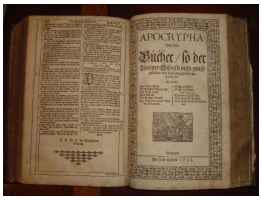
Why Not Those Books?

Then He told them, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you--that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. - Luke 24:44-45 HCSB



There were several principal criteria that determined whether or not the early church considered a book to be canonical. The first was "**authorship**." Was the book written by a prophet, an apostle or an accredited spokesperson of God? This stemmed from the view that God is the ultimate authority, not the Church. God was the one who determined who the real prophet was. God was the one who created the truth, not us.[1]

Immediate contemporaries confirmed that a person was a true prophet through divine miracles or fulfilled prophecies.[2] However, the ability to perform neat tricks was not enough. Their teachings had to mesh with God's previous teachings.[3] The fact that none of the apocryphal books claim to be written by a prophet tells us that we should not use them for doctrinal purposes. In fact, 1 Maccabees even says that it isn't prophetic![4]

The second criterion was "**authority**." Did the book *claim* to be the Word of God? Between the Old and the New Covenants we find over 3,800 claims of divine inspiration.[5] Among the Apocryphal books, none can be found.

Thirdly, there was "**validation**." Did Christ and the other authors confirm that the book was scriptural? For example, in today's text, Christ validated the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms (which were part of the Jewish Old Covenant called "the writings"), essentially validating the entire Old Covenant as being Scriptural. Though there may (and that is very much up to debate) be a couple of allusions to the Apocrypha[6] there are no clear quotations from it.

The fourth consideration could be called "**contents**" with the fundamental question being "does it agree with or contradict the rest of the Scriptures?" In this the Apocrypha fails abysmally, contradicting Hebrews' clear teaching that Christ offered the sacrifice of His blood *once for all*[7] by teaching the doctrine of the Mass.[8]

The last criterion was that of "**universality.**" Were the writings accepted and received by the early Christians universally? This was not simply a popularity contest where a popular author like Max Lucado would have found his writings granted the status of Scripture. The work had to conform to the previous four criteria and the Christians looked to truly authoritative figures. For example, though Augustine favored the Apocrypha, Josephus did not. Josephus' view won out because the Jewish Christians knew that there were no prophets during the 400 years between the two Covenants. How could the Apocryphal books, which were written during that time period be authoritative?

The decision to reject the Apocrypha was sound. We can be sure that the books we have in the Bible are clearly the inspired Word of God and that we have all of them.

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[1] 2 Peter 1:20
[2] Exodus 3:1-3; 1 Kings 18; Acts 2:22; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4
[3] Deuteronomy 18:18
[4] 1 Maccabees 9:27
[5] For instance, 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; 3:16
[6] Hebrews 11:35 cp 2 Maccabees 7:12 for example
[7] Hebrews 7:27
[8] 2 Maccabees 12:42-45