

Canonicity/ Transmission (Which Books Belong in the Bible & Why)

CANONICITY: The biblical canon is the collection of scriptural books that God has given his corporate people, which are distinguished by their divine qualities, reception by the collective body, and their apostolic connection, either by authorship or association.

* The word *canon* comes from the Greek κανών, meaning "reed" or "rod" (often used as a measuring stick), the word began to be referred to with the idea of a rule, measure or boundary.

* Thus, we use the word "Canon" to refer to a set of _____

* Though it was written over a period of 1,500 years through the pens of almost 40 human writers - We must understand that **the Bible is actually 1 book with 1 Divine Author,**

* **How do we know what supposed sacred writings were to be included in the canon of Scripture and which ones were to be excluded?**

* We often make the statement: "God's Word is Sufficient" – Inferring our Scriptural Canon Is Sufficient

* It offers all we need for Salvation & Every Good Work

In previous weeks we've shown that:

* God doesn't need to give us further private **revelation** to help us in our walk with Him.

* *II Tim 3:16-17*¹⁶ *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;*¹⁷ *that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

* As the apostle John penned the final words of the last book of the New Testament, he recorded this **warning:** *Rev 22:18-19*¹⁸ *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.*

* Last week we reviewed how God "inspired" the OT Holy Scriptures by using Covenants

* Noahic: Promises the preservation of humanity and provides for the restraint of human evil and violence.

* Abrahamic: God promised Abraham a land, descendants and blessing. This blessing promised to Abraham would extend through him to all the peoples of the earth.

* Mosaic/Priestly: God gave the Law which was meant to govern and shape the people of Israel in the Promised Land. This Law, though not a means of salvation, would distinguish the people from the surrounding nations as a special kingdom of priests. This covenant was conditional and defined blessings and curses based on obedience or disobedience

* Davidic: God promised a descendant of David to reign on the throne over the people of God.

- * It is a continuation of the earlier covenants in that it promises a Davidic king as the figure through whom God would secure the promises of land, descendants, and blessing.
- * This covenant becomes the basis for hope of a Messiah and makes sense of the Gospels' concern to show Jesus is the rightful King of the Jews.
- * It is "Fulfilled" in Christ, though some would argue that the complete fulfillment is still yet future.
- * **New:** This is language first used in Jeremiah's promise of rescue and renewal of the exiled people of God in Babylon.
 - * It promises a coming day when God would make a new covenant.
 - * This coming day would bring forgiveness of sin, internal renewal of the heart, and intimate knowledge of God.
 - * On the night of Jesus's Last Supper, Jesus takes the cup and declares that his death would be the inauguration of this new covenant.
 - * *Luke 22:19-20*¹⁹ *And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."*
 - *²⁰ *Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.*
- * Prophets: Who – _____ – at times _____ – at times served as covenant _____
- * The **OT Canon Closed after the time of _____ and _____**
 - * **Followed by 400 "silent years"** when no prophet spoke God's revelation in any form.
 - * That **silence was broken by John the Baptist** as God spoke as we entered the NT age.
- * When was the current Canon decided?
 - * These books were grouped together by God's people relatively early
 - * The **Old Testament** was settled and stable by the _____
 - * By the _____, the complete canon exactly as we have it today was popularly recognized.
 - * Church councils in the 4th Century verified & made official what the church has universally affirmed, that the 66 books in our Bibles are the only _____ by God.
- * 3 factors were used to ultimately decide which books incorporation into the Canon
 - 1) The writing had to have a recognized _____ or _____ as an author.
 - * Or one closely associated with them – Mark – Luke – James - Jude - Hebrews
 - 2) General Consensus by the _____+ as an inspired book
 - 3) Their _____ qualities: No _____ to previous scriptures
- * Solid Historical Evidence exists that the books in our Bible can be traced directly to
 - * _____/_____

* Or at least to a historical situation where that book could reasonably retain the teachings of an _____/_____.

* We accept the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) as from God because we hold to Moses as the author

* We accept many of the NT books because we see clear evidence that the apostle Paul was the author.

* We accept anonymous books like *Hebrews* because we have good reasons to think the author received his information directly from apostles – and it states the same.

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

* *Heb 13:23*²³ *Know that **our brother Timothy** has been set free, **with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly***

* What questions might be raised about how these books - written by Various Authors - in Different Times – in Different Places - Came to form a single volume?

* We can divide these questions into 2 specific categories: Historical & Theological

* **Historical:**

* When & How

* **Theological**

* Legitimacy & Authority.

Historical Questions

* With regard to the OT, by the _____ All of the OT had been written and accepted in the Jewish community.

* The first-century Jewish historian Josephus offers a list of 22 OT books accepted by the Jews which appears to match our current 39 book collection

* For Josephus, at least, the OT canon seems quite settled: “*For although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured neither to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable*”

* Who Was Josephus? -- Josephus was a Jewish priestly aristocrat born a few years after the crucifixion of Jesus. He became a part of the ruling aristocracy and took part in the Jewish-Roman war of the late 60s which culminated in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70, giving first-hand accounts of the war. He also wrote extensively on the history of the Jewish people from the beginning of time – Thus he followed the biblical record up to his own day.

* Philo of Alexandria hints at a three-fold division to the OT canon:

* The Laws of God * The Sacred Oracles of God (Enunciated by the prophets)

* The Psalms

* This three-fold structure seems to match Jesus’s own words about the OT being composed of *Luke 24:44*⁴⁴ *... the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms ...*

- * Do the NT writers quote writings other than those contained in the OT?
- * As for the NT canon, there appears to be a core collection of scriptural books—approximately 22 out of 27—functioning as Scripture by the middle of the second century.
 - * This core included the four gospels, Acts, 13 Epistles of Paul, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation.
 - * Books that were “disputed” tended to be the smaller books such as 2 Peter, Jude, James, and 2-3 John.
- * Christians were using NT writings as Scripture even before the second century.
 - * Peter refers to Paul’s letters as “Scripture”
 - * II Pet 3:15-16¹⁵ ... as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,¹⁶ as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also **the rest of the Scriptures**.
 - * Several of Paul’s letters were already in circulation & regarded on par with OT books.
 - * Similarly, Paul quoted from Deuteronomy & Luke, affirming both as scripture
 - * 1 Tim 5:8¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “**The laborer is worthy of his wages.**” (Deut 25:4; Luke 10:7)
- * Early in the 2nd Century, the use of NT writings continue – history tells us ...
 - * Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, appears to receive at least the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, as well as 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation, and maybe some of Paul’s epistles.
 - * By the middle of the 2nd Century, Justin Martyr has an established collection of the 4 Gospels that is read in worship alongside OT books.
 - * By the time of Irenaeus, the “Bishop of Lyons” in the late 2nd Century, we see a nearly complete NT canon.
 - * As stated, it consists of about 22 out of the 27 NT books Scripture
 - * Irenaeus quoting them in his own writings over 1,000 times.
- * While it was not until the fourth century that the disputes over some of the peripheral books were resolved, the core of the NT canon was already in place long before.

Divine Qualities

- * If God is genuinely the one who stands behind these books, then we would expect these books to share God’s own qualities.
- * Since we know that the created world is from God by seeing God’s own attributes revealed therein – **General Revelation** (Ps. 19; Rom. 1:20)
 - * We would expect God’s **Special Revelation**, his written word, to do the same.
 - * Beauty and Excellency
 - * Ps 19:8⁸ *The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is **pure**, enlightening the eyes*

* Ps 119:103¹⁰³ *How **sweet are your words** to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.*

* Eccl 3:11¹¹ *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.*

* **Power and Efficacy:** The ability to produce a desired or intended result

* Ps 119:50⁵⁰ *This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life.*

* Heb 4:12-13¹² *For **the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword**, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is **a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart**.*¹³ *And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

* **Unity and Harmony:** The story and promises (prophecy) flow the same throughout?

* Num 23:19¹⁹ *God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*

* Is 46:10¹⁰ *Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure*

* Titus 1:2² *in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began*

* Heb 6:18¹⁸ *that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.*

* Jesus himself declared, John 10:27²⁷ ***My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me***

* Why should we expect non-Christians to reject the divine qualities in Scripture?

Apocrypha (14/16 Books)

* What is the Apocrypha?

* A group of 14/16 writings penned after Malachi and attached to the Old Testament in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament called the Septuagint (LXX) – Also appears today in some versions of the Bible.

* Why aren't the books of the Apocrypha currently included in our Canon?

* During the 400-year intertestamental period, many books appeared, that claimed to be authoritative books authored by God.

* Likewise, there were many, many books written during the New Testament era in the first century – like many books supposedly written by Paul or Peter, that were found to be false.

* These books were never accepted by the general church consciousness, because it was determined, some obviously so, that they were not inspired.

* They are also filled with historical error: Wrong dates that are inconsistent with what we know to be historical.

* **Not a single passage** from the Apocrypha is cited by any New Testament writer, **nor did Jesus affirm any of it** as He recognized the Old Testament canon of His era

* Luke 24:27,44²⁷ *And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. ...*⁴⁴ *Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.**”*

* Jesus quotes from each of the major sections of the OT, affirming God’s authoritative Scripture by basing both doctrine and practice on what it says.

* Moses & the Pentateuch: (Matt 4:1-11, John 3:14; 5:45-47)

* David & the Psalms (Luke 20: 41-44)

* Isaiah (Matt 13:13-15)

* Jonah (Matt 12:39-40) from the Prophets

* The Apostles also quote from the OT in their preaching (Acts 2:17-21, 25-28, 31, 34-35; 3:22, 25; 4:25-26)

* John MacArthur: “The apocrypha is filled with theological error, spiritual and moral error making it apparent to the most cursory reader that they don’t match up. So the church never recognized them at all. But at some point in time, and I can’t even remember what the council was, they put them back in to the center of the Bible; but they have never really stood the test of inspiration. They are not authored by the apostles. They’re 1st & 2nd *Esdras*, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd *Maccabees* and others. They’re not apostolic writings, and they’re not Old Testament prophets either, so they don’t fit any of the criteria. And as I say, the quality of these books do not match the standard of inspired literature.”

Is There More To Come?

* How do we know that God will not amend our current Bible with a 67th inspired book? Is the canon forever closed?

* Scripture texts warn that no one should delete from or add to Scripture (3 in the OT, 1 NT)

1) Deut 4:2² *You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.*

2) Deut 12:32³² *“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.*

3) Prov 30:6⁶ *Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.*

* Certainly, additional canonical books came after these words of warning

* We can only conclude that while no deletions whatsoever were permitted, in fact, authorized, inspired writings were permitted to be added in order to complete the canon protected by those passages.

* The most compelling text on the closed canon is the Scripture to which nothing has been added for over 1,900 years.

4) Rev 22:18-19¹⁸ *For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that 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 Book of Life, from the holy city, & from the things which are written in this book.

* Several significant observations, when taken together, have convinced the church over the centuries that the canon of Scripture is actually closed, never to be reopened.

1) The book of Revelation is unique to the Scripture in that it describes with unequalled detail the end-time events which precede eternity future. As Genesis began Scripture by bridging the gap from eternity past into our time/space existence with the only detailed creation account (Gen. 1, 2), so there was a parallel silence after John delivered Revelation. This also leads to the conclusion that the New Testament canon was then closed.

2) Just as there was prophetic silence after Malachi completed the OT Canon, so there was a parallel silence after John delivered Revelation. This leads to the conclusion that the NT Canon was then closed also.

3) Since there have not been, nor now are, any authorized prophets or apostles in either the OT & NT sense, there are not any potential authors of future inspired, canonical writings. God's Word, Jude 3³ *once for all delivered to the saints*, is never to be added to, but to be earnestly contended for.

4) Of the 4 exhortations not to tamper with Scripture, only the one in Rev 22:18,19 contains warnings of severe Divine judgement for disobedience. Further, Revelation is the only book of the New Testament to end with this kind of admonition and was written over 20 years after any other New Testament book. Therefore, these facts strongly suggest that Revelation was the last book of the canon and that the Bible is complete; to either add or delete would bring God's severe displeasure.

5) Finally, the early church, those closest in time to the apostles, believed that Revelation concluded God's inspired writings, the Scriptures.

* So we can conclude, based on solid Biblical reasoning, that the canon is & will remain closed.

Conclusion

* We can have great confidence in the state of both our OT and NT Canons.

* We know a great deal about the historical processes that brought those canons into existence,

* God has given us ways to recognize the books that are from Him

* Authoritative Authors * Corporate Reception * Divine Qualities