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Question 29 - What Biblical Books were at first temporarily disputed and why?

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

29. What Biblical Books were at first temporarily disputed and why?

A. The Old Testament books

Five such books were questioned at the Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90.

Terry Hall overviews the problems involved:

“During their deliberations, they raised some new questions about five Old Testament books. But closer scrutiny resolved their questions.

- “1. The council debated why Esther did not mention God’s name, the only Hebrew Scripture book to omit it. They decided God’s presence, power, and protection was evident in the Book of Esther in His saving the Jewish race from a Persian king’s annihilation decree.

It’s interesting that in an ancient Hebrew manuscript of Esther, God’s name *is* found four times as an acrostic, reading single letters vertically. It occurs twice in the first column of letters along the left margin and twice in the last column on the right. Two of the mentions read down and two read up. Is it possible some Hebrew scribe tried to amend for the seeming omission?

- “2. Proverbs was questioned as perhaps being self-contradictory. For example, ‘*Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes*’ (Prov. 26:4-5). But these apparently contradictory Proverbs apply to different situations because a different Hebrew word was used for ‘fool’ in each verse. Some types of fools will receive correction; others won’t.

(How the Bible Became a Book, Victor Books, A Division of Scripture Press Pub., USA, Canada, England, 1990. p. 76)

3. Ecclesiastes was the third book, for it seemed to actually teach atheism, as found in the following verse:

“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. . . . Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no

work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (9:5, 10).

But they soon realized the two key phrases unlocking the thrust of the book were “under the sun” (used 30 times), and “vanity,” (or empty, meaningless used 37 times). In other words, King Solomon was led to conduct an extensive search that he might find the answer to a very perplexing question – “Can a person, regardless of his or her station in life, find true peace and purpose down here . . . APART FROM GOD?” The answer was a resounding *no*, thus Solomon’s conclusion –

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccles. 12:1, 13-14).

Tony Hall summarizes the council’s initial difficulties concerning the final two Old Testament books.

4. The Song of Solomon was challenged for seeming to emphasize the sensual side of marriage, which was not in keeping with Jewish culture. Orthodox Jews forbade their young men to read the Song until they were at least 30 years of age! But God created humanity male and female and established the sexual union in marriage. The Jamnia Jews accepted the Song of Solomon as a picture of God’s love for Israel.

Ezekiel’s description of the Jewish temple in chapters 40-48 differs from Moses’ in Exodus 25-40. But Ezekiel’s temple is prophetic of a permanent one to be built when Messiah comes. Moses describes a portable tabernacle.

Such questioning helps assure us that succeeding generations didn’t unthinkingly accept what they received. No Old Testament book was removed from the sacred collection, and other ancient books were flatly rejected at Jamnia. (ibid, p. 76)

B. The New Testament Books

As in the Old Testament, there were also five New Testament books initially in dispute:

1. Hebrews because of the uncertainty about the book's authorship.
2. James because it seemed to contradict the teachings of Paul.
(Compare James 2:20 with Eph. 2:8-9.)

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"
(James 2:20).

3. 2 and 3 John because they seemed to be simply two personal letters.
4. Jude because the author refers to an uncanonical Old Testament book, the book of Enoch.
5. Revelation because of the uncertainty about the book's authorship and because of its many mysterious symbols.