

The Canonization of the Bible

There are sixty-six books commonly accepted as Scripture—the divinely inspired Word of God. Origen (185-254 A.D.), a prolific early Christian writer, noted a commonly accepted list of 27 New Testament books, indicating that by the second or third century, the New Testament canon was established. There are many other books, beside the New Testament canon, that are considered inspired *by some scholars*, but not all.

The Bible is complete and sufficient as it is **(2 Timothy 3:16-17; Luke 21:33; John 12:48)**

- I. The Bible: How did the 66 books we have in the Bible today get there?
 - A. Canon - what does it mean?
 - i. "Canon" comes from the Greek "Kanon" which means a "standard", "rule", "measure", or "norm". Later, the word came to mean "list" or "collection."
 - ii. The Greek word is a derivation from the Hebrew word "qaneh" which means reed, a device used to measure.
 - B. The Difference between "deciding" what books belong in the Bible and "recognizing" what books belong in the Bible.
- II. The Old Testament Books.
 - A. Three parts at the time of Jesus:
 - i. The Law (Torah)
 - ii. The Prophets (Nevi'im)
 - iii. The Writings (Kethuvim):
 - a) Poetry
 - b) Five Rolls
 - c) History
 - B. Most of these books were recognized and collected as soon as they were written.
 - C. The Old Testament Canon was complete about 400 B.C. and collected into its three parts by about 200 B.C. and this was the Bible of Jesus and the Apostles.
 - i. Jesus refers to these three parts of the Old Testament in Luke 24: 44
 - ii. Jesus also shows He accepted the whole Old Testament in Luke 11:51 (Matt. 23:35)
 - iii. Every book of the O. T. is either quoted or referred to in the New Testament except Esther and the Song of Solomon. (100's of quotations and references)

So...We accept the same Old Testament books
accepted by Jesus and the apostles!

III. Other Books

- A. The Apocrypha- Greek--"hidden or concealed" (Hard to understand)
 - i. 16 other Jewish religious books around at time of Jesus and N. T. writers
 - ii. The writers of the N.T did not quote from them and they were not recognized as scripture by other Jews. (see note on Jude under "E" below)
 - iii. Early Jewish historians (1st cent.) do not put them in the Canon. (Josephus, Philo)
 - iv. Jesus never mentioned the apocryphal events and they are not included in the historical recounts in the book of Acts.
- B. What are the problems with the Apocrypha?
 - i. They are full of Historical and geographical mistakes (ex. Judith has Nebuchadnezzar living in Nineveh!)
 - ii. They teach false doctrine and things that disagree with the Bible
 - iii. Their literary style is legendary and fantasy. Some stories are grotesque and demonic.
 - iv. They lack the power and distinctive elements of the Word of God.
- C. The History of the Apocrypha and the Bible.
 - i. Literally no one accepted them as inspired before the 4th century, especially the Jews.
 - ii. They were never included on the list of Bible books by the Jews living in Israel. Some Jews living in Alexandria in Egypt accepted them as a part of the Bible
 - iii. Even in Qumran (the place where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found) these books were kept separate from the true Bible books.
 - a) They were written in different style, on different kinds of paper, and kept in different kinds of jars. They were treated like other books, not the Holy Bible.
 - iv. They were only accepted as part of the Catholic Bible at the Council of Trent in 1546. (As a reaction against Luther)
 - a) It seems as if they were seeking a way to prove their existing doctrines such as praying people out of purgatory and the atonement of sins by the giving of money.
 - b) Notice also that the Council was selective in this exercise, because it did not include 2 Esdras, which in its chapter 7:105 speaks *against* prayers for the dead!
 - v. They were accepted by the Orthodox (1638) and Anglican churches as semi-inspired. (not the same as scripture)

- D. The Pseudepigrapha – Greek meaning “false writings” or “false inscriptions”
- i. The pseudepigrapha are books typically written from 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. whose true author is unfounded and the authorship is attributed to a figure of the past.
 - a) These writings differ from the Apocrypha because they are writings that virtually no one accepts.
 - ii. Some of the pseudepigraphical books
 - a) Letter of Aristeas
 - b) Book of Jubilees
 - c) 3 and 4 Maccabees
 - d) Sibylline Oracles
 - e) 1 and 2 Enoch
 - f) Assumption of Moses
 - g) 2 and 3 Baruch
 - h) Life of Adam and Eve
- E. Book of Jude – Does it quote from the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha?
- i. The Assumption of Moses (Jude 9)
 - a) Many scholars, based on the writings of Clement, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origin, and Didymus, assume that Jude 9 is a reference to an apocryphal book called The Assumption of Moses, a work that is extant only in fragmental form (in Latin and in a translation from Greek).
 - b) If Jude intended to reference it, it cannot be determined that Jude actually quoted the apocryphal book, because the material Jude allegedly quoted does not exist.
 - ii. The book of Enoch (Jude 14-15)
 - a) There are sharp variations between the statement allegedly cited by Jude and the actual statement as it appears in Jude.
 - iii. However, let's assume that they are quotes from these apocryphal and pseudepigraphical books.
 - a) This does not mean that these books are inspired in their entirety, but simply only the quoted section can be considered inspired. The truth is the truth no matter who says it!

IV. The Books of the New Testament.

- A. The Christians accepted the same O. T. books as the Jews because they also recognized their inspired quality and because Jesus accepted them.
- B. The New Testament Books were selected the same way as the Old, their inspiration was recognized by believers.
- C. Why were these books collected?
 - i. They were prophetic (written by a prophet or apostle), therefore valuable, and therefore needing to be preserved.
 - ii. They needed to correct the errors of heretics about the word of God.
 - iii. The needs of Missionaries

iv. Persecution

D. There seem to be four general things the collectors looked at:

- i. Was it written by an apostle (or someone close to an apostle like Mark or Luke)
 - a) Eph. 2:20
- ii. Was it authoritative – in other words did it claim to be from God?
 - a) John 16:4, 13 (was it written by the Holy Spirit)
- iii. Did the churches recognize it as scripture?
- iv. Did it conform to sound doctrine? (did it measure up to other scripture)

**The ultimate authority however was the testimony
of God's Spirit in people's hearts.**

E. The apostles recognized each others books as scripture even though when they wrote these, no one knew that they were going to be in the New Testament except for the Holy Spirit.

- i. Peter calls Paul's letters scripture 2 Peter 3:15-16
- ii. Jude 17, 18 quotes 2 Peter 3:2,3 as a word from the apostles.
- iii. 1 Timothy 5:18 quotes Luke 10:7 and calls it scripture.

F. The "Official" Canon was established in the 300's

All of the following approved the same 27 books we have in our Bible. Although there was a New Testament "Bible" already in Syrian and Latin by about 150 A. D. (missing Hebrews, James, and I and II Peter--but if you don't have something you can't translate it!)

Council of Laodicia	363
Athanasius' Easter Letter	367
Synod of Hippo	393
Council of Carthage	397

G. Why did it take so long?

- i. Communication (no telephones, e-mail, good mail service, fax machines, or copy machines in those days!)
- ii. Persecution

Therefore, what is our conclusion? The canonization of the Bible was complete and authoritative and did not include the books of the Apocrypha or the pseudepigrapha. They can be good for insights into Jewish history, but only the Bible should be considered for doctrine and practical Christian life.