

4. The Jews of Christ's day were unanimous in their agreement as to which books were inspired.

The words used by Christ and the apostles in reference to the Old Testament would be strange indeed if it could be shown that the Jews of that day were actually in doubt as to what books belonged in the Old Testament. The evidence is clear that there was no such doubt. It is made absolute when we read the words of Josephus in a book written to defend his people against anti-Semitic attacks and therefore intended to be widely distributed. Josephus had carefully investigated many different groups of Jews in his early days. Yet he speaks positively of the fact that these specific books were accepted by all Jews as commands of God, and that no Jew would willingly add anything to them or take anything from them (Contra Apionem, I,8).

There is abundant evidence that the Jews in the first century hotly disputed many questions. The Talmud gives evidence of some discussion as to whether certain books of the Old Testament were inspired. Yet examination of the evidence for these disputes shows that actually what they amount to was a discussion of the ways to defend these books from attack. There is no evidence of any Jewish suggestion in the first century that a book which is not now contained in our Old Testament might really belong there. The way in which the discussions were carried on clearly presupposes a definite and fixed canon. The evidence fits with the statement of Josephus that there was a definite unanimity among the Jews as to which were the inspired books.

5. This unanimity of the Jews as to which books belong in the Old Testament came about because the Holy Spirit providentially led the people of God.

It is an interesting question just how the Jews came to have such unanimity about the books of the Old Testament. There is no difficulty in seeing how it would have been reached regarding the first five books, since we are definitely told that Moses, who was the great leader of the people, received revelations from God which he passed on to them as God's will for them. God commanded him to write down the law and to place it in the Holy of Holies in order that it might be treasured and observed. It is not at all strange that the Jews from that time on accepted these five books as part of God's Word. We are in quite a different situation, however, as regards most of the prophetic books of the Old Testament.

Many of the prophets did not speak as recognized leaders of the nation. When we read their strong criticism of many of the leaders of the people, and even of the nation as a whole, we find it hard to imagine how any nation would accept such books as part of its national treasure. It is a phenomenon that can hardly be paralleled in any other nation.

Nor was there any lack of attempts to dispute the authority of the prophets during their lifetime. Jeremiah tells us that there were other prophets, both in Palestine and in Mesopotamia, who denied his claim to be a prophet. Some of them gave alleged revelations from God that were directly contrary to what he was saying. While some of these men were hypocrites and liars, others probably believed that what they said was true. Doubtless many of the people accepted the books of these other prophets. The natural result would be that some groups of people would accept the books of Jeremiah as inspired, while others would accept those of one or more of his opponents. Some might accept both, while some might deny the claims of both. Thus many shades of opinion as to which books were inspired might be expected to