

The Canon

1. The Bible is our starting point. God revealed himself in a limited number of writings. In the Bible he identifies which books should be included in the Bible.
2. In the OT the writings of Moses made up the foundation upon which all subsequent revelation (the Prophets and the Writings) was based. Thus, the warning not to add to or subtract from Scripture comes near the end of Moses' works (Deut. 12:32), not in the book of Malachi.
3. Although the OT was written at different times by many men using various literary genres, etc., the OT is fundamentally one book (Ps. 40:7; Isa. 34:16). As God gave new revelation, it was included in that book (Exod. 17:14; Josh. 24:26). What the prophets wrote was therefore canonical at the time it was written. Only prophets appointed by God could add to that book, and only what they added to the book was canonical.
4. The continuity or succession of prophets is demonstrated in the fact that each new prophet "completed" the work of his predecessor. Moses wrote Deuteronomy, but he couldn't have written its last chapter because the last chapter records his death (Deut. 34:1–12). Joshua finished Deuteronomy and then he went on to write his own book. Again, the last chapter of his book, which records his death (Josh. 24:28–31), was written by the author of Judges/Ruth (probably Samuel). Likewise, the genealogy of David found in Ruth 4:21–22 was likely written by the author of Samuel and Kings (probably Jeremiah). Note the similarity in the last four verses of 2 Kings (25:27–30) and the last four verses of Jeremiah (52:31–34). Ezra wrote at least the conclusion to 2 Chronicles (cf. 2 Chron. 26:22–23 with Ezra 1:1–3), if not the whole book.
5. As the OT was about to close, the prophets predicted that God would speak again when the prophet like unto Moses arrives (Joel 2:28–32). They also predicted that this additional revelation would be temporary and limited (Dan. 9:24–27).
6. The OT canon closed with the death of the last prophet, that is, about the time of Ezra and Malachi (about 425 BC).
7. Many other books are mentioned in the OT, but they were not considered canonical because they were not included in the book: the book of the wars of the Lord (Numb. 21:14), the book of Jashar (Josh 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18), another book of Samuel on the kingdom (1 Sam. 10:25), the chronicles of David (1 Chron. 27:24), the book of the acts of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41), Solomon's 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs (1 Kings 4:32), Solomon's writings on botany and zoology (1 Kings 4:33), the book of Samuel the Seer (1 Chron. 29:29), the book of Nathan the prophet (1 Chron. 29:29; 2 Chron. 9:29), the book of Shemaiah the prophet (2 Chron. 12:15), the book of Gad the seer (1 Chron. 29:29), the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite (2 Chron. 9:29), the visions of Iddo the seer (2 Chron. 9:29; 12:15), the story of Iddo (2 Chron. 13:22), Isaiah's history of Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:22), the book of Jehu the son of Hanani (2 Chron. 20:34), and the book of the kings of Israel (1 Kings 14:19; 2 Chron. 20:34; 33:18).
8. NT revelation focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ, just as the OT was based on the writings of Moses (Heb. 3:1–6). Jesus Christ was also the one who communicated this revelation (Heb. 1:1).
9. The NT Scriptures, which quote the OT more than 1600 times, were seen as the continuation of the OT from the time they were first given. In fact, the NT picked up exactly where the OT ended, viz., with the prophecies of Malachi concerning the Messiah's forerunner (cf. Mal. 3:1; 4:5–6 and Luke 1:16–17). Thus, the NT Scriptures were regarded as *in this book* (Rev. 22:18–19) just as much as the OT Scriptures were.

10. Jesus spoke through his *apostles* (ἀπόστολος) in the NT. The apostles, like the prophets of the OT, were sent to speak and to act in the name of the sender (Matt. 10:40; John 13:20). Their authority came from Jesus Christ, who had received his authority from his Father. They testified as *witnesses* (μάρτυς) of what they had seen and heard. Therefore, their teachings, particularly those given in Scripture, constituted the *traditions* (παράδοσις) of the church (1 Cor. 11:2; 15:1–4; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6).

11. The NT authenticates itself as follows:

- Jesus told Peter that he would build his church on Peter's confession (Matt. 16:16–19).
- Peter was the first to preach the gospel after the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2). He also wrote two books to be included in the book (1 and 2 Peter).
- In 2 Peter 1:19, Peter affirmed that we now have a confirmed prophetic word — the New Testament (2 Pet. 1:19). The pronoun *we* probably refers to himself and John, the last surviving apostles. Thus, he approved of John's writings (his gospel, three epistles and Revelation).
- Peter authorized the writing of his memoirs, which, according to the early church fathers, was the gospel of Mark (2 Pet. 1:14–15).
- Peter also authenticated Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15–16).
- Paul authenticated the writings of Luke, viz., Luke and Acts (1 Tim. 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7; Acts 1:1).
- The fact that Peter authorized Mark's gospel and Paul approved of Luke's also gives us Matthew's gospel, which agrees with Mark and Luke.
- In Gal. 2:9 Paul says that James was one of the pillars. James had written his epistle earlier to counter a possible misunderstanding of the Jerusalem Council. His work is fundamental to the NT message.
- Hebrews is an explanation of the transition from the old to the new covenant in Christ based on Jer. 31:31–34. Jesus had earlier tied the inauguration of the NT to the shedding of his blood (Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25). Paul also addressed this in 2 Cor. 3:6–18.
- 2 Pet. 1:19 seems to indicate that the NT canon was mostly complete when Peter wrote. The confirmed word of prophecy had been made available to the church. 2 Peter was probably the next to the last NT book to have been written.
- Jude 3 closed the canon. The faith had been once and for all delivered. Here the word translated *delivered* is a verbal form of the word translated *traditions* (παράδοσις).

12. Because the NT books were not physically part of the one book (although they included in it in principle) and therefore not available to all the churches at once, NT prophets were given the responsibility to recognize the canonical text of the apostles (1 Cor. 14:37). These prophets were present in all the churches (Acts 20:23). The early church copied and circulated the books that it received as canonical (Col. 4:16).

13. The writings of first-century Jews and early church fathers demonstrate that they understood the process of canonization, including the central role of prophets and apostles as God's spokesmen. But they did not determine what was canonical. They merely recognized what was already there.

14. The OT apocrypha was written after the close of the OT canon and is therefore not part of Scripture. Likewise, the NT apocrypha was written after the close of the NT canon.

15. Since the canon of NT was closed with the death of the last apostle, there is no possibility of adding a "lost NT book." Even if we were to find Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9) or his letter to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16), we would not include them in the Bible because they were not recognized as having been included in the book in the first place.