

Equipping Hour

Bible 101, part 3

Canonization

What will we be looking at over 5 weeks?

- 1) **The Importance of a Right Bibliology.** (part 1: 8-11-19)
- 2) **Inspiration** - How was the Bible written?
- 3) **Canonization** - How were the various books of the Bible collected and placed together in one book? Did we get it right? Are there missing books? Are there books in the Bible that should not be there?
- 4) **Preservation** - Has the Bible been handed down to us faithfully? Whose job is it to make sure the Bible is preserved accurately?
- 5) **Textual Criticism** - Since the original manuscripts of the Bible do not exist, how do we know for sure that our copies of copies of copies accurately represent the originals? Textual criticism is the science of re-creating the original manuscripts.

A little experiment, continued:

An evangelistic encounter:

Canonization

Canon comes from a word (κανών) which means “that which is measured.” It refers to the collection and acceptance of the books of the Bible and the rejection of those which are not Scripture.

How did the 66 books of the Bible come to be included in the Bible?
Why do we have just 66 books? And why do we have these 66 books?

Properly speaking, a discussion of the canon is really a continuation of last week’s discussion about inspiration.

The bottom line up front:

A book is canonical if, and only if, it is God-breathed.

Any portion of Scripture was canonical the very moment it was written.

Canonicity reflects the very nature of the Scriptures; canonicity is not a status granted to the books of the Bible by an external authority.

The church does not create the canon. The church recognizes, submits to, and has the responsibility to preserve, the canon.

Old Testament Canonization

Events of Old Testament canon formation:

- God scribed the “Ten Words”; Moses placed them in the ark (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 10:5).

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- Moses wrote the first five books (Deuteronomy 31:24-26) and had them placed beside the ark.
- Joshua wrote "words in the book of the law of God" (Joshua 24:26; cf. Deut.4:2 and 12:32).
- Successive writers:
 - 1 Samuel 10:25
 - 1 Chronicles 29:29
 - 2 Chronicles 20:34; 26:22; 32:32
 - Jeremiah 30:2
- Malachi probably the last writer in 435 B.C., roughly concurrent with the last OT history books – Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.
- 400 Silent Years (Malachi's prophecy of JTB in Malachi 4:5 and Matthew 11:10)

Literature during this time affirms Scriptural silence.

1 Maccabees 9:27 Common English Bible (CEB)

So there was great distress in Israel, the worst since the time when prophets ceased to appear among them.

1 Maccabees 14:41 Common English Bible (CEB)

The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise.

Josephus (Jewish historian who lived 37-100 A.D.), *Contra Apion*, 1:37–42:

"Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but two and twenty, and contain the record of all time. Of these, five are the books of Moses, comprising the laws and the traditional history from the birth of man down to the death of the lawgiver. . . . The prophets subsequent to Moses wrote the history of the events of their own times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life."

Wait?! Aren't there 39 OT books?

Why are they often numbered as 24? or 22?

Single scrolls often combined OT books.

Judges and Ruth

Jeremiah and Lamentations

Samuel

Kings

Chronicles

The Twelve (minor prophets)

Ezra and Nehemiah

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- Intertestamental works (the Apocrypha) not in Hebrew Bible but in LXX and RCC Bibles.
 - 1 Esdras (150 B.C.)
 - 2 Esdras (100 B.C.)
 - Tobit (200 B.C.)
 - Judith (150 B.C.)
 - The Rest of Esther (140-130 B.C.)
 - The Wisdom of Solomon (30 B.C.)
 - Ecclesiasticus (132 B.C.)
 - Baruch (150-50 B.C.)
 - The Epistle of Jeremiah (300-100 B.C.)
 - The Song of the Three Holy Children,
aka, The Prayer of Azariah (2nd/1st Century B.C.)
 - Susanna (2nd/1st Century B.C.)
 - Bel and the Dragon (100 B.C.)
 - The Prayer of Manasseh (2nd/1st Century B.C.)
 - 1 and 2 Maccabees (110 B.C.)

The Old Testament Canon in Jesus' day:

- Jews of Jesus' day viewed the OT Canon as we do today.
 - Mt 23:34-35 and Lk 11:49-51 (this captures the swath of OT history from Genesis to 2 Chronicles)
- Jesus quotes parts of the OT as Scripture nearly 300 times.
 - Jesus affirmed the historical reliability of the OT (Mt 10:15; 19:3-5; 12:40; 24:38-39)
 - Jesus affirmed the prophetic accuracy of the OT (Mt 26:54)
 - Jesus affirmed the sufficiency of the OT (Lk 16:31)
 - Jesus affirmed the unity of the OT (Lk 24:27, 44)
 - Jesus affirmed the inerrancy of the OT (Mt 22:29; Jn 10:35; 17:17)
 - Jesus affirmed the authority of the OT (Mt 21:13, 16, 42)
(these 6 affirmations compiled by Nate Busenitz)
- Not a single citation from the Apocrypha.
- No Apocryphal book is even mentioned in the NT.
- No other works referenced as if they had divine authority.

The Old Testament Canon in church history:

- Melito – the earliest Christian list of OT books (A.D. 170). It excludes Esther, but Esther later universally accepted in Christian communities.

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- Jerome's Vulgate (A.D. 404) included Apocrypha, not as "books of the canon" but as "books of the church."
- RCC Council of Trent 1546 declared the Apocrypha to be canonical.
Why? consider the events of 1517; the purpose of the Council of Trent; the need to affirm unbiblical doctrines such as the doctrine of purgatory.

Reasons to reject the Apocrypha as Scripture (#1-4 from Wayne Grudem *Sys Theo*, 60-61):

1. They do not claim for themselves the same kind of authority as the Old Testament writers.
2. They were not regarded as God's words by the Jewish people from whom they originated.
3. They were not considered to be Scripture by Jesus or the New Testament authors.
4. They contain teachings inconsistent with the rest of the Bible (ie., purgatory, prayers for the dead, the worship of angels).
5. They contain historical and factual errors. [Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 270: "The subbiblical nature of the Apocrypha can be seen in its historical and chronological errors. It is claimed that Tobit was alive when the Assyrians conquered Israel (722 B.C.) as well as when Jeroboam revolted against Judah (931 B.C.), yet his total life-span was only 158 years (Tobit 14:11; cf. 1:3-5). Judith speaks of Nebuchadnezzar as reigning in Nineveh instead of Babylon (Judith 1:1)."

OT Scriptures accepted by orthodox Jews are the same OT Scriptures we have today.

To summarize OT canon and transition to NT canon,

Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, **affirmed the OT** (Law, Prophets, Writings —> Mt 15:16; Mk 7:13; Lk 3:2; 5:1).

Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, **authorized the NT** (the apostolic message).

[I am thankful to Nate Buzenitz for these two categories]

New Testament Canonization

Jesus pre-authorized the NT canon.

John 14:23-26

John 16:12-15

John 15:26-27, fulfilled in John 21:24!

The New Testament Canon in the Apostles' day:

- The Apostles spoke and wrote with Divine authority (2 Peter 3:21; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 14:37)

- New Testament writers expressed awareness that the canon of Scripture was expanding, placing New Testament revelation on par with the Old Testament Canon (2 Peter 3:16; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).

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- The NT picks up where the OT left off (Mal4 and Mt11; 2Chron 36:23 and Mt 28:18-20).
- From the first generation in the church, New Testament writings were considered part of the Canon.

The New Testament Canon in church history:

- Factors in the “slow” process of collection and recognition of the New Testament Canon:
 - Geography and circulation of all the books (map)
 - Variance in location of writing and location of audience
 - No central place of worship and depository of Scripture
 - Due diligence in discernment (1Th 5:20-21; Acts 17:11)
- Factors which encouraged the recognition of the Canon:
 - Natural and beneficial usage of NT books in corporate worship and in the lives of believers.
 - Spurious writings (Gnostics and others)
 - Marcionite heresy (rejected or altered most OT and NT outside of Paul)
 - Diocletian persecution A.D. 303 and the burning of sacred books
- Important dates in the timeline of recognizing the NT Canon:
 - 95 - Canon closed with the writing of the book of Revelation.
 - 95 – Clement of Rome mentions 8 NT books.
 - 108 – Polycarp mentions 15 NT books.
 - 115 – Ignatius of Antioch mentions 7 NT books.
 - 170 – Muratorian Canon – all but Hebrews, James, 1,2Peter, and one epistle of John.
 - 185 – Irenaeus acknowledges 21 NT books.
 - c. 200 – Hippolytus recognized 22 NT books.
 - 363 – Council of Laodicea declared that only the OT and the 27 NT books were to be read in churches.
 - 367 – Athanasius wrote that the 27 were the only true books of the NT Canon.
 - 393 – Council of Hippo recognized the 27.
 - 397 – Council of Carthage stated that only the 27 were to be used in churches.

How do we know what books should be included in the Bible and which ones should not?

- Or, how did Christians throughout church history decide what books should make up the Canon? And did they get it right?
- Michael Kruger’s categorization of the two views of canon is helpful:
 - 1) extrinsic model of canonicity (external authority, driven to do so by external factors).
a book is not canonical until the Church declares it to be so.

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- 2) intrinsic model of canonicity (internal nature).
a book is canonical if it is authored by God, and it is canonical as soon as it is written. The task of the church is to recognize and submit to the canon of Scripture.

Criteria for determining inclusion in the canon:

- The work must be Divinely authored!
"If the words of the book are not God's words, it does not belong in the canon" (Wayne Grudem *Systematic Theology*, 63).

- Some further considerations in the church's recognition of what was truly Scripture:

Apostolic endorsement.

Direct Apostolic authorship.

Mark (Peter) cf. Papias, quoted in Kruger *The Question of Canon*, p183.

Luke-Acts (Paul)

Hebrews (Paul)

Jude (James and Jesus)

Internal / External consistency.

Agreement with theology and content of previous revelation.

Self-attesting nature of Scripture and the work of the Spirit in believers (John 10:27).

God's love for and providential care for His church.

Might we have missed a book?

- There are no strong contenders for inclusion in the Canon.
- None of the early church contenders (pseudepigrapha) bear weight with evangelicals today.
Grievous theological and historical errors.
Contain explicit disclaimers of equal status with Scripture.
(see examples: the *Didache*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Gospel of Thomas*, in Grudem; The Gospel of Philip, Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians, and Gnostic writings from the 3rd-4th centuries.)

Early Christian leaders wrote books for Christians and letters to churches. They did not consider their works to be on par with the Apostles'; they did not consider them carrying the same authority; they did not claim Scriptural status for them.

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- Consider the providential care of God for His church. Would He have left His church for 1900 years without life-giving words that we would need for salvation and Christian living?

Might we have included a book that shouldn't be in the Bible?

- (Luther and James?)
- Today there are no strong objections to anything in the Canon.
- Consider God's providential care for His church.
- Consider the inward testimony of Scripture (Hebrews 4:12) and the community of Christian experience with the Word of God.

Does the church create the canon?

No. The church recognizes the canon (contra RCC which places the church over the Scriptures). Canonization is man's recognition and acceptance of the canon of Scripture, rather than the creation of the canon of Scripture.

"The church no more gave us the New Testament Canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by His work of creation, and similarly He gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up." - J. I. Packer.

The Close of the Canon

- Hebrews 1:1-2
The final and authoritative speaking from God has occurred "in these last days... in His Son." We should not expect a continuing revelation beyond the depiction and explanation of Jesus Christ and His work on our behalf. This truth has resonated in regenerate Christian community for two millennia and is echoed in the witness of history.
- Revelation 22:18-19
The immediate intent of this warning concerns the words of Revelation itself. Yet it is no accident that Revelation finds itself at the end of the Canon, as Genesis finds itself at the beginning. A closed canon is in keeping with this warning as well as with this warning's placement in the Bible.

The bottom line (at the bottom this time!):

A book is canonical if, and only if, it is God-breathed.

Any portion of Scripture was canonical the very moment it was written.

Canonicity reflects the very nature of the Scriptures; canonicity is not a status granted to the books of the Bible by an external authority.

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Resources for further study:

On Inspiration:

R. Laird Harris *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*
B.B. Warfield *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*

On Canonization:

Wayne Grudem *Systematic Theology*, chapter 3.
F.F. Bruce *The Canon of Scripture*
R. Laird Harris *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*
Bruce Metzger *The New Testament: It's Background, Growth, and Content*
Michael Kruger *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate*

On Preservation:

James White *The King James Only Controversy*
Jon Rehuek "The Preservation of the Bible: Providential or Miraculous? The Biblical View" in *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Spring 2008.
Bruce Metzger *The New Testament: It's Background, Growth, and Content*
David Daniel *The Bible in English*

On Biblical Criticism (The Bad Kind):

Thomas and Farnell *The Jesus Crisis*
Eta Linneman *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology? Reflections of a Bultmannian Turned Evangelical*

On Biblical Criticism (The Good Kind):

Bruce Metzger *The New Testament: It's Background, Growth, and Content*
www.csntm.org

General:

Don Kistler, gen ed. *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible*
Erwin Lutzer *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible*

A helpful resource on the clarity of Scripture (which makes hermeneutics possible!):

Mark D. Thompson *A Sure Ground on Which To Stand: The Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther's Approach to Scripture*