

## **THE CANONISATION OF THE BIBLE**

- As the Bible was being written down, numerous other religious writings were also being produced.
- In some cases, these writings consisted of heretical c\_\_\_\_\_ published in the name of an apostle and intended to deceive (**2 Thessalonians 2:2**).
- In other cases, these writings were by authors who were generally trustworthy men — men such as Jewish patriots, Rabbinical scribes, historians and Church Fathers — whose religious writings were historically accurate and even edifying.
- The question is: “WHICH WRITINGS WERE G\_\_\_\_\_ SCRIPTURE?”
- The process of canonisation answered this question.

### **I. THE MEANING OF “CANON” AND “CANONICITY”**

- The word canon comes from the Greek word kanon (‘kanon’) — a r\_\_\_\_\_.
- It also conveys the idea of:
  - i. a measure — a test, a straight-edge, a critical standard
  - ii. that which has been measured — a fixed amount, a defined limit.
- The word “canon,” as applied to the scriptures means:
  - i. The rules or standards by which each Book in the Bible was measured to determine its admission to the sacred collection.
  - ii. The name given to the collection of Books which measured up to the applied rules or standards.
- Canonisation is the process of determining which writings “m\_\_\_\_\_ u\_\_\_\_\_” as genuine scripture.
- It is important to understand that canonisation was only m\_\_\_\_\_ recognition of a Book’s God-given authority and NOT man giving that Book its divine a\_\_\_\_\_.

### **II. THE STANDARDS, OR TESTS, OF CANONICITY**

- The process of canonisation involved the “interplay of subjective and objective factors, overruled by divine providence.”
- There were basically four tests (canons) applied to determine the canonicity of a Book:

**1.** W\_\_\_\_\_

- Was the writer God's appointed man?
  - i. With The Old Testament — was the writer a prophet of God?
  - ii. With The New Testament — was the writer an apostle?
- The apostles were "eye-witnesses" (Luke 1:2; 2 Peter 1:16) and had received the promise of inspiration through the Holy Spirit (John 14:26)
- Did the writer live in the apostolic age?
- The apocryphal "Shepherd of Hermas" was rejected by most Christians on the grounds that it was written after the death of the apostle John.

**2.** THE C\_\_\_\_\_

- Do the contents have life?  
Are they life-giving?  
Are they edifying?  
Do they stand apart in their spiritual character?
- John 8:32; 2 Timothy 3:15,16b; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:2
- Is the narrative historically accurate?

**3.** A\_\_\_\_\_

- Was there a widespread acceptance of the Book by God's people?
- This test applied especially to the Books of the New Testament.

**4.** I\_\_\_\_\_ AND A\_\_\_\_\_

- Does the Book bear the hallmarks of inspiration? Is there a "thus saith the Lord" quality about it? Are its contents authentic? Does it have the stamp of divine authority? Is it without fable or factual error?
- Each of these tests, while not necessarily conclusive in and of themselves, together bear testimony to the real written Word of God.

**III. SPECIALISED TERMS USED IN A DISCUSSION OF CANONISATION**

- Canonisation is a p\_\_\_\_\_.
- During that process, a great number of "pretenders" were instantly rejected by everyone as being false.
- However, there were also a small number of Books that were not immediately received by everyone as being part of the Word of God.

- There are certain canonical terms that are used to classify these books:
  - i. HOMOLOGOUMENA — “canonical books accepted by all.”
  - ii. ANTILEGOMENA — “canonical books disputed by some.”
  - iii. APOCRYPHA — “spurious books accepted by some.”
  - iv. PSEUDEPIGRAPHA — “spurious books rejected by all.”

#### **IV. THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON**

##### **1. THE HISTORY OF OLD TESTAMENT CANONISATION**

- The Old Testament canon was formed progressively as the Books were written down and received by the nation of Israel.
- This is evidenced by the immediate reception of:
  - i. the Law (**Exodus 24:3**)
  - ii. Joshua (**Joshua 24:26,27**)
  - iii. Samuel (**1 Samuel 10:25**)
  - iv. Jeremiah (**Daniel 9:2**)
- There were not three separate canonising periods, as claimed by Higher Critics.
- Deuteronomy was not canonised in Josiah’s time, as some believe **2 Kings 22:8** and **23:1,2** teaches.
- In this case, a long lost Book — already recognised as authoritative — was found.
- For the same reasons, Ezra did not canonise any Book (**Neh 8:1-3**).

##### **2. NON-CANONICAL WRITINGS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PERIOD**

- Some religious and historical writings are mentioned in the Old Testament, but these were not given by inspiration of God and hence were never received as authoritative scripture.
- For example:
 

<b>Numbers 21:14</b>	-	The Wars of the LORD
<b>Joshua 10:13</b>	-	Jasher
<b>1 Kings 11:41</b>	-	The Acts of Solomon
<b>2 Chronicles 12:15</b>	-	The Book of Shemaiah
<b>2 Chronicles 13:22</b>	-	The Story of the Prophet Iddo
<b>2 Chronicles 20:34</b>	-	The Book of Jehu
<b>2 Chronicles 33:18</b>	-	The Kings of Israel

### 3. THE EXTENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

- This a very controversial subject because of the “apocrypha question.”
- However, scripture itself defines the limit of the Old Testament canon.
- Christ established the extent of the Old Testament canon in **Matthew 23:35 (Luke 11:51)**.
- This verse speaks of the blood of Old Testament martyrs from Abel (**Genesis 4:8**) to Zechariah (**2 Chronicles 24:20,21**).
- Since the Hebrew Old Testament begins with the Book of Genesis and ends with the Book of Chronicles, this statement is like us saying “from Genesis to Malachi.”
- New Testament quotations and references to the Old Testament also set the bounds of the canon.

### 4. PROOFS FOR CANONICAL AUTHORITY OF OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

- The acceptance of the 39 Books of the Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God by the people of Israel is demonstrated by:
  - A. The R\_\_\_\_\_ Placement Of The Books
    - i. The Law was kept inside and beside the ark of the covenant (**Deut 31:24-26; Joshua 24:26; 1 Sam 10:25**)
    - ii. The Law was later kept in the temple at Jerusalem (**2 Kings 22:8**)
  - B. The R\_\_\_\_\_ Of The Authority Of The Books
    - i. The Law of Moses was to be read publicly every seven years (**Deuteronomy 31:10-13**)
    - ii. Joshua was commanded to read, meditate upon, and teach the Law (**Joshua 1:7,8**)
    - iii. The kings of Israel (and Judah) were commanded to keep a copy of the Law, and to govern by it (**Deuteronomy 17:14,18-20**)
    - iv. When the Law was read and obeyed, blessing and revival from God followed (**2 Chron 15:1-15; 2 Chron 34:14,15,29,30; Neh 8–10**)
    - v. When the Law and the Prophets were neglected and disobeyed, judgment and captivity followed (**2 Chronicles 36:12,16-21**)

- vi. The Prophets were held in the same esteem, and given the same respect as the Law (2 Kings 17:13)
- vii. The quotations of Old Testament passages by other Old Testament writers demonstrates their acceptance of them as holy scripture.

- C. The R\_\_\_\_\_ To Them By The New Testament
  - This has been covered in Lesson 5.

#### 5. THE ANTILEGOMENA (canonical Books disputed by some)

- The Pharisaical “School of Shammai,” and later, a Jewish council convened at Jabneh in 90 A.D., questioned whether some of the Books in the Old Testament were in fact canonical.
- There were five Old Testament Books that have been classified by some as antilegomena.
- These are:
  - A. Song Of Solomon
    - Disputed by some because of its sensual language.
    - However, not only does this blessed Book promote the sanctity and purity of marriage — but it also pictures the relationship between the “altogether lovely” Lord Jesus Christ and His own and His churches.
  - B. E\_\_\_\_\_
    - Disputed by some because of its so-called skeptical language.
    - This is really a problem of interpretation rather than canonisation, for the Book is written from the standpoint of life “under the sun.”
    - Its conclusion, however, is very spiritual (Ecc 12:1,13,14)
  - C. E\_\_\_\_\_
    - Disputed by some because of the absence of the word “God” or any divine title or personal pronoun referring to God.
    - Regardless, of all the Books in God’s Word the presence and providence of God is most apparent in Esther.
  - D. E\_\_\_\_\_
    - Disputed because of some perceived discord with the Law of Moses.
    - No examples have been forth-coming.

E. P\_\_\_\_\_

- Disputed because of a supposed contradiction between **Proverbs 26:4** and **5**.
- Again, simply a matter of interpretation and understanding!

**6. THE APOCRYPHA (spurious books accepted by some)**

- The word “apocrypha” means “h\_\_\_\_\_” or “c\_\_\_\_\_,” but after c.450 A.D. the word came to refer to the non-canonical books, especially those of the Old Testament period.
- Consideration of the Apocrypha usually centres around the highly contentious issue of a\_\_\_\_\_ books contained in Roman Catholic bibles, and, more increasingly, in several modern Protestant versions.

**A. The Nature Of The Apocrypha**

- The official Apocrypha consist of 15 books of Jewish literature written during the i\_\_\_\_\_t\_\_\_\_\_ period.
- Some of them have historic value, but all are:
  - i. spurious
  - ii. of unknown authorship
  - iii. without claim of inspiration or authority
- Some are legendary and fantasy.
- All extant copies of the Apocrypha are written in Greek.

**B. The List Of The Apocrypha**

- The following list gives the books referred to as Apocrypha:
 

Wisdom of Solomon	Ecclesiasticus
Tobit	1 Esdras
1 Maccabees	2 Maccabees
Judith	Baruch
Letter of Jeremiah	2 Esdras
Additions to the Book of Esther	Susanna
Bel and the Dragon	The Prayer of Manasseh
Prayer of Azariah (aka “Song of the Three Holy Children)	

**C. The Acceptance Of The Apocrypha**

- As a general summary:
  - i. The Jews do not a\_\_\_\_\_ the Apocrypha as part of their scriptures.

- ii. Protestants do not accept the Apocrypha as scripture, though some ascribe v\_\_\_\_\_ to them as “good and useful reading” and “for example of life and instruction of manners.”
  - iii. The Roman Catholic Church in effect accepts 12 of the apocryphal books as canonical (omitting I & II Esdras and the Prayer of Mannaseh from the above list).
- D. The Council Of Trent.
- The Apocrypha were officially canonised by the Roman Catholic ‘Church’ on April 8, 1546 A.D. at the Council Of Trent.
  - The Council Of Trent was actually a series of three ‘Church’ councils held between 1545 and 1563 A.D. and dominated by the newly-formed Jesuits.
  - It was called as an integral part of the counter-Reformation to counteract the Protestant Reformation that had begun 28 years earlier (sparked by Martin Luther).
  - One of the catch-cries of the Protestant Reformation was “sola-Scriptura” — “the Bible alone!!”
  - In order for the Roman Catholics to be able to say the same thing, the Apocrypha were added to give “scriptural” proof for their false teachings.
  - The resolution of the Council was: “...if anyone receives not as sacred and canonical the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church ... let him be anathema [accursed!].”
  - Some of the unscriptural Catholic doctrines supported by the Apocrypha are:
    - i. Purgatory (2 Maccabees 12:39-46)
    - ii. Salvation through Almsgiving (Ecclesiasticus 3:33)
  - Other unscriptural teachings found in the apocryphal books are:
    - i. the justification of suicide (2 Maccabees 14:43-46)
    - ii. slavery and cruelty (Ecclesiasticus 33:24-28)
    - iii. reincarnation (Wisdom of Solomon 8:19-20)
    - iv. lying, assassination, and magical incantations are also approved of

- The Rheims-Douay Version (1582 A.D.) contains a total of 73 books.
- It adds the “Additions” to Esther, the “Prayer of Azariah” and “Bel” to Daniel, and combines the “Letter of Jeremiah” with “Baruch” — thereby effectively incorporating 12 of the 15 apocryphal books into the Roman Catholic Old Testament.
- The Council of Trent was selective in this exercise because it did not include 2 Esdras which, in its chapter 7:105, speaks against prayers for the dead!

## 7. ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE CANONICITY OF THE APOCRYPHA

- A. They are not, and have never been, part of the Jewish canon.
- B. They were never quoted or alluded to by Jesus Christ or any of the apostles.
- C. Most Church Fathers rejected them.
- D. None of the apocryphal writings claim inspiration or divine authority.
- E. Many of the apocryphal books contain historical, geographical, and chronological e\_\_\_\_\_.
- F. Many of the apocryphal books teach h\_\_\_\_\_, contrary to the Word of God.
- G. Their literary style is often legend and fantasy.
- H. They lack the power and distinctive elements of the Word of God.

## 8. THE PSEUDEPIGRAPHA — spurious books rejected by all.

- Otherwise known as the “Wider Apocrypha,” these are:
  - i. Spurious writings usually ascribed to Old Testament characters.
  - ii. Books written between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D.
  - iii. Books which have never been accepted as canonical by anyone.

- There are numerous such writings, but the more well known are as follows:

Enoch	Testament of Job
Book of Noah	Secrets of Enoch
Apocalypse of Baruch	Testament of Solomon
2 Baruch	Penitence of Jannes & Jambres
3 Baruch	Martyrdom of Isaiah
Assumption of Moses	Letter of Aristeas

Revelation of Moses	Psalms of Solomon
Prophecy of Jeremiah	18 Greek Psalms
Apocalypse of Zephaniah	Addition to the Psalter
Apocalypse of Elijah	Psalms 151
Apocalypse of Esdras	3 Syriac Psalms
Sibylline Oracle	Magic Books of Moses
Book of Adam and Eve	Story of Ahikar
Book of Jubilees	3 Maccabees
Testament of Abraham	4 Maccabees
Apocalypse of Abraham	Pirke Aboth
Testaments of the Patriarchs	Zadokite Fragment
Life of Asenath	

## V. **THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON**

### 1. THE HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

#### A. The Writing Of The New Testament Books

- The New Testament Books were recorded under divine inspiration between 50 A.D. (probably Matthew or James) and 95 A.D. (The Revelation).
- The great mark of canonicity was their a\_\_\_\_\_.
- Apostles were eye-witnesses

(Luke 1:2; 1 John 1:3; 2 Peter 1:16; Acts 2:42)

#### B. The Collection Of The New Testament Books

- The scriptures were being circulated as early as 65 A.D.  
(Col 4:16; Revelation 1:11; James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1)
- The Canon was obviously being compiled before 70 A.D. - the destruction of Jerusalem.  
(2 Peter 3:15,16; Jude 17)
- Clement of Rome (c.96 A.D.) quotes or cites Matthew, Luke, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, and 1 John in his writings.
- The Epistle of Barnabas (c.100 A.D.) in quoting from Matthew refers to it as scripture.

- The Didache (c.100 A.D.), Polycarp (69-155 A.D.), Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.), and the second Epistle of Clement (c. 130 A.D.) quote from many of the New Testament books.
- Therefore, we may conclude that, like the Old Testament, the Books of the New Testament were “canonised” as they were written and circulated.

#### C. The Need For A Formal Canon

- The need for an “official,” universally recognised and accepted collection of Books came about for the following reasons:
  - i. The rise of h\_\_\_\_\_ (Judaism and Gnosticism) required the use of defined scripture to contend for the faith.
  - ii. The formation of s\_\_\_\_\_ canons by Judaistic sects (pro-Petrine, anti-Pauline,) and the canon of the gnostic Marcion of Sinope (c.140 A.D.) — who countered the inroads of Judaism by compiling a New Testament consisting only of parts of Luke and 10 Pauline epistles — required a standard list.
  - iii. P\_\_\_\_\_
    - The emperor Diocletian issued an edict in 303 A.D. ordering the burning of the Christian scriptures.
    - Christians naturally desired to defend and preserve their Bibles.
    - What, then, were these Scriptures?
  - iv. The e\_\_\_\_\_ of non-canonical writings — both noble (Luke 1:1) and ignoble (2 Thes 2:2 cf. 3:17) — required a canon.

#### D. The Formation Of The New Testament Canon

- The New Testament was canonised by Christians, churches, and Councils.
- It was compiled almost immediately, and was formally settled between 200 and 400 A.D.
- Because the scope of Christianity was the world, due to geographical (and sometimes theological) reasons, some early compilations of the New Testament did not contain all 27 Books.
- In general terms:

- i. Western (Latin) Christendom — R\_\_\_\_\_
  - By 200 A.D., 22 Books were well accepted.
  - The greatest difficulty came in accepting the Book of Hebrews (finished work of Christ).
- ii. Eastern (Greek-Egyptian) Christendom — A\_\_\_\_\_
  - The Book of The Revelation was resisted by this “spiritualising” school.
- iii. Eastern Syrian Christendom — A\_\_\_\_\_
  - The Old Syriac Version (the original Peshitta Bible) omitted **2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.**
- From history we see:
  - i. The Synod of Laodicea (363 A.D.) forbade the reading of non-canonical Books.
    - Therefore by this time the New Testament canon must have been finalised.
  - ii. The first complete listing of the 27 New Testament Books was given by Athanasius in an Easter letter written in 367 A.D.
    - This does not mean the canon had not been settled earlier — it is the earliest-known list!
  - iii. The Council of Hippo (393 A.D.) decreed the 27 Book canon.
  - iv. The Synod of Carthage (397 A.D.) forbade the reading of anything but the New Testament in churches.
  - v. The Council of Carthage (419 A.D.) re-affirmed the New Testament canon.

## 2. NEW TESTAMENT ANTILEGOMENA

- As noted above, some of the Books in the New Testament did not receive ready acceptance by all churches and leaders (Fathers).
- Seven Books were the subject of dispute until the middle of the 4TH century A.D.
- They were:

- A. H\_\_\_\_\_
- Disputed because of its anonymity, but also because it taught against the burgeoning idea of a priestcraft and a sacrifice that was promoted by Cyprian (200-258 A.D.), the “father of corrupt ecclesiology.”
- B. J\_\_\_\_\_
- Disputed because of its supposed conflict with the writings of Paul.
  - **Romans 1:17c. vs. James 2:17**
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- Disputed because of differences in style with 1 Peter — or was it because it deals with the expanding heresy (**2 Pet 2:1-3:4**)?!?
- D. \_\_\_\_\_
- Disputed because of anonymity and their private nature.
  - They also warned against Arianism (**2 John 9**) and Sacerdotalism (**3 John 9,10**)
- E. J\_\_\_\_\_
- Disputed because it quotes from the Book of Enoch. It actually does not quote from Enoch, but cites Enoch.
  - Furthermore, the pseudepigraphal Enoch is probably of later date than Jude.
  - Jude takes the strongest stand against heresy and heretics, and there were many of them in the first four centuries A.D.!
- F. R\_\_\_\_\_
- Disputed because of its premillennial teaching.
  - This Book buries St. Augustine’s “City Of God,” which established the twin errors of Post- and A-millennialism.

### 3. NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

- The following non-canonical writings were accepted by some of the Church Fathers, and found their way into some collections of the Bible:

Epistle of Barnabas	Shepherd of Hermas
Epistles of Clement	Epistle to Corinthians
The Didache	Apocalypse of Peter
Acts of Paul & Thecla	Epistle to the Laodiceans

Gospel of The Hebrews    Epistle of Polycarp  
Epistles of Ignatius

**4. NEW TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA**

- These are writings that claim to have been written by New Testament people.
- They have never been accepted by anyone as canonical.
- A partial listing is as follows:
  - A. False G\_\_\_\_\_
    - There are 21 false Gospels, including those ascribed to Andrew, Bartholomew, Barnabas, Matthias, Thomas, Peter, Philip, a pseudo- Matthew, and Nicodemus.
    - Many of these teach fantastic things such as childhood miracles of Christ (cf. [John 2:11](#)), Mariolatry, and salvation by legal observance.
  - B. False A\_\_\_\_\_
    - There are eight false Acts — attributed to John, Paul, Peter, Andrew, Thomas, Matthias, Philip, and Thaddæus.
    - These give legendary accounts of the apostles.
  - C. False E\_\_\_\_\_
    - There are four false epistles.
  - D. False A\_\_\_\_\_
    - There are seven false prophetic writings, including the extremely gnostic Revelation of Peter (which is included in Codex D), and the Revelations of Paul, Thomas, Stephen, and John the Theologian.

**5. THE PROOFS OF NEW TESTAMENT CANONICAL AUTHORITY**

- The 27 Books making up our New Testament stand apart as the Word of God because:
  - A. They were written by i\_\_\_\_\_ apostles and prophets belonging to the apostolic age.
  - B. They stand on a superior plane of a\_\_\_\_\_ to all other writings.
  - C. They bear w\_\_\_\_\_ to their divine origin.