

CANON of SCRIPTURE

Foundations for Life

Who Decided?

- What is Inspired?
- Are any books missing?
- Is our Old Testament the same as Jesus'?
- Is our New Testament the same as the Church Father's?

Canon

- Defined – the list of books officially recognized as Holy Scripture.
- Greek and Hebrew terms mean “reed”
- Used as measuring rod – Canon then means a standard rule, list or index.

Biblical Canon

- Two Canons – Old and New Testaments
- 39 Hebrew books in OT
- 27 Greek books in NT
- 66 Total books
- Divine Authority – based on inspiration
- Canoncity based on general acceptance

Old Testament Canon

- 39 Books
- Accepted since the 4th Century
- Hebrew Bible condensed them in 24 books
 - 12 Minor prophets counted as 1 book
 - Sam, Kings and Chron counted as 1 book
 - Ezra and Neh counted as 1 book
- 3 Divisions: Law, Prophets and Writings

Old Testament Canon

- Law – 5 books of Moses
 - Genesis
 - Exodus
 - Leviticus
 - Numbers
 - Deuteronomy

Old Testament Canon

- Prophets – Former and Latter
 - Former
 - Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings
 - Latter – Major
 - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
 - Latter – Minor
 - The Twelve in one book

Old Testament Canon

- The Writings – Poetical, 5 Scrolls, Historical
 - Poetical
 - Psalms, Proverbs, Job
 - 5 Scrolls
 - Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lam, Ecclesiastes, Esther
 - Historical
 - Dan, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chron

Septuagint

- Greek translation from 180 BC
- Quoted in New Testament
- Name refers to seventy men – 72 translators
- Most accurate translation into common language
- Helped establish order of books
 - Historical, Poetical, Prophetical

Preservation

- Jews entrusted with care (Rom 3:1-2)
- Preserved in tabernacle and temple
- Sealed in 5th Century BC
- From that time – no books were added or deleted

Apocrypha

- Defined – hidden, secretive and concealed
- Jerome in A.D. 340 stated “Anything outside of these must be placed within the Apocrypha.”
- Apocryphal writings – 15 books
- Written from 200 BC to AD 100
- Authors were Alexandrian Jews

Problems with the Apocrypha

- Never accepted by Jews as part of the Hebrew Canon
- Never accepted as canonical by Jesus & the Apostles
- Not accepted by Jewish historians of First Century A.D. – Philo & Josephus
- Not accepted by much of the early church (i.e., Origen, Jerome)
- Not officially accepted by the Roman Catholic Church until the 16th Century A.D.

Official Acceptance of Apocrypha

- Catholic traditions clash with Reformation
- Traditional practices had no Scriptural support
- Martin Luther – “...Give me Scripture”
- Church officially recognized Apocrypha allowing extra-biblical concepts such as:

Extra-Biblical Practices

- Prayers for the dead – II Maccabees 12:44
- The expiatory (atoning for guilt) sacrifice (Mass) – II Maccabees 12:39-46
- Almsgiving with expiatory value (pay money to get forgiven) – Tobit 12:9; 4:10
- Intercession prayers to the Saints – II Maccabees 15:14; Baruch 3:4
- Worship of angels – Tobit 12:12
- Purgatory (redemption of souls after death) – II Maccabees 12:42,46

Council of Trent

- Met with 255 delegates to discuss spiritual matters
- April 8, 1546 – final session of council – 53 remained
- Historical scholars gone – Vatican reps remain
- Brought up Apocrypha and approved it as Scripture
- Ratified in 1869

Scholars Comment

- “The internal as well as the external evidence is overwhelmingly decisive against the canonical claims of the Apocrypha. Their historical, geographical and chronological discrepancies, their inferior moral and spiritual tone in teaching false doctrines and fostering practices contradicting inspired Scripture and their fictional, legendary and artificial characteristics prove conclusively that there is a distinct line of demarcation between the Apocrypha and the canonical books of the Old Testament.”
- *Merril Unger – Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*

New Testament

- Developed over 250 to 300 years
- No single person decided which to include
- Not made at church council
- Gradual process of which to include
- Two categories for decision:
 - Apostolic Teaching (Voice of Christ)
 - Apostolic Authority (Sanctioned by Apostle)

History

- Much being attributed to Apostles – some accurate, some not.
- Church fathers wanted to determine how to distinguish
- Oral traditions began being captured in writing
- Which had been accepted by the most Christian writers, churches and Believers within the guidelines.

History

- Process:
 - First – Accepted by Churches
 - Second – Validated by Church Fathers
 - Finally – Ratified by Church Councils
- Factors included:
 - Revered as Scripture – used in Worship
 - Collected by assemblies
 - Copied for circulation
 - Quoted by early writers

Authority of Canon

- “It is important to emphasize that no church council made the canon of Scripture. No church by its decrees gave to or pronounced on the books of the Bible their infallibility. The Bible owes its authority to no individual or group. The church does not control the canon, but the canon controls the church.”

Neil Lightfoot – How We Got the Bible

New Testament Apocryphal Writing

- Additional writings some think valuable
- Largely rejected:
 - They were classified as heretical writings of the 2nd & 3rd Centuries
 - They were obvious imitators of biblical New Testament genre (Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Apocalypses)
 - They were written by anonymous authors under assumed names
 - There was no connection to the early church Apostles
 - They were often highly imaginative, mystical and fanciful
 - They were never accepted as Holy Scripture by the churches, church Fathers or church councils.

Gnosticism

- Defined – belief in capacity to claim a higher spiritual knowledge and mystical experience.
- Greek – gnosis or knowledge
- Belief - one can be saved through knowledge
- Gnostics thought they had secret knowledge about God others didn't have
- Problems:

Problems with Gnosticism

- Denies incarnation of God as Son
- Denies atonement of Jesus
- God is absentee leader – uses other gods to rule the earth – some good, some not.
- Graduated scale of humanity
 - Higher Knowledge Class
 - Can Be Saved Class (faith plus works)
 - Hopelessly Lost Class

Why Talk About Gnosticism?

- Still active today
 - Mormonism – attainable godhood teaching
 - Roman Catholicism – mystical sacraments and removed God approached through intermediaries
 - Modern Writings
 - Da Vinci Code (Dan Brown)
 - New Earth (Eckhart Tolle)
 - Oprah Winfrey (Jesus discovered within people's consciousness)

Final Thoughts

- Must not base understanding of Jesus on personal experiences and visions
- Must be grounded in Scripture
- Matt 24:4,5,24 – False christs and prophets
- We can trust the Bible – 66 books
- There is no other resource we need – nothing is missing from the Bible, nothing need be added.

Practical Exercise

- How would you answer someone who doubts the completeness of the Bible?
- What filters could you use to evaluate modern texts and speakers regarding Biblical truth?
- A friend uses a Bible with the Apocrypha included in the text. How would you answer their question as to why your Bible doesn't include the text?

