

# THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

## Definition

The word canon comes from the Greek word *kanon* meaning a straight reed used for measuring rod. Also used for a standard of faith or practice. The canon of scripture is the list of all the books and letters that are deemed to be inspired by God and therefore belong in the Bible. Over the centuries orthodox Christianity only recognized the 66 Books and letters found in our Bibles, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

The canon of Scripture tells the whole story from creation to the eternal state with Jesus Christ (Messiah) being the central theme.

## The Old Testament Canon

The O.T. was written over a period of about 1000 years.

- Moses completed the Pentateuch in 1405 BC.
- Ezra most likely established the O.T. canon in the fifth century BC after returning from captivity. – Ezra 7:6-10, 8:1-12

The O.T. canon begins with the six days of creation and concludes with the prophecy of the forerunner to the promised Messiah. – Malachi 3:1, 4:5-6

- Compare with Luke 1:17 & Mat. 11:7-15

At the time of Christ a fixed collection of books was recognized as the canon of what we call the Old Testament.

- Josephus (1<sup>st</sup> century historian) noted 22 divinely inspired books in the Hebrew canon. Later Jewish writings typically listed 24 books.

### The Hebrew Canon (according to the Talmud)

The Law	The Prophets	The Writings
Genesis	Joshua	Ruth *
Exodus	Judges *	Psalms
Leviticus	Samuel	Job
Numbers	Kings	Proverbs
Deuteronomy	Jeremiah **	Ecclesiastes
	Ezekiel	Song of Songs
	Isaiah	Lamentations **
	Twelve Minor Prophets	Daniel
		Esther
		Ezra – Nehemiah
		Chronicles

Note: Among all the recorded disputes between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, the question of the canon was never debated. The disputes were over the Leaders not following the teachings of Scripture. Example: Mat. 15:1-9, 23:1-36

- Jesus confirmed the O.T. – Mat. 5:17-18 & Luke 24:13-27
  - Compare with Mat. 5:21-48
- From a Christian perspective, the 39 books comprising the O.T. canon were settled by Jesus and the apostles by their acceptance of them.

### **The New Testament Canon**

The N.T. canon was written over a period of approximately fifty years.

- It consists of 27 books and letters written by 8 or 9 men depending on who wrote Hebrews.

The criteria for N.T. canonicity:

- Apostolic authorship = Matthew, John, Paul, Peter
- Close associates of the apostles = Mark, Luke, James, Jude
  - Mark had a close relationship with Peter (1Peter 5:13) and Paul (2Tim. 4:11)
  - Luke had a close relationship with Paul (2Tim. 4:11)
    - Compare 1Tim. 5:18 with Luke 10:7
  - James was the oldest half-brother of Jesus ((Mat. 13:55) and an elder in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:1-20, Gal. 1:19 & 2:9
  - Jude was the brother of James (Jude 1) and the youngest half-brother of Jesus (Mat. 13:55)
- All documents must have consistent doctrinal agreement with all existing scripture.
- All books and letters have universal acceptance by the people of God.

### **What About The Apocrypha?**

The term "apocrypha" comes from the Greek meaning "hidden" or "secret". The Apocrypha consists of 14 books that were in a separate section in those Bibles that did not omit them entirely. The books of the Apocrypha were written in the 400-year silent period between the postexilic period of Israel, Malachi being the last prophet, and the birth of Messiah. The ancient Jewish writers did not recognize it as equal with the Scriptures. The majority opinion in the early church was that the Apocrypha was not part of scripture. But as time went on and the church weakened the Apocrypha gained in popularity. In 1546 at the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church declared them as part of its canon.

Josephus wrote: "From Artaxerxes to our times a complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets." The "complete history" referred to are those books written after Malachi the last recognized prophet.