

Chapter 2 — The Holy Scriptures

Q13. Is the entire Bible a divine book?

A. Yes, because it contains things that could only proceed from God.

The question does not speak about a part of the Bible but about the “entire Bible.” Why is the word “entire” added and not just spoken of “Bible”? Because some believe that only parts of the Bible are from God. Others believe that the Old Testament is no longer valid for us. But we as Reformed believe that the whole Bible is the Word of God. No part can and may be excluded. This means that the history of Israel is not different from the words of Jesus (in red letters). All is God’s speaking. What does then count as the entire Bible? That is both Old Testament and New Testament. It is from Genesis to Revelation. Every book, chapter and word, yes, every letter is God’s Word. Let us therefore realize when we read the Bible that God speaks. That is why the question continues to speak about a “divine book.” This phrase means that it came from God. We can say that the whole Bible is inspired by God. He is the ultimate author even though He uses human beings.

But is the whole Bible a divine book? The answer says, “Yes...it contains things.” This means that not each part of the Bible directly shows that it is a divine book. But there will be parts in it that show it. What are things that could be from humans? Think about certain laws. Humans could have thought them out. For example, the law of Moses says, “Thou shalt not steal.” Everyone in the world agrees that this is not allowed. Even non-Christian nations will say that this is the case. Besides, we find histories in the Bible. Someone could have written it after doing much research. It would be similar than writing a book about the history of the United States of America. You do your research and then write this book. What are some examples of this in Scripture? The exodus out of Egypt. Moses could have written it ‘without God.’ We do not say that this is the case. But we say that Moses has experienced this exodus himself and could have written it by himself. We can also thin about other parts of the Bible like poetry or Paul’s letters. The latter contain many greetings and pieces of advice. But this does not take away that the Bible contains things that can only come from God. Such things are evidence that it is a divine Book. After reading it, you must come to the conclusion that this Book must be from God. Let’s say that you receive a letter from the government. On the top of the letter you see an official stamp. This shows that the whole letter comes from the government. We can say this, a part on the letter, the stamp, proves that the whole letter is from the same author. This means that the whole letter has authority. The same is true for the Bible. We will find ‘stamps’ in the Bible that prove it is from God.

Our catechism answer call such stamps things that “could only proceed from God.” Only God knows these things. Only He can reveal them. Either it is impossible that humans can know it, or it could only be understood when we got new technology. Think for example about the stars. Today, NASA has telescopes. But could Job know all this information? No, and still he writes fascinating information about certain star groups. What are some divine stamps in the Bible? We will see that in our next question.

Q14. What are some of those things?

A. (1) *Mysteries*

such as God is triune; creation out of nothing in six days; Jesus is God and man, the Mediator, etc.; and

(2) *Prophecies* of future events that were fulfilled at the exact time and place.

This question gives proves that the Bible must be a divine book. What things are mentioned in our answer? Two: 1. Mysteries, 2. Prophecies.

So the first reason is that it contains *mysteries*. What are mysteries? Things that are difficult to understand. Things that can only be known by special revelation. These cannot come up into a person's mind. Let us give a clear example. Why did Abraham have to circumcise his children on the eighth day? Why not on the seventh or the ninth? The main answer is of course that God commanded him. But is there maybe another reason? Something that God knew and man did not? Yes, there is. On this day blood clotting is the best. First, vitamin K is not in the body until day 5 – 7. If a person does not have that, he would bleed to death. So, circumcision could not happen until day 5 or maybe even later. Second, prothrombin, which causes blood clotting, is 110 percent on day eight. After that moment, it turns to 100 percent. Only one day in a person's life it is higher than normal. That is on day eight. Notice that Abraham could not have known this. Only in 1872, Alexander Smith discovered it. Let us give another example. Think about the Old Testament laws for cleaning. Jews had a high hygiene. This protected them against many illnesses. One of these is the Black Death. Many contracted this illness, except the Jews. Why? They simply lived according to God's law. They took care of hygiene. But let us turn back to our answer. We thought about the fact that the Bible is divine. The first reason we pointed out is that it contains mysteries. What is one of those mysteries? That Jesus is both God and man. Which human would have ever invented that? None. That is why other religions deny that Jesus is God. This is true for both Islam and Jehovah's Witnesses. They say that God can never became human.

The second reason is *prophecies*. What are prophecies? Simply said it is to foretell what will happen in the future. God had spoken through prophets. They prophesied what would take place. This happened indeed. These prophecies were fulfilled. But if a prophecy would only be a thought of man, how can he then predict the exact moment and place? That is hardly possible. But many prophecies spoken in the Bible have been fulfilled. What are some examples? One is the exile to Babylon. God had warned Israel. If they would not turn from their sin, He would bring them into exile. And it happened. Another example is the birth of Christ. This would take place in Bethlehem. Micah had foretold, "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah...out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). This is exactly fulfilled when we read in Matthew, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea" (Matt. 2:1). These two things prove that the Bible is a divine book. But what about other books?

Q15. Are the apocryphal books the Word of God?

A. No, because they contain fictitious things *contrary* to the Word of God. They were never acknowledged as divine by the Jewish Church, to whom the oracles of God had been committed (Rom. 3:2).

What does the word "apocryphal" mean? It comes from the Greek *apokryptos* (ἀπόκρυφος). What

do you hear? Crypto. You can think about cryptocurrency, like the bitcoin. People like to hide it from the government. The word apocryphal means, “hidden or hard to understand.” But what are these apocryphal books? Most of them were written in the time between the Old and New Testament. So, after Malachi and before Matthew. What is the problem of these books? They contain errors and teachings against the Bible. The latter is not for every book or chapter, but we will find them. Let us give two examples. First, one apocryphal book speaks of prayer for the dead. We read in the Maccabees, “Wherefore he made the propitiation for them that had died, that they might be released from their sins” (2 Macc. 12:45). This is one of the reasons the Roman Catholic Church says you can pray for the dead. They would say that some of the dead are in purgatory, a temporal hell. Such prayers can release them from their sins. But what does the Bible say? “[There shall not be found] a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a *necromancer*. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD” (Deut. 18:11-12). A “necromancer” is someone that communicates with the dead. Do you see what the book of the Maccabees promotes is unbiblical? This makes clear it cannot be a book inspired by God. Second, we find historical errors in the apocrypha. In Judith, it says, “It was the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh” (Judith 1:1). But what does the Bible say? Nebuchadnezzar reigned in Babylon. Do you see why they cannot be books given by God?

Maybe you ask, are we then allowed to read apocryphal books? What do you think? It is allowed, but we need to be careful. And certainly, they do not have any authority. Our Belgic Confession says, “The Church may read [apocryphal books] and use them for instruction. Only as long as they do agree with the Bible. Also, they do not have authority” (BCF, Art 6). Such books can have historical value. Think about the Jews that fought in the time between the Old Testament and New Testament. Also, we can find theologically some nice and interesting passages, like the prayer of Manasseh, “I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I acknowledge mine iniquities: wherefore, I humbly beseech thee, forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with mine iniquities. Be not angry with me for ever, by reserving evil for me; neither condemn me to the lower parts of the earth” (Prayer of Manasseh 1:12-13). What does that remind of? Yes, indeed, Daniels prayer (Dan. 9). Has Manasseh truly prayed this prayer? We do not know. But if it is the case, it would have been a very solemn and Biblical prayer.

What is another reason that we do reject the apocrypha? The answer says, they were “never acknowledged...by the Jewish church.” You will not find the apocrypha in the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. They were added when the Greek translation of the Old Testament was produced. Yes, the Jews denied that any authority belonged to these books. Josephus writes that Jews believed that only the 22 books were inspired of God. These books are the same as our 39 Old Testament. Notice that they do not say this of the apocryphal books. Another example is Philo’s commentaries. He was a first century Jewish scholar. He used the Septuagint as his Bible, the Greek Translation of the Old Testament (LXX). He wrote a commentary that commented on each book of the Bible. However, the apographe are lacking. It shows that he did not think they had any authority. So, we can say that apographe can be useful, but we need to be careful in reading them. They have not any authority and are certainly not inspired by God.