in style but is allegorical and mystical in nature.

B. Shepherd of Hermas (c. A. D. 115-140) This work was the most popular of all the noncanonical books. It is a picturesque allegory about a shepherd (Jesus) who gives moral guidance through visions and mandates to a man named Hermas. It was considered Scripture by Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria (See "Books that Almost Made It," p. 30).

C. Didache (c. A. D. 100-120) This work was held in high regard by the early church and gives the opinion of the early church of the second century on the essential truths of Christianity.

D. Apocalypse of Peter (c. A. D. 150) This apocalypse gives picturesque descriptions of heaven and hell.

E. The Acts of Paul (A. D. 170) This is the story of the conversion and testimony of an Iconian lady, Thelca, based on Acts 14:1-7.

F. The Gospel According to the Hebrews (A. D. 65-100)

G. The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians (c. A. D. 108).