

CANONICITY AND HISTORICITY

CANONICITY OF THE BIBLE

Definition

The Scriptures were completed by the apostolic writers in the first century.

- If the Scriptures are indeed inspired by God, then the question is: What books are inspired?
- Canonicity addresses the issue of determining which books God has inspired and which ones are to be included in the Scriptures
- “Canon” (from the Greek *kanon*) = “a measuring rod/reed;” that which serves as a measure, limit, or boundary
- The word is used 4 times in the NT:
 - **2 Corinthians 10:13**~ *But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.*
 - **2 Corinthians 10:15** ~ *not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men’s labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you,*
 - **2 Corinthians 10:16**~ *so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.*
 - **Galatians 6:16**~ *And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*
- The word came to mean metaphorically “a standard”
- This term signifies the standards by which books were measured to determine whether or not they were to be accepted as Scripture
- It is important to note that religious councils at no time had any power to *cause* books to be inspired, rather they simply *recognized* that which God had inspired at the exact moment the books were written

can•on (kân'en) *n.* (Lat. *canon*, rule) 1. a law or code of laws established by a church council. 2. A secular law, rule, or code of law. 3. A basis for judgment: CRITERION. 4. The books of the Bible officially recognized as the Holy Scripture.

The Need for the Canon

- a. The apostles were Christ’s formal, authorized representatives (John 20)
- b. As the apostles died and passed off the scene, it was important that their teaching be preserved
- c. The apostles were concerned about this problem

1 Corinthians 11:2 ~ *Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.*

2 Thessalonians 2:15 ~ *So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.*

Thus the writings of the apostles became increasingly crucial

- d. Spurious writings as well as attacks on genuine writings were a factor (i.e. Marcion’s canon)
- e. The content of the NT writings testified to their authenticity and they naturally were collected, being recognized as canonical

- f. Apostolic writings were used in public worship, hence, it was necessary to determine which of those writings were canonical
- g. Ultimately, the edict Emperor Diocletian in AD 303, demanding that all sacred books be burned, resulted in the NT canon
- h. In the end, God providentially preserved the apostolic writings through local churches, pastors, copyists, and church councils

The Existence of the Canon

- We must not confuse the existence of the canon (God’s action) with the church’s recognition of the canon
- The activity of the church (statements of the church fathers, decrees of councils, etc.) concerning the contents of the New Testament does not create the canon
- The Scriptures do not derive their authority from any ecclesiastical body. Canonization is not the act of compiling a closed list of books which are then made to be the authoritative standard for the church, rather, it is the recognition of the inherent canonical quality and qualification of each portion as it becomes available.
- Thus canonicity (e.g. the innate authenticity of a document which it possesses by virtues of its divine inspiration) may be viewed as antecedent to canonization (e.g. the recognition of the authenticity and authority of the writings by the community of believers).
- The books of Scripture were **RECOGNIZED** as canonical; not **DECLARED** to be canonical because the ultimate criterion for canonicity is divine authorship
- Therefore, the Bible is a collection of authoritative writings (the authority is vested in the writings themselves) **NOT** an Authoritative collection of writings (the traditional view of Roman Catholicism – i.e. the authority of the canon is vested in the collecting agency rather than in the writings themselves)
- In the case of the former, the church merely recognizes the authority that is latent in the writings themselves.
- The authority rests upon the fact of inspiration, not upon the agency of the collection

The Completion of the Scriptures

1. Old Testament

1. Ezra may have played a pivotal role in collecting the OT Scriptures in the fifth century B.C.
2. By the time of the New Testament, the threefold division of the OT was recognized: Law, Prophets, Psalms

Luke 24:44 ~ Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

3. Jesus confirmed the existence of the OT canon in John 10:35

John 10:35 ~ If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken)

4. By the time of Paul, there was evidently a "canonized" collection of books called "Scripture" and “the sacred writings”

2 Tim 3:15-16 ~ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness

5. Qumran-The Qumran community cites most of the OT books.
6. The canon was closed by general common consent rather than by formal decree on the part of the rabbis.
7. The Jewish Council of Jamnia in AD 90 is generally considered the occasion whereby the OT canon was publicly recognized

What were the specific tests to consider OT canonicity?

1. Did the book indicate Divine authorship?
2. Did it reflect God speaking through a mediator (i.e. Exodus 20:1; Joshua 1:1)?
3. Was the human author a spokesman of God?
4. Was he a prophet or did he have the prophetic gift?
5. Was the book historically accurate?
6. Did it reflect a record of actual facts?
7. How was the book received by the Jews?

What about the Apocrypha (“hidden”)/Deuterocanonical (“second canon”) books?

- Definition: Group of 14 writings which were written after Malachi and attached to the Old Testament about 200–150 B.C. in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament called the Septuagint (LXX), appearing to this very day in some versions of the Bible.
- The books of the Apocrypha: 1, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach/Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Song of Three Youths, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, 1, 2 Maccabee
- Within early Judaism, the writings of the Apocrypha were treated with respect, but were not accepted as books of the Hebrew Bible. The early Christian church debated the status of the Apocryphal writings, but few early Christians believed they belonged in the canon of Scripture
- Why it is not part of canon: (Grudem, pg 59)
 1. They do not claim for themselves the same kind of authority as OT writings
 2. They were not regarded as God’s words by the Jewish people from whom they originated
 3. They were not considered to be Scripture by Jesus or the NT writers (the NT quotes from the OT hundreds of times, but nowhere quotes or alludes to any of the Apocrypha)
 4. They contain teachings inconsistent with the rest of the Bible

i.e. Many of the Roman Catholic Church teachings (which are contrary to the Bible) are contained within the Apocrypha such as praying for the dead, petitioning “saints” in heaven for their prayers, the existence of purgatory, worshipping angels, and almsgiving atoning for sin
- Some of the Apocrypha include important and helpful information, but due to their historical and theological errors, the books must be viewed as fallible historical and religious documents, not as the inspired, authoritative Word of God

2. *New Testament*

1. The books of the NT were used in public worship by the first century church.

1 Thessalonians 5:27 ~ *I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.*

Colossians 4:16 ~ *When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea*

2. The *Apostolic fathers* (90-120) quote most of the epistles as Scripture.

- Clement of Rome (AD 95) mentioned at least 8 NT books in a letter
- Ignatius of Antioch (AD 115) acknowledged 7 books
- Polycarp (AD 108), a disciple of John, acknowledged 15 letters

3. The *Apologists* (120-170) clearly recognized the canonical gospels as distinct from other false works.

- Irenaeus (AD 185) acknowledged 21 books
- The Muratorian Canon (AD 170) was a compilation of books recognized as canonical; it included all the NT books except Hebrews, James, and 1 epistle of John

4. The fourth century demonstrated a prominent recognition of the NT canon

- Athanasius (AD 367) cited the 27 books of the NT as being the only true books
- The Council of Laodicea (AD 363) stated that only the OT and the 27 books of the NT were to be read in the churches
- The Council of Hippo (AD 393) recognized the 27 books of the NT
- The Council of Carthage (AD 397) recognized the presently accepted NT canon

Conclusion: We can be confident that all the books in the present canon should be there AND that no other books exist that should have been included in the Scripture but were not.

Criteria for Biblical Books (primarily NT)

1. Inspiration - It bears evidence of being inspired by God

Tests of Inspiration:

- a. It is supported by intrinsic content – i.e. the subject is the person and work of Jesus Christ
- b. It results in personal edification - The application of the writing results in the edification of the reader

THE BEST AND FINAL TEST OF CANONICITY IS INSPIRATION

2. Authorship - It was written by an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle

Ephesians 2:20~ *having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,*

2 Corinthians 12:12~ *The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.*

Hebrews 2:3-4~ *how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,⁴ God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*

2 Peter 3:15-16~ *...just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

<p>Matthew-Apostle Mark-associated with Peter Luke-associated with Paul John-Apostle Paul-Apostle Peter-Apostle Jude-1/2 brother of Christ James-1/2 brother of Christ; an apostle (1 Cor 15:7) Hebrews-?</p>

3. Universal church acceptance - It was used by the early church

4. Subject matter - Scripture does not contradict itself

Disputed books: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, Revelation

Rejected books: 1 Clement, The Shepherd of Hermas, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter

Quote from Gospel of Thomas: "Simon Peter said to them: 'Let Mary go away from us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said: 'Lo, I shall lead her, so that I may make her a male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the kingdom of heaven'"

Is the Canon closed?

1. Scriptural reason

Jude 3 ~ *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

Hebrews 1:1-2~ *GOD, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*

Hebrews 2:3-4~ *how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,⁴ God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*

Revelation 22:18-19~ *I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.*

- How do you respond to those who say that the admonition in Rev 22:18-19 applies only to Revelation?
 1. The book of Revelation is unique to the Scripture in that it describes with unparalleled detail the end-time events which precede eternity future.

2. Just as there was prophetic silence after Malachi completed the Old Testament canon, so there was a parallel silence after John delivered Revelation.
 3. Since there have not been, nor are now, any authorized prophets or apostles in either the Old Testament or the New Testament sense, there are not any potential authors of future inspired, canonical writings.
 4. Of the four exhortations not to tamper with Scripture, only the one in Revelation 22:18,19 contains warnings of severe divine judgment for disobedience.
 5. Finally, the early church, those closest in time to the apostles, believed that Revelation concluded God's inspired writings, the Scriptures.
2. Theological reason - If God has decided to reveal Himself in His Word then we can be sure that in His providence He will provide for its writing and for its collection, recognition, and preservation
 3. Logical reason - Those who were in the best position to determine the canon (i.e. those in the early church) were the ones who recognized it
 4. Factual reason - There has been no attempt to reinstate non-canonical books or add new books
 5. Experiential reason – The inward dynamics of the 27 books of NT have proven itself as the means by which God saves people; People are not saved by other literature

THE HISTORICITY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is historically accurate, and fully what it claims to be, the inerrant Word of God.

Document Abundance

Work	Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	Copies
Homer	900 BC	400 BC	500 yrs.	643
NT	40-90 AD	125 AD	35 yrs.	24,000+

Ancient Hebrew Books

- Parchment rolls were made of skins fastened together.
- They were rolled up on a round stick at each end with a disk above and below the parchment.
- A roll could be up to 75' long and 2' wide--very cumbersome.
- They were written from right to left and the text was written in narrow columns from top to bottom without any break between words or sentences.

Scribal Carefulness

- Old Testament Scribes were fastidious!

- They were extremely careful in how they wrote.
- They counted the letters, words, verses, sections in each book.
- They determined the middle of a book.
- Whenever they wrote “Yhwh” they had to take a bath and get a totally new pen

Internal Evidence

- There are no unexplainable contradictions or factual inaccuracies.

Job 26:7~ He stretches out the north over empty space, And hangs the earth on nothing

The Bible & Church History

0-500

- By 170 A.D. the entire Bible had been translated into Latin
- By 200 AD it had been translated into Syrian.
- In the following centuries it was translated into many other languages.

500-1500 A.D. - The “Dark Ages”

- The tendency of the church was to keep the Bible from the people and to substitute the authority of the church
- Any translations were made secretly for fear of the church
- Translators were threatened with death
- Frequently, reading of the Bible was prohibited by the church and state

1500+

- With the reformation and the invention of printing came a period of many translations and copies of the Bible.
- The Bible was and continues to be translated into many, many languages.

Conclusion: The texts of both the Old and New Testament have been providentially preserved in remarkable purity!