

How We Got Our Bible

Part Five: Canonicity

- I. The Meaning of the word *Canonicity*
 - A. The Greek word *Kanon* refers to a reed used for measuring.
 - B. The Canon is the standard list of books that belong in the Bible. The word canonicity refers to the determination of which books are inspired and therefore belong in that list.
- II. Canonicity in Historical Perspective
 - A. The Old Testament
 1. Inspired or Canonical writings were kept near the Ark of the Covenant (Deut 31:24-26) and later in the temple (2 Kgs 22:8).
 2. During the Talmudic times the Jews referred to the canonical books as those that defiled the hands. The Council of Jamnia in AD 90 listed the 39 books of the Old Testament as Scripture.
 3. Jesus quoted from the Old Testament as Scripture.
 - B. The New Testament
 1. The New Testament Authors Refer to other Parts of the New Testament as Scripture (2 Pet 3:16; 1 Tim 5:18).
 2. Most of the New Testament books were accepted as Scripture from their introduction.
 3. In the Apostolic Fathers there is much proof for early acceptance of the books of the New Testament
 - a. Clement of Rome (wrote to the church in Corinth around 95) quotes the Gospels, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Hebrews, and the words of Jesus as being as authoritative as the Old Testament prophets.
 - b. Ignatius of Antioch (died ca. 110) was condemned to death by Roman authorities. As he traveled through Asia Minor on his way to his martyrdom in Rome he wrote letters to churches and individuals in Asia Minor. In these he quotes the following books as Scripture: Matthew, John, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and maybe additionally Luke, Hebrews, and 1 Peter.
 - c. Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John and pastor of the church in Smyrna. In his letter to the Philippians (ca. 120) he quotes Matthew, Luke, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 and 2 John. He often introduces these quotes with phrases like, “The Scriptures say.”
 4. Later some books were questioned, but only in particular circumstances.
 5. Official church documents from the 4th century provide a list of canonical books. These lists include the 66 books we have today. Eusebius, the early church historian, listed books that were considered canonical.

- III. Principles for Determining Canonicity.
 - A. Was the book written by a prophet, apostle, or a close associate of a prophet or apostle?
 - B. Does the book claim to be Scripture?
 - C. Does the book contradict other Scripture?
 - D. Has the book been universally accepted by believers?
- IV. Books of the Bible and Canonicity
 - A. Books Accepted by All
 - 1. Old Testament
All of the Old Testament except Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezekiel, and Proverbs
 - 2. New Testament
All of the New Testament except Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation
 - B. Books Disputed by Some
 - 1. Old Testament
Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezekiel, and Proverbs
 - 2. New Testament
Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation
 - 3. Roman Catholic Apocrypha
Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Esdras, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Baruch, Additions to Esther (10:4-16:24), The Prayer of Azariah (Dan 3:24-90), Susanna (Dan 13), and Bel and the Dragon (Dan 14). The Roman Catholic Church did not officially recognize these books until the Council of Trent (1545-63).
 - C. Books Rejected by All
 - 1. Old Testament
Book of Jubilee, Letter of Aristeas, Book of Adam and Eve, Martyrdom of Isaiah, 1 Enoch, The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, The Sibylline Oracle, The Assumption of Moses, 2 Enoch, 2 and 3 Baruch, 3 and 4 Maccabees, Pirke Aboth, The Story of Ahikar, The Psalms of Solomon, and Psalm 151.
 - 2. New Testament
 - D. Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of the Ebionites, Gospel of Peter, Protevangelium of James, The Gospel of the Hebrews, The Gospel of the Egyptians, The Gospel of the Nazarenes, The Gospel of Judas, The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas, Didache, Apocalypse of Peter, Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, and the Seven Epistles of Ignatius. This list is by no means exhaustive. There are literally hundreds of pseudepigraphal books of the New Testament.
- V. Canonicity and Illumination
 - A. The Definition of Illumination (1 Corinthians 2:9–16): Illumination is the work of the Spirit of God in the heart of a believer to take away the native hostility to God and his word and to help the believer to understand the implications and authority of God’s word. Illumination does not cause a person to understanding the meaning of God’s words, but to accept their authority and application.
 - B. Universally Illumination works in the heart of a believer to cause them to recognize God’s words as from God.
 - C. Canonicity then is ultimately the work of the Spirit of God to cause believers corporately to recognize the Bible (and its individual books) as Scripture, the Word of God.