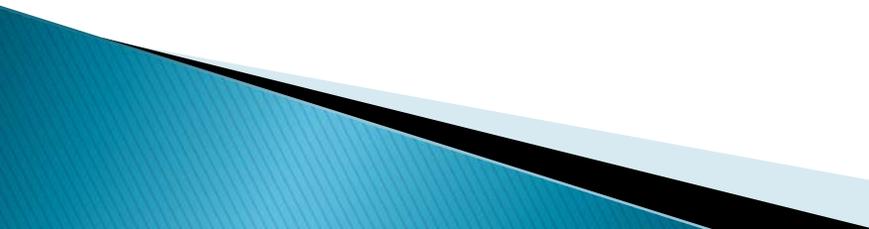


How the Bible came to be Canonized



- ▶ The word “canon” is used to describe those books recognized as inspired of God.
 - ▶ Literally, it means (a) a straight rod or bar; (b) a measuring rule as a ruler used by masons and carpenters; then (c) a rule or standard for testing straightness.
 - ▶ The Canon consists of the 39 books of the Old Testament which form the Bible of Judaism, while the Christian Bible includes those books and also the 27 books of the New Testament.
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Important Considerations for Canonicity

- ▶ **1. Self-authentication.** It is essential to remember that the Bible is self-authenticating since its books were breathed out by God (2 Tim. 3:16).
 - ▶ The books were canonical the moment they were written.
 - ▶ Their canonicity was inherent within them, since they came from God
 - ▶ No Bible book became canonical by action of some church council.
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- ▶ **2. Decisions of men.** Nevertheless, men and councils did have to consider which books should be recognized as part of the canon.
 - ▶ There were some candidates that were not inspired. Some decisions and choices had to be made, and God guided groups of people to make correct choices (not without guidelines) and to collect the various writings into the canons of the Old and New Testaments.
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- ▶ **3. Debates over canonicity.** In the process of deciding and collecting, some disputes arose about some of the books.
 - ▶ However, these debates in no way weaken the authenticity of the truly canonical books, nor do they give status to those which were not inspired by God.
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- ▶ **4. Completion of canon.** Since A.D. 397 the Christian church has considered the canon of the Bible to be complete.
 - ▶ Since it is complete, it must be closed. Therefore, we cannot expect any more books to be discovered or written that would open the canon again and add to its sixty-six books.
 - ▶ The more recent books of the cults which are placed alongside the Bible are not inspired and have no claim to be part of the canon of Scripture. Certainly
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The Old Testament

- ▶ The Old Testament is known as Torah or the Pentateuch which started out as stories (oracles) passed from one generation to the next.
 - ▶ The Jews had a clearly defined body of Scriptures that was fixed early in the life of Israel.
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- ▶ The same books are there as in our Old Testament, but not in the same order.
- ▶ **The Law** was the first five books, known as the Pentateuch, which means “five rolls”—(parchment scrolls).
- ▶ **The Prophets** consisted of the Former Prophets (these included Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah which included
- ▶ **Lamentations**, and the 12 smaller prophetic books.
- ▶ **The Writings** gathered up the rest.
- ▶ The total amounted generally to 24 books because many books, such as 1 and 2 Samuel and Ezra and Nehemiah, were counted as one.

When was the canon of the Old Testament settled?

- ▶ The simple response is that if we accept the position that each of the books was written at the time of its history—the first five at the time of Moses, the psalms of David during his lifetime, and the prophets written at the time they were given.
 - ▶ Certainly, the Jews generally held this to be true.
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- ▶ There is a lot of internal evidence that the books of the Old Testament were written close to the time they record.
- ▶ For example, in 2 Chronicles 10:19, we have a record from the time of Rehoboam that “Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.” Clearly, therefore, that must have been recorded prior to 721 B.C.
- ▶ We know also that the words of the prophets were written down in their own lifetime; Jeremiah had a secretary called Baruch for this very purpose (Jeremiah 36:4).

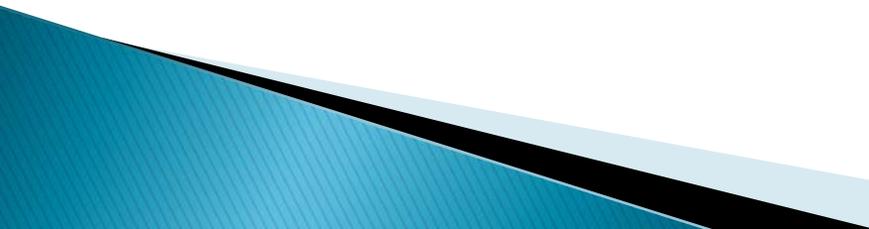
The Council of Jamnia

- ▶ Between A.D. 90 and 100, a group of Jewish scholars met at Jamnia in Israel to consider matters relating to the Hebrew Scriptures.
- ▶ It is now generally accepted that Jamnia was not a council nor did it pronounce on the Jewish canon; rather it was an assembly that examined and discussed the Hebrew Scriptures.
- ▶ The purpose of Jamnia was to examine those that were already accepted.
- ▶ The point is that the formation of the canon did not come all at once like a thunderbolt, but was the product of centuries of reflection.

The Apocrypha and the Septuagint

- ▶ **The Apocrypha** is 14 books, which were written some time between the close of the Old Testament (after 400 B.C.) and the beginning of the New.
- ▶ They were never considered as part of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the Jews themselves clearly ruled them out by the
- ▶ **The Septuagint** (meaning 70) is a translation of the Old Testament into Greek during the third century B.C. (70 men involved in the translation.)
- ▶ It was the Greek Septuagint that the disciples of Jesus frequently used since Greek was the common language of the day.

The New Testament

- ▶ Regional church councils made declarations about the canon (Laodicea, Hippo, Carthage).
 - ▶ But these regional councils did not just “pick” books they happened to like, but affirmed the books they believed had functioned as foundational documents for the Christian faith.
 - ▶ These councils were declaring the way things had been, not the way they wanted them to be.
 - ▶ The shape of our New Testament canon was determined by a broad and ancient consensus.
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Facts about the New Testament Canon

- ▶ There were only ever the four Gospels used by the churches for the life and ministry of Jesus. Other pseudo-gospels were written but these were immediately rejected by the churches across the empire as spurious.
- ▶ The Acts of the Apostles and 13 letters of Paul were all accepted without question or hesitation from the earliest records.
- ▶ Apart from James, Jude, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Hebrews, and Revelation, all other New Testament books had been universally accepted by A.D. 180. Only a few churches hesitated over these seven.
- ▶ Clement of Rome quoted from or referred to more than half the New Testament and claimed that Paul wrote “in the Spirit” and that his letters were “Scriptures.”

- ▶ Polycarp, who was martyred in A.D. 155, quoted from 16 NT books and referred to them as “Sacred Scriptures.”
- ▶ Irenaeus of Lyons, around A.D. 180 quoted over 1,000 passages from all but four or five New Testament books, and called them “the Scriptures” given by the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Tertullian of Carthage, (A.D. 200) used almost all the NT books. They were equated with the Old Testament, and he referred to “the majesty of our Scriptures.”
- ▶ By A.D. 240, Origen of Alexandria was using all our 27 books, and only those, as Scripture alongside the Old Testament books.

What Made a Book “Scripture”?

- ▶ At first, the churches had no need to define what made a book special and equal to the Old Testament Scriptures. If the letter came from Paul or Peter, that was sufficient.
 - ▶ It was not long before others began writing additional letters and gospels either to fill the gaps or to propagate their own ideas.
 - ▶ Some tests became necessary.
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- ▶ **1. Apostolic—does it come from an apostle?**
- ▶ The first Christians asked, “Was it written by an apostle or under the direction of an apostle?” Paul was insistent that his readers should be reassured that the letters they received actually came from his pen (e.g., 2 Thessalonians 3:17).
- ▶ **2. Authentic—does it have the ring of truth?**
- ▶ The authoritative voice of the prophets, “This is what the Lord says,” is matched by the apostles’ claim to write not the words of men but the words of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13)
- ▶ **3. Ancient—has it been used from the earliest times?**
- ▶ Most of the false writings were rejected simply because they were too new to be apostolic.

- ▶ **4. Accepted—**are most of the churches using it?
- ▶ Since, as we have seen, it took time for letters to circulate among the churches, it is all the more significant that 23 of the 27 books were almost universally accepted well before the middle of the second century.
- ▶ **5. Accurate—**does it conform to the orthodox teaching of the churches?
- ▶ Irenaeus asked the question whether a particular writing was consistent with what the churches taught.¹⁷ This is what ruled out so much of the heretical material immediately.
- ▶ It was actually not until 367 AD that the church father Athanasius first provided the complete listing of the 66 books belonging to the canon.