

*The Canon of Scripture*  
(Biblical Studies)

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## *Preface*

The study of the Canon of Scripture is a very interesting study for any person who loves the history of the Bible or the history of the Church or any of the people involved in these histories. There are many discoveries both through writings and archaeology; there is a good deal of adventure in the discoveries; there is a great deal of controversy, and plenty of theology. The study of the history of how the Canon comes together is a very profitable and interesting study for all who undertake it.

However these are not the true reasons why we should study the Canon of Scripture. I believe the study of the Canon of Scripture goes to the heart of our Christian Faith. If we do not know which books that were written by people of all ages are inspired of God and are part of His infallible rule, then we have no standard from which to learn and understand the glorious things of God. If we can never be sure which books are parts of the Scriptures, and are from God Himself, we will never have a measuring standard for truth. If we cannot know which books are from God and which are not then we cannot know which part of the Gospel story, the story of our Lord Jesus is true or not, is real or not.

How will we contend for the Gospel? How will we fight error, sin and wickedness? How shall we declare the unconditional love of Jesus Christ? How can we know to be cleansed of unrighteousness? Which parts of the Bible are true and which are myth, superstition or tradition? All of these problems are resolved when we have a Canon of Scripture.

Of course in the church of today and in theological circles the question is do we actually have a Canon of Scripture and how can we know? Who put this Canon together and why did they get to do it instead of someone else? Are the Scriptures simply a tool that the church uses to have its way in the world? Or is the Canon of Scripture created by God Himself as He orchestrates how His Word was gathered and put together. Is God the one who governs His Church through His word? Is the Canon of Scripture our only rule of faith and practice?

The Canon of Scripture is either God's Holy Word binding our lives and consciences or it is something else. Let us discover what the Canon is all about.

## *Introduction*

### *Course Description*

This course is part of the Biblical Studies course and provides the fundamentals in understanding how the Scriptures came together from 66 individual books to one “Word of God”. This course will demonstrate the significance and importance of understanding how the Canon of Scripture was compiled. It will also show how understanding the Canon affects us in our churches and ministries as we seek to use the Word of God to accomplish His purposes on earth until He returns.

The course is not auto-didactic. Nor is it principally academic in nature. A mature teacher must be prepared to play the role of mentor to his students, rather than a mere instructor.

The number of students in the class should be small, to allow for the interchange necessary in the mentoring process. Eight to twelve students are the ideal number. The course should be as practical as possible, dealing with real life situations and problems that the leader will encounter personally and in the context of his ministry.

Finally, the teacher must keep in mind at all times, the goal for this class is for the student to understand the Canon and its aid to ministry in the church today. The goal is to teach the students how to use their understanding of the Canon of Scripture in the life and ministry of the local church including how to use it for the spread of the Gospel.

### *Purpose of the Course*

To establish in the mind of the student the importance and significance of the Canon of Scripture:

Why does the canon matter?

How does it apply to the Church in the past?

How does it apply to the Church of today?

How do we define which writings are to be included in the Bible?

How does the Canon shape our theology and bible Study?

### *Summary of Course Content*

This course will give the student the information needed for teaching on the authority and trustworthiness of God’s Word. This course will teach how we can use this knowledge in spreading the Gospel. It will also strengthen the students understanding and faith in the Scriptures.

### *Course Materials.*

Michael Saunders. *The Canon of Scripture*. Miami, Florida; M.I.N.T.S., 2008.

F.F. Bruce. *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL; IVP Academic Press, 1988. 334 pages.

Randal Price. *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Eugene Oregon; Harvest House Publishers, 1977. 525 pages.

### *Objectives of the Course*

- 1- Student participation in classroom discussion
  - 2- Student comprehension of course materials
  - 3- Student familiarization with course bibliography
  - 4- Student completion of papers and assignments that can be used in the church and/or ministry settings
  - 5- Student's retention of course materials and application to real ministry
  - 6- Student's application of course materials to their own ministry
- These objectives will be evaluated in four ways (See evaluation of the course).*

### *Structure of the Course*

#### *How the course will be conducted.*

1. For students studying at a distance and not attending course lectures:
  - a. The student will contact the MINTS Academic Dean in order to enroll in the course and be designated a supervising professor.
  - b. The student will identify his or her mentor, who will locally oversee the course. The mentor will verify that all of the lessons have been read and the homework completed. Note: The supervising professor of MINTS must approve the mentor.
  - c. The student will download the course syllabus and begin studies.
  - d. The mentor will send the lesson completion chart, the exam completion chart and the case study to the supervising professor.
  - e. The supervising professor will review and record the grades, ensure that they are registered with the MINTS Registrar and that the final grade is sent to the student and mentor.
2. For students studying at a distance who attend course lectures:
  - a. MINTS provides an orientation to the course (by invitation by a professor).
  - b. The student will attend 15 hours of lectures.
  - c. The student will complete the lesson assignments and give them to the professor, who also serves as the mentor.
  - d. The supervising MINTS professor will review the student's work (attendance, lesson completion and case study grade) and have the final grade registered with the MINTS Registrar. The Registrar will send the group leader the student's final

grade.

## Lesson Development

### Lesson 1 - "Sola Scriptura" - Authority and Inspiration of Scripture

#### *Homework:*

1. Read Chapters one and two of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper on Sola Scriptura.

### Lesson 2 - Definition of the Canon of Scripture

#### *Assignment Due This Week:*

1. One page paper on Sola Scriptura.

#### *Homework:*

1. Read Chapter three of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper defining the Canon of Scripture.

### Lesson 3 – The Jewish Canon

#### *Assignment Due This Week:*

1. One page paper defining the Canon of Scripture.

#### *Homework:*

1. Read Chapter four of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper defining the Jewish Canon with an outline of how it came down to us today and discussing whether it is a closed Canon or not.

### Lesson 4 – The Septuagint – Bible of Jesus and The Masoretic Text

#### *Assignment Due This Week:*

1. One page paper defining the Jewish Canon with an outline of how it came down to us today and discussing whether it is a closed Canon or not.

#### *Homework:*

1. Read Chapter five of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper explaining how we got the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text.

### Lesson 5 - The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Targums

#### *Assignment Due This Week:*

1. Write a one page paper explaining how we got the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text.

#### *Homework:*

1. Read Chapter six of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper explaining how we found the Dead Sea Scrolls and what they

contribute to the Canon of Scripture.

#### Lesson 6 – Christian Canons of the New Testament

##### *Assignment Due This Week:*

1. One page paper explaining how we found the Dead Sea Scrolls and what they contribute to the Canon of Scripture.

##### *Homework:*

1. Read Chapter seven of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper on the Christian Canon of the New Testament.

#### Lesson 7 – Criteria for Canonicity

##### *Assignment Due This Week:*

1. One page paper on the Christian Canon of the New Testament.

##### *Homework:*

1. Read Chapter eight of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper on the Criteria for Canonicity.
3. Write a one page paper on the 2 main issues of Canonical Criticism.

#### Lesson 8- Canonical Criticism

##### *Assignment Due This Week:*

1. Write a one page paper on the Criteria for Canonicity.
2. Write a one page paper on the 2 main issues of Canonical Criticism.

##### *Requirements of the course*

The student will attend 15 hours of class and participate in the discussion time.

Pass a short quiz at the end of each class (for credit students only).

The student will complete reading and writing assignments required between classes.

The students will become familiar with readings related to the course theme(s).

The student must turn in one written paper per week (for credit students only).

##### *Evaluation of the course*

Student participation: 20% attendance.

Quizzes: 20% for passing all quizzes.

Student homework: 20% for completed homework assignments.

Student readings: Bachelor level students will read 300 extra pages and write a 3-page book report. Master level students will read 500 pages and write a 5-page book report. Doctoral level students will read 5000 pages and present an annotated bibliography (20%).

Student ministry papers and assignments: 20% for passing all 8 one page papers.

*Benefits of the course*

This course will give the student the knowledge of how the 66 books of the Bible came to be together and how this will benefit them in their own Biblical studies and provide a foundation for their preaching and teaching and evangelistic work.

*Closing Remarks*

The student will be able to conclude this course with several very useful tools for ministry in Biblical Studies and Evangelistic outreach.



## Chapter One

# *Sola Scriptura*

### Authority and Inspiration of Scripture

*“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth;  
Meditate on it day and night,  
So that you may be careful to do everything written in it.  
Then you will be prosperous and successful.”*

*Joshua 1:8*

### *Biblical Inspiration*

Biblical inspiration is the doctrine in Christian theology concerned with the divine origin of the Bible and what the Bible teaches about itself. The word *inspiration* comes from the Latin; "immediate influence of God" especially that under which the holy books were written; inspire, inflame, blow into, to breathe. General sense of "influence or animate with an idea or purpose," inspirational that is "influenced by inspiration; tending to inspire."

In 2 Tim 3.16-17 we read: *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God [theopneustos], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* *Theopneustos* is rendered in the Vulgate with the Latin *divinitus inspirata* ("divinely breathed into"), but some modern English translations opt for "God-breathed" (NIV) or "breathed out by God" (ESV) and avoid *inspiration* altogether, since its connotation, like its Greek root, leans toward breathing in instead of breathing out.

The Bible contains many passages in which the authors claim divine inspiration for their message, or report the effects of such inspiration on others. Besides the direct accounts of written revelation, such as Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, the Prophets of the Old Testament frequently claimed that their message was divine by the formula *"Thus says the LORD"* (for example, 1 Kings 12:22–24; 1 Chronicles 17:3–4; Jeremiah 35:13; Ezek 2:4; Zech 7:9; etc.). The Second Epistle of Peter claims that *"no prophecy of Scripture ... was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Pet 1:20–21).

In addition, theological conservatives sometimes argue that Biblical inspiration can be corroborated by examining the weight of the Bible's moral teaching and its prophecies about the

future and their fulfillment. An exception common to all the different views of inspiration is that, although the New Testament Scriptures quote, paraphrase, and refer to other works (including other New Testament versions, such as the Septuagint - the Jewish translation of the Old Testament into Greek - the Apocrypha, and the Greek writers Aratus, Epimenides, Menander, and Philo), none of them teach that these referenced works were inspired..

Evangelical Christians see the Bible as a truly human product whose creation was superintended by the Holy Spirit, preserving the authors' works from error without eliminating their specific concerns, situation, or style. This divine involvement, they say, allowed the biblical writer to reveal God's own message to the immediate recipients of the writings and to those who would come later, communicating God's message without corrupting it. Some Evangelicals have sought to characterize the conservative or traditional view as verbal, plenary inspiration in the original manuscripts, by which they mean that every word (not just the overarching ideas or concepts) is meaningfully chosen under the superintendence of God.

Evangelicals acknowledge that there is textual variation between accounts of apparently identical events and speeches, which would seem to have God saying different things. Some of these differences are accounted for as deviations from the autographa that were introduced by copyists, while other cases are considered intentional deviations that were inspired by God for particular purposes (for instance, the Gospel of Matthew was intended to communicate the Gospel to Jews, while the Gospel of Luke was intended to communicate it to non-Jews). Many Evangelicals consider biblical inerrancy and/or biblical infallibility to be the necessary consequence of the Bible's doctrine of inspiration (see, for example, the Westminster Confession of Faith or the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy), though not all do.

### *Sola Scriptura*

*Sola Scriptura* (Latin "by scripture alone") is the assertion that the Bible as God's written word is self-authenticating, clear to the rational reader, its own interpreter (Scripture interprets Scripture), and sufficient of itself to be the final authority of Christian doctrine. *Sola Scriptura* was a foundational doctrinal principle of the Protestant Reformation held by the Reformers and is a formal principle of Protestantism today. By contrast, the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Oriental Orthodox Churches teach that the Scriptures are an important but not exclusive part of the Sacred Tradition from which the Churches derive their doctrines. These bodies also believe that the Church has authority over the Scriptures because it actively selected which books were to be in the biblical canon, whereas Protestants believe the Church passively

recognized and received the books that were already widely considered canonical (1).

The key implication of *Sola Scriptura* is that interpretations and applications of the Scriptures do not have the same authority as the Scriptures themselves; hence, the ecclesiastical authority is viewed as subject to correction by the Scriptures, even by an individual member of the Church. Luther said, "A simple layman armed with Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it". The intention of the Reformation was to correct the perceived errors of the Catholic Church by appeal to the uniqueness of the Bible's authority and to reject what Catholics considered to be Apostolic Tradition as a source of original authority alongside of the Bible, wherever tradition did not have biblical support or where it supposedly contradicted Scripture.

*Sola Scriptura*, however, does not ignore Christian history and tradition when seeking to understand the Bible. Rather, it sees the Bible as the only final authority in matters of faith and practice. As Martin Luther said, "The true rule is this: God's Word shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel can do so."

### *Prima Scriptura*

*Sola Scriptura* may be contrasted with *Prima Scriptura*, which holds besides canonical scripture; there are other guides for what a believer should believe, and how he or she should live. Examples of this include the general revelation in creation, traditions, charismatic gifts, mystical insight, angelic visitations, conscience, common sense, and views of experts, the spirit of the times or something else. *Prima Scriptura* suggests that ways of knowing or understanding God and His will that do not originate from canonized scripture, are in an equal place, helpful in interpreting that scripture. This is opposed to the view of *Sola Scriptura*.

*Sola Scriptura* rejects any original, infallible authority, other than the Bible. In this view, all secondary authority is derived from the authority of the Scriptures and is therefore subject to reform when compared to the teaching of the Bible. Church councils, preachers, biblical commentators, private revelation, or even a message allegedly from an angel or an apostle are not an original authority alongside the Bible in the *sola scriptura* approach.

### *Singular Authority of Scripture*

The idea of the singular authority of Scripture is the motivation behind much of the Protestant effort to translate the Bible into vernacular languages and distribute it widely. Protestants generally believe each Christian should read the Bible for themselves and evaluate what they have been taught on the basis of it. Traditions of the non-Protestant churches include

the Bible, patristic, conciliar, and liturgical texts. Even prior to the Protestant movement, hundreds of vernacular translations of the Bible and liturgical materials were translated throughout the preceding sixteen centuries. Some Bible translations such as the Geneva Bible included annotations and commentary that were anti-Roman Catholic. Before the Protestant Reformation, Latin was almost exclusively utilized but it was understood by only by the most literate.

According to *Sola Scriptura*, the Church does not speak infallibly in its traditions, but only in Scripture. As John Wesley stated in the 18th century, "In all cases, the Church is to be judged by the Scripture, not the Scripture by the Church (2)." For this reason, *Sola Scriptura* is called the formal cause or principle of the Reformation.

Protestants argue that the Scriptures are guaranteed to remain true to their divine source; and, thus, only insofar as the Church retains scriptural faith is it assured of God's favor. Following such an argument, if the Church were to fall away from "faith through Scripture" (a possibility which Roman Catholics deny but Protestants affirm), its authority would be negated. Therefore, the early Protestants targeted for elimination traditions and doctrines they believed were based on distortions of Scripture, or were contrary to the Bible, but which the Roman Catholic Church considered scripturally-based aspects of the Christian faith, such as transubstantiation, the doctrine of purgatory, the veneration of images or icons, and especially the doctrine that the Pope in Rome is the head of the Church on earth.

### *Scripture and Tradition*

The Roman Catholic Church, against which the Reformers directed these arguments, did not see Scripture and the Sacred Tradition of the faith as different sources of authority, but that Scripture was handed down as part of tradition (see 2 The 2:15, 2 Tim 2:2). Accepted traditions were also perceived by the Roman Church as cohesive in nature. The proper interpretation of the Scriptures was seen as part of the faith of the Church, and seen indeed as the manner in which Biblical authority was upheld (see Acts 15:28-29). The meaning of Scripture was seen as proven from the faith universally held in the churches (see Phil 2:1, Acts 4:32), and the correctness of that universal faith was seen as proven from the Scriptures and apostolic tradition (see 2 Thess. 2:15, 3:6; 1 Cor 11:2). The Biblical canon itself was thus viewed by Rome as part of the Church's tradition, as defined by its leadership and acknowledged by its laity.

However, this view of scripture and tradition was not universally accepted. Throughout the history of the Church, movements have arisen within the Church or alongside of it which

have disputed the official interpretation of the Scriptures. The leaders of these movements were often labeled heretics and their doctrines were rejected. According to Irenaeus, the Judaistic Ebionites charged, less than one hundred years after the Apostles, that the Christians overruled the authority of Scripture by failing to keep the Mosaic Law. Later, Arius (250-336), once he had been made a presbyter in Alexandria, began arguing that the teaching concerning the deity of Christ was an invention of men not found in Scripture and not believed by the early Christians. The Church held that when disagreements over Scripture arise, the correct interpretation of the Bible will be consistent with how the Church authorities have believed in the past (see 2 Tim 2:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Cor 11:2), as revealed by the Ecumenical Councils, the writings of the Apostles of Jesus and Fathers of the Church, the decisions of the Bishops of Rome and similar sources of Tradition.

The Reformers believed some tradition to be very seriously in conflict with the Scriptures: especially, with regard to teaching about the Church itself, but also touching on basic principles of the Gospel. They believed that no matter how venerable the traditional source, traditional authority is always open to question by comparison to what the Scriptures say. The individual may be forced to rely on his understanding of Scripture even if the whole tradition were to speak against him. This, they said, had always been implicitly recognized in the Church, and remains a fail-safe against the corruption of the Church by human error and deceit. Corruptions had crept in, the Reformers said, which seriously undermined the legitimate authority of the Church, and tradition had been perverted by wicked men.

Sola Scriptura is a doctrine that is not, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6 "expressly set down in scripture". However, it is claimed that it passes the second test of being part of "the whole counsel of God" because it is "deduced from scripture" "by good and necessary consequence", citing passages such as Isaiah 8:20: "*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*". Jesus is also typically understood by Protestants as expressly nullifying unscriptural traditions in the (Jewish) church, when he says, for example in Mark 7:13: "*thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.*"

### *Jesus' Teachings on the Inspiration of Scripture*

#### *Jesus' Teachings on the Old Testament*

The Gospels agree on a variety of fronts that Jesus had total confidence in the text of the Old Testament. We are told that Jesus made many statements regarding the trustworthiness and

even the inspiration of Scripture. An inductive examination of Jesus' teachings provides a clear indication of this.

One of Jesus' strongest statements concerning the Old Testament Law was His affirmation that heaven and earth would pass away before even the smallest portion of a letter (Matt. 5:17-18). Jesus also taught that these fractions of letters would never fail (Luke 16:17). Further, after citing a particular text in Psalm 82:6, Jesus stated that Scripture could not be nullified (John 10:35). These comments are striking reminders regarding the extent to which Jesus thought Scripture spoke the truth.

Regularly, Jesus also demonstrated His trust in the Old Testament by utilizing it as His source for solving theological disputes. On more than one occasion, His argument turned chiefly on the significance of a single word in the text. In Mark 12:35-37, Jesus based an important theological point on the second usage of the word "Lord," arguing that the Messiah was more than just the son of David. In the English text of Matthew 22:31-32, Jesus built His case against the Sadducees on the word "am" in order to teach the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, which they rejected. Such confidence in the very words of Scripture is a crucial indication of Jesus' high view of their truth.

On many other occasions, Jesus cited Scripture as a "proof text" while debating His adversaries. During the wilderness temptation, Jesus quoted Old Testament texts in opposition to Satan (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Elsewhere, Jesus responded to His detractors by asking them, "Have you not read. . . ?"; "It is written. . .", or a similar comment, also served to refute an opposing view. In Matthew 22:29, Jesus remarked that an ignorance of Scripture caused the Sadducees to make a theological error. It seems clear from these uses of Scripture that Jesus considered its contents to be the definitive authority in solving theological issues.

In yet another debate with Jewish leaders, after citing portions of the Law and prophets, Jesus appears to refer to the entire Old Testament as the "commandment of God" and "the word of God" (Mk. 7:8-13). Such descriptions indicate that Jesus thought that God was the Authority behind Scripture. It was an inspired text, written for our edification. As such, these writings must be fulfilled (Matt. 26:54; Luke 4:21; John 7:38). Jesus used the Old Testament as a proof text that serves as God's blueprint for correct theology and behavior. It disproved contrary positions. Jesus did not doubt this authority.

Jesus referred to the entire Old Testament both as the Law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17), as well as adding the Psalms (Luke 24:44). By either designation, Jesus indicated that each section was the Word of God. Moses, the author of the Law (Luke 16:31; 24:44), spoke God's

words in Exodus 3:6 (Mk. 12:26). David wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Psalm 110:1 (Mark 12:36). The prophets also spoke God's words because their prophecies of the Christ had to be fulfilled (Luke 24:27, 44).

So we have seen that Jesus based arguments on specific words of the Old Testament text. He indicated His trust of even the letters themselves, in that not even a portion could fail. Both the whole, as well as the individual sections, received His positive endorsements, as well. Jesus referred to the Old Testament not simply as a time-honored human document. Rather, He called it the very command and words of God. True, humans like Moses and David penned the text, but God still spoke through them. In citing the Scriptures, Jesus believed that He was reporting the very message of God. The Word of God was the expression of God's truth. Seen from various angles, this is indeed a high view of inspiration. We conclude that Jesus definitely accepted the inspiration of the Old Testament. It is very difficult to do otherwise (3).

### *Jesus' Teaching on the New Testament*

A case for the inspiration of the New Testament must be made differently than that of the Old Testament, since the former was not written until after Jesus' death. Thus, whereas Jesus approved the already-written Old Testament, He provided for the as yet unwritten New Testament. Jesus' resurrection provided the major indication that God approved His teachings. By raising Him from the dead, God placed His stamp of approval on Jesus. Incidentally, similar messages are found in various New Testament texts (Acts 2:22-24; 17:31; Rom. 1:3-4). Further, the text of Jesus' teachings is reliable.

First, Jesus taught His disciples that they were His designated witnesses and spokesmen (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8; John 15:27). As His students, they learned His teachings so that they, in turn, might impart these principles to others. This was even true to the extent that those who believed and obeyed the disciples' words would actually be receiving Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 10:14-15, 40; John 13:20).

Second, Jesus also promised His disciples the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. He would teach them additional matters (John 16:12-13), causing them to remember Jesus' words (John 14:26), and revealing to them the future (John 16:13b). Perhaps the key item is that, in all these matters, the Holy Spirit would lead the disciples to truth (John 16:13a).

So the disciples were taught by Jesus. Then He designated them as His spokesmen. Jesus additionally promised that the Holy Spirit would assist His students in their teaching. This twofold promise paved the way for the inspiration of the New Testament.

Third, as the New Testament writers penned their words, they recognized that they were inspired. They claimed Jesus' twofold promise. The apostles' teachings were based on the foundation that Jesus provided (Eph. 2:20; 2 Pet. 3:2; Heb. 2:3-4). They believed their words were inspired (1 Peter 1:12b). This is especially evident in Paul's epistles. They were convinced that the Holy Spirit empowered both their teaching and their writing.

Fourth, the New Testament writers recognized that Jesus' promise of inspiration also extended to other writers, as well. For instance, I Timothy 5:18 notes two citations, referring to both as Scripture. The first is obviously drawn from Deuteronomy 25:4. Although the second is similar to certain Old Testament texts, it is nowhere quoted. Actually, this saying is the same as that in Luke 10:7 (cf. Matt. 10:10), spoken by Jesus. Comparing a quote from the Law to one found in the teachings of Jesus, and calling them both Scripture, is certainly significant, and for more than one reason. It shows some conviction that the existing canon of inspired texts, consisting only of Old Testament writings, is not the end of the matter. After all, if any writings are considered to be inspired, the words of Jesus should be included! Moreover, Jesus' saying is even placed on a par with the Law itself.

Another example is found in 2 Peter 3:15-16, where Paul's epistles are placed alongside other Scripture, thereby being given the same status. Additionally, Jude 17-18 seems to cite 2 Peter 3:3 (or a common text) as the words of an apostle.

It is true that we cannot move from a few examples to an entire theory. But by recognizing the sayings of Jesus and the words and writings of apostles as being on a par with Old Testament Scriptures, we do glimpse a growing conceptualization that the Old Testament is not the end of God's revelation. Inspiration actually extended to other writings! The canon was not closed. Other works needed to be included, as well.

The chief impetus for believing in the inspiration of New Testament texts rests on the approved teachings of Jesus. He promised His disciples both that they were His special witnesses and that they would be inspired and guided to all truth by the leading of the Holy Spirit. We also have many instances where New Testament authors claimed this promise personally for their own writings, as well as a few examples where they extended this promise to other qualified authors. Additionally, although we cannot pursue the issue here, we also have a great amount of New Testament texts that recognize the inspiration of various Old Testament figures and passages (4).



## *Conclusion*

### *The Verbal Inspiration of Scripture*

A belief in a wholly-inspired Bible is the very foundation principle of the Christian faith. The verbal inspiration of Scripture is a doctrine of fundamental importance; for if the writing of the Bible was not divinely (and therefore infallibly) guided, then the source of what we know of God and His dealings with men would be unreliable. If we could not, with absolute confidence as to its divine origin and production, turn to the Bible as the authoritative Word of God in all its parts, then we would be quite unable to make any certain progress towards true enlightenment in spiritual things and in matters related to salvation.

The key aspects of Biblical inspiration are as follows:

1. The Bible was produced by the 'out breathing' of God through His Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16)
2. The Spirit of God 'carried men along' to write His Word (2 Peter 1:20, 21).
3. The inspired writers of the Bible wrote with the divine authority of God Himself, and their words are binding on God's people (1 Corinthians 2:12, 13; 1 Corinthians 14:37; John 10:35).
4. The inspiration of the Bible involved the divine control or superintendence of the very words used (Numbers 22:38; 23:3,5; 2 Samuel 23:1-3; Jeremiah 1:7,9; John 14:10,24).
5. Because the words themselves were divinely inspired (as well as the writers), the possibility of the original Scriptures containing errors is excluded (Psalm 12:6).
6. The power of God's Spirit to enlighten, to convert, and to save is in the Scriptures themselves, and the benefit of their divine origin is conveyed to us in their words (2 Timothy 3:15; John 6:63; Acts 20:32; Romans 10:17; Isaiah 55:11) (5).

### *Questions for Chapter One*

- 1- What is Sola Scriptura?
- 2- What is the position of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Oriental Orthodox Churches on Sola Scriptura and why?
- 3- What is Prima Scriptura?
- 4- How does sola Scriptura compare to Prima Scriptura?
- 5- How does Sola Scriptura affect our view of the church?
- 6- How did the Reformers view the Scriptures and the church?
- 7- What is Biblical Inspiration?

- 8- What do we believe about Biblical Inspiration?
- 9- What did Jesus think about the inspiration of the Old Testament?
- 10- Why do we believe in the inspiration of the New Testament?

### *Footnotes for Chapter One*

- 1- W. Robert Godfrey. "What Do We Mean by Sola Scriptura?", in Don Kistler: Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible. Soli Deo Gloria.
- 2- *Popery Calmly Considered* (1779) in *The works of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. XV, p. 180, London (1812), digitized by Google Books.
- 3- Jesus view of Scripture was reiterated during the Reformation and made systematic by John Calvin. Calvin was the great "organizer" of the Reformed Faith. That is he wrote his Institutes as a systematic way of understanding Reformed Theology. Calvin viewed Scripture as being equivalent to an utterance of God given from heaven: "Since no daily responses are given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign his truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognized, unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them."

Calvin believed Scripture to be the Word of God. He considered that Christians do not need the testimony of the church to appreciate its authority, since it is self-authenticating, and that it is only through the Holy Spirit that we know it to be the Word of God: "The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted... Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit.

According to Calvin, Word and Spirit must always go together. Scripture gives us a saving knowledge of God, but only when its certainty is "founded on the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit." It is "foolish to attempt to prove to infidels that the Scripture is the Word of God," since this can only be known by faith. Nevertheless, he did see a place for evidences of Scripture's authority, as long it is recognized that they are secondary: "The human testimonies which go to confirm it will not be without effect, if they are used in subordination to that chief and highest proof, as secondary helps to our weakness. The "chief and highest proof" being, of course, the testimony of the Holy Spirit, though Calvin does not say that the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit is the *source* of this authority. John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

I.vii.1; I.vii.4-5; I.viii.1.

4- [garyhabermas.com/articles/areopagus\\_jesusinspirationscripture/areopagus\\_jesusinspiration\\_scripture.htm#ch1](http://garyhabermas.com/articles/areopagus_jesusinspirationscripture/areopagus_jesusinspiration_scripture.htm#ch1)

5- *The Testimony Magazine*. <http://www.bibletopics.com/BibleStudy/36.htm>

## *Chapter Two*

### *Definition of the Canon of Scripture*

*The church has always understood the canonical books as inspired. It is to these books and no others that Christians refer when they wish to establish authentic Christian teaching (1).*

A Biblical canon or canon of scripture is a list or set of Biblical books considered to be authoritative as scripture by a particular religious community, generally in Judaism or Christianity. The term itself was first used by Christians, but the idea is found in Hellenistic Jewish sources (2). The current use of the term "canon" to refer to a collection of scripture books was introduced by David Ruhnken in 1768 in his *Historia critica oratorum graecorum* for lists of sacred scriptures. While it is tempting to think that such usage has its origins in antiquity in reference to a closed collection of scriptures, such is not the case. The term was developed by Early Church Fathers however; the usage of the term as we know it today is recent in history. For example Athanasius used "kanonizomenon (canonized) and Eusebius used kanon and "endiathekous bibulous (encovenanted books) (3). The Biblical canon is the set of books Christians regard as divinely inspired and thus constituting the Christian Bible.

These lists, or canons, have been developed through debate and agreement by the religious authorities of those faiths. Believers consider these canonical books to be inspired by God or to express the authoritative history of the relationship between God and his people. Books excluded from a particular canon are considered non-canonical — however, many disputed books considered non-canonical or even apocryphal by some are considered Biblical apocrypha or Deuterocanonical or fully canonical, by others. There are differences between the Jewish and Christian canons, and between the canons of different Christian denominations. The differing criteria and processes of canonization dictate what the communities regard as the inspired books.

The canons we will be talking about in this chapter are usually considered closed (i.e., books cannot be added or removed (4). The closure of the canon reflects a belief that public revelation has ended and thus the inspired texts may be gathered into a complete and authoritative canon (5). By contrast, an open canon permits the addition of additional books through the process of continuous revelation. In Christian traditions, continuing revelation is most commonly associated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and with some denominations of Pentecostal and

Charismatic Christianity.

The word "canon" is derived from the Greek word meaning "reed" or "cane," often used as a standard of measurement. Thus, a canonic text is a single authoritative edition for a given work. The establishing of a canonic text may involve an editorial selection from biblical manuscript traditions with varying interdependence. Significant separate manuscript traditions in the Hebrew Bible are represented in the Septuagint, the Targums and Peshitta, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Masoretic Text, and the Dead Sea scrolls.

New Testament Greek and Latin texts presented enough significant differences that a manuscript tradition arose of presenting diglot texts, with Greek and Latin on facing pages. New Testament manuscript traditions include the Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Bezae, Codex Alexandrinus, Textus Receptus, Vetus Latina, Vulgate, and others (see additionally the Categories of New Testament manuscripts – Appendix #2).

### *The Canon in the Scriptures*

*900 BC - Numbers and Deuteronomy - The Silver Scroll*

*400 BC - The Pentateuch - Exodus 17:14; Deuteronomy 31:24-26*

*(The Letter of Aristeas (2<sup>nd</sup> Century) attests to this & this version was used in the Septuagint)*

*400 BC - "The kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings" (Neh. 2:13-15) - 2 Maccabees*

*450 BC - The Canon put together by Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly (or Great Synagogue) - 4 Ezra (2 Esdras)*

The ancient "canonical" concept appears in its earliest form in the OT in Exodus 17:14 and Deuteronomy 31:24-26, where emphasis is made upon preservation of material as a memorial and as a witness. This is the seed from which an OT canon, or set of established books, grew (6).

Ideas about the earliest organization of the canon remain purely hypothetical. Some suggest that Ezra and/or Nehemiah were responsible for the first true organization, with Judas Maccabaeus being the one who put an "official" deposit of the sacred writings in the Temple (7).

The first record we have of a Canon of Scripture is in Joshua 1:8 “*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful*”. We believe that the Book of the Law is the first five books of the Scriptures, the Torah, the Pentateuch written by Moses in

Deuteronomy 31:23-25 “24 After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, 25 he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD: 26 "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God.” Since God is commanding Joshua to meditate on it and obey it we believe that these five books of the Bible were inspired, inerrant and infallible and came directly from God. We also believe they were the beginning of the Jewish (Old Testament) Canon. (See appendix #3 on books mentioned in the Bible that are not included in the Scriptures.

### *Canon Indicators*

The earliest "hard" indication we have of any sort of classification or categorization of OT books - aside from internal OT references to the books of Moses - comes from the Wisdom of Sirach, a book dated to approximately 130 BC and written by Sirach's grandson (8). The classification scheme refers to the law, the prophets, and the "other" ancestral books. This does not reflect a "fixed" canon of books, merely a basic classification scheme, although it is known that most of what we call the OT today was indeed put into one of these three classes - indicating a "normative collection of sacred writings" as settled. The suggestion in Sirach is that the "law" and "prophets" were recognized bodies of literature, whereas "other ancestral books" seems to have been more fluid. In particular, the books of Moses are recognized as Scripture as early as the 2nd century BC, being named as such in the *Letter of Aristeas* (9). At about the same time, though no titles are given, the Book of Jubilees indicates that there are 22 accepted books (10).

Our next indicator comes from the work of the Jewish historian Philo. In his *Contemplative Life*, written early in the first century, Philo writes of "the laws and the sacred oracles of God enunciated by the holy prophets, and hymns, and psalms, and all kinds of other things" - perhaps a rough equivalence of Sirach's law, prophets and "other" categories. Again, however, we have no specific catalog of books to work with, nor even a number of books (11). A more clear delineation of a threefold division comes from the New Testament. In Luke 24:44, Jesus refers to "the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms" - again, showing that while the first two sections seem to be stable, the third section has not yet been clearly defined; and as yet, there is no clear evidence of a "closed" canon for all three sections.

The next indicator comes from Josephus' description of the Jewish holy books in *Contra Apion* 1.8, dated c. 93-95 AD. After clearly identifying the Pentateuch as the work of Moses, Josephus writes:

“From the death of Moses until Artaxerxes...the prophets who followed after

Moses recorded their deeds in thirteen books. The remaining four comprise hymns to God and rules of ethical conduct for men.” (See appendix #2 for Josephus’ canon.)

Josephus' description here indicates a canon that has been decided upon and closed for quite some time, for he says: "...for although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable." Josephus' Roman readers would have been able to "check out" such an extraordinary claim (12). The same number of books is testified to by the Bryennius List and the canon of Epiphanius, both dated to near the time of Josephus; and 4 Ezra (c. 100 AD) lists 24, likely having Ruth and Lamentations separated (13).

Often cited as a concrete step in the Old Testament canonization procedure is the Council of Jamnia. But some suggest that this seems to have been more a discussion group or college confirming what was already known rather than a canon council (14). In terms of the canon, the most that Jamnia did was ratify "what the most spiritually sensitive souls in Judaism had been accustomed to regard as being Scripture (15).” In the late second century AD, there is distinct evidence that the OT as we know it is fully formed.

### *The Masoretic Text or The Jewish Canon*

Rabbinic Judaism recognizes the twenty-four books of the Masoretic Text, commonly called the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible. Evidence suggests that the process of canonization occurred between 200 BC and AD 200. A popular position is that the Torah was canonized circa 400 BC, the Prophets circa 200 BC, and the Writings circa AD 100 (16) perhaps at the Council of Jamnia—however this position is increasingly criticized by modern scholars. The book of Deuteronomy includes a prohibition against adding or subtracting (4:2, 12:32) which might apply to the book itself (i.e. a closed book, a prohibition against future scribal editing) or to the instruction received by Moses on Mt. Sinai (17).

The book of 2 Maccabees, itself not a part of the Jewish canon, describes Nehemiah (around 400 BC) as having "founded a library and collected books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings" (2:13-15). The Book of Nehemiah suggests that the priest-scribe Ezra brought the Torah back from Babylon to Jerusalem and the Second Temple around the same time period. Both I and II Maccabees suggest that Judas Maccabeus (around 167 BC) likewise collected sacred books (3:42-50, 2:13-15, 15:6-9), and some scholars argue that the Jewish canon was fixed by the Hasmonean dynasty (18). However, these primary sources do not suggest that the canon was at that time closed; moreover, it is not clear that these sacred books were identical to those that later became part of the canon. Today,

there is no scholarly consensus as to when the Jewish canon was set.

### *Samaritan Canon*

A Samaritan Pentateuch exists which is another version of the Torah, in this case in the Samaritan alphabet. The relationship to the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint is still disputed. Scrolls among the Dead Sea scrolls have been identified as proto-Samaritan Pentateuch text-type (19). This text is associated with the Samaritans, a people of whom the Jewish Encyclopedia states: "Their history as a distinct community begins with the taking of Samaria by the Assyrians in 722 BC (20). The Samaritans accept the Torah but do not accept any other parts of the Bible, probably a position also held by the Sadducees (21). Moreover, they did not expand the canon even by adding any Samaritan compositions.

Both texts from the Church Fathers and old Samaritan texts provide us with reasons for the limited extent of the Samaritan Canon. According to some of the information the Samaritans parted with the Jews (Judeans) at such an early date that only the books of Moses were considered holy; according to other sources the group intentionally rejected the Prophets and (possibly) the other Scriptures and entrenched themselves in the Law of Moses.

The small community of the remnants of the Samaritans in Palestine includes their version of the Torah in their canon (22). The Samaritan community claims to possess a copy of the Torah that they believe to have been penned by Abisha, a grandson of Aaron.

### *Christian Canons*

#### *Earliest Christian Communities*

Though the Early Church used the Old Testament according to the canon of the Septuagint (LXX), the apostles did not otherwise leave a defined set of new scriptures; instead the New Testament developed over time (23).

The writings attributed to the apostles circulated amongst the earliest Christian communities. The Pauline epistles were circulating in collected form by the end of the first century AD. Justin Martyr, in the early second century, mentions the "memoirs of the apostles," which Christians called "gospels" and which were regarded as on par with the Old Testament (24).



### *Apostolic Fathers*

A four gospel canon (the Tetramorph) was asserted by Irenaeus, c. 160 (25). By the early 200's, Origen may have been using the same 27 books as in the modern New Testament, though there were still disputes over the canonicity of Hebrews, James, II Peter, II and III John, and Revelation (26). Likewise by 200 the Muratorian fragment shows that there existed a set of Christian writings somewhat similar to what is now the New Testament, which included four gospels and argued against objections to them (27). Thus, while there was a good measure of debate in the Early Church over the New Testament canon, the major writings were accepted by almost all Christians by the middle of the second century (28).

### *Greek Fathers*

In his Easter letter of 367, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, gave a list of exactly the same books as what would become the New Testament canon (29), and he used the word "canonized" (kanonizomena) in regards to them (30).

### *Latin Fathers*

The African Synod of Hippo, in 393, approved the New Testament, as it stands today, together with the Septuagint books, a decision that was repeated by Councils of Carthage in 397 and 419. These councils were under the authority of St. Augustine, who regarded the canon as already closed (31). Pope Damasus I's commissioning of the Latin Vulgate edition of the Bible, c. 383, was instrumental in the fixation of the canon in the West (32). In 405, Pope Innocent I sent a list of the sacred books to a Gallic bishop, Exsuperius of Toulouse. When these bishops and councils spoke on the matter, however, they were not defining something new, but instead "were ratifying what had already become the mind of the Church (33)." Thus, from the fourth century, there existed unanimity in the West concerning the New Testament canon (as it is today) (34), and by the fifth century the East, with a few exceptions, had come to accept the Book of Revelation and thus had come into harmony on the matter of the canon (35).

### *Reformation Period*

Nonetheless, a full dogmatic articulation of the canon was not made until the Council of Trent of 1546 for Roman Catholicism, the Thirty-Nine Articles of 1563 for the Church of England, the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 for British Calvinism, and the Synod of

Jerusalem of 1672 for the Greek Orthodox.

### *Modern Interpretation*

Many Christian groups do not accept the theory that the Christian Bible was not known until various local and Ecumenical Councils, which they deem to be "Roman-dominated", made their official declarations. For example the Ethiopian and Syriac Christian churches which were not part of these councils developed their own biblical traditions.

These groups believe that, in spite of the disagreements about certain books in early Christianity and, indeed, still today, the New Testament supports the view that Paul (2 Timothy 4:11–13), Peter (2 Peter 3:15–16), and ultimately John (Revelation 22:18–19) finalized the canon of the New Testament. Some note that Peter, John, and Paul wrote 20 (or 21) of the 27 books of the NT and personally knew all the other NT writers. (Books not attributed to these three are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, James, and Jude. The authorship of Hebrews has long been disputed.)

Evangelicals tend not to accept the Septuagint as the inspired Hebrew Bible, though many of them recognize its wide use by Greek-speaking Jews in the first century. They note that early Christians knew the Hebrew Bible, since around 170 AD Melito of Sardis listed all the books of the Old Testament that those in the Evangelical faiths now use (without mentioning, at least explicitly, the Book of Esther and, on the other hand, explicitly including the deuterocanonical Book of Wisdom).

“Accordingly when I went East and came to the place where these things were preached and done, I learned accurately the books of the Old Testament, and send them to thee as written below. Their names are as follows: Of Moses, five books: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy; of Jesus Nave, Judges, Ruth; of Kings, four books; of Chronicles, two; the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, Wisdom also, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Job; of Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah; of the twelve prophets, one book ; Daniel, Ezekiel, Esdras. From which also I have made the extracts, dividing them into six books (36).”

However, Melito's account, as well as including the Book of Wisdom, does not determine that the specific documentary tradition used by the Jews was necessarily that which was eventually assembled into the Masoretic text, several centuries later. St Athanasius is often quoted as endorsing 39 books in his Old Testament, rejecting any apocryphal writings. However his 39 books are a little different from the Protestant canon in that he rejects Esther and includes

Baruch.

“But for greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being [merely] read; nor is there in any place a mention of apocryphal writings. But they are an invention of heretics, who write them when they choose, bestowing upon them their approbation, and assigning to them a date, that so, using them as ancient writings, they may find occasion to lead astray the simple (37).”

Many modern Protestants point to the following four "Criteria for Canonicity" to justify the selection of the books that have been included in the New Testament:

*Apostolic Origin* — attributed to and based on the preaching/teaching of the first-generation apostles (or their close companions).

Tertullian, the "Father of Latin Theology" (ca. 160-225), witnesses to the authority of writings in the Western church. He stressed the criterion of apostolicity. For example, in his writing *Against Marcion* he clearly distinguishes gospels of apostolic origin and gospels written by disciples of apostles. He writes: "Of the apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instill faith into us; whilst of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterwards." Tertullian did not produce a list of what was in his Old Testament and New Testament, and what we may call his "New Testament canon" included the four gospels, thirteen Pauline letters, Acts, 1 John, 1 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. He referred to these writings in an authoritative manner, and called them an "entire volume." He names the main parts of the New Testament "Gospels" and "the Apostles," the latter phrase probably denoting the apostolic letters. Once again, we note that the boundaries of the apostolic letters are not defined with certainty, but this should not prevent us from seeing that for Tertullian the Bible was a "fixed entity (38)."

*Universal Acceptance* — acknowledged by all major Christian communities in the ancient world (by the end of the fourth century).

"Accordingly, among the canonical Scriptures he will judge according to the following standard: to prefer those that are received by all the catholic churches to those which some do not receive. Among those, again, which are not received by all, he will prefer such as have the

sanction of the greater number and those of greater authority, to such as are held by the smaller number and those of less authority. If, however, he shall find that some books are held by the greater number of churches, and others by the churches of greater authority (though this is not a very likely thing to happen), I think that in such a case the authority on the two sides is to be looked upon as equal (39)."

*Liturgical Use* — read publicly when early Christian communities gathered for the Lord's Supper (their weekly worship services).

What was read in the congregation was probably a key factor in most cases, but even this phenomenon needs differentiation. We have seen that books not in our canon today were widely read by early Christians. However, this does not necessarily mean that they too were regarded as authoritative. The Muratorian Fragment shows that the Shepherd of Hermas was suggested as reading-matter, yet it was accorded a lesser authority and was not to be read "publicly in the church," because it had been written more recently. Even the Festal Letter of Athanasius (from AD 367, containing a clear acknowledgement of the New Testament canon of twenty-seven books) permits the reading of other literature, including the Shepherd of Hermas. The early church possessed literature edifying as reading matter as well as writings with a higher authority (40).

The regular use of writings in the ancient churches was also an important factor in their selection for the New Testament canon. The wide-spread use of the New Testament writings in the churches may have been the most determinative factor in the canonical process. The fact that the authorship of Hebrews was strongly questioned, yet it made it into the New Testament canon, suggests that churches were reluctant to dismiss a useful and cherished document. An important factor was who was favorable toward the acceptance of a document and who was not. Athanasius and Epiphanius, for instance, would have had a greater influence on the church than many lesser known figures. Also, larger churches in the metropolitan centers such as Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, Ephesus, and the New Rome, Constantinople, were more likely to have a greater influence on which books were included than were the smaller churches in rural areas. While most New Testament writings were known and used by most of the churches in Eusebius's day, doubt lingered over others. These "disputed" (antilegomena) writings included James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, probably Revelation, and possibly Hebrews (41).

*Consistent Message* - containing a theological outlook similar or complementary to other accepted Christian writings.

A writing was believed to be scripture, if it was also believed to be internally self-consistent and not self-contradictory. For example, in Justin's famous Dialogue with Trypho, he admonishes that if Trypho had spoken ill of the scriptures in error or without ill intent, he would be forgiven, but, "if you have done so because you imagined that you could throw doubt on the passage, in order that I might say the scriptures contradicted one another, you have erred. But I shall not venture to suppose or to say such a thing, and if a scripture that appears to be of such a kind be brought forward, and if there be a pretext for saying that it is contrary to some other, since I am entirely convinced that no scripture contradicts another, I shall admit rather that I do not understand what is recorded, and shall strive to persuade those who imagine that the scriptures are contradictory to be rather of the same opinion as myself (42)."

Orthodoxy: This theological concern led the early church to employ the "rule of faith" as the criterion of "orthodoxy" to determine which writings could be used in the church. Bishop Serapion (ca. 200) rejected the reading of the Gospel of Peter in church because of this criterion of truth. When asked by the church at Rhossus ... whether the Gospel of Peter could be read in their services, he at first agreed because it had an apostle's name attached. But later he reversed his decision saying, "since I have now learnt, from what has been told me, that their [the authors'] mind was lurking in some hole of heresy, I shall give diligence to come again to you; wherefore, brethren expect me quickly." His rejection was based upon the book's divergence from what was generally accepted as true in the churches. It was not because of its questionable authorship, though that may have played a small role, but because the theology was considered out of step with the "rule of faith" operating in the church (43).

The basic factor for recognizing a book's canonicity for the New Testament was divine inspiration, and the chief test for this was apostolicity. The term apostolic as used for the test of canonicity does not necessarily mean apostolic authorship or derivation, but rather apostolic authority. According to these Protestants, Apostolic authority is never detached from the authority of the Lord.

### *Questions for Chapter Two*

- 1-What is the Biblical Canon?
- 2- How was the Biblical Canon formed?
- 3-What is the difference between open and closed canons?

- 4-What does “canon” mean?
- 5-What was the very first canon?
- 6-What are the main canon indicators?
- 7-When was the Jewish Canon set?
- 8- When was the Christian Canon set?
- 9-What are the protestant Criteria for Canonicity?
- 10-How is the canon used to define orthodoxy?

### *Footnotes for Chapter Two*

- 1- Leon Morris. *New Testament Theology*. p.11.
- 2- McDonald & Sanders, *The Canon Debate, 2002, The Notion and Definition of Canon* by Eugene Ulrich, page 29 defines canon as follows: "...the definitive list of inspired, authoritative books which constitute the recognized and accepted body of sacred scripture of a major religious group, that definitive list being the result of inclusive and exclusive decisions after serious deliberation."; page 34 defines canon of scripture as follows: "...the definitive, closed list of the books that constitute the authentic contents of scripture."
- 3- McDonald & Sanders, *The Canon Debate, 2002, The Notion and Definition of Canon* by Eugene Ulrich, page 28; also from the Introduction on page 13.
- 4- *Athanasius Letter 39.6.3*: "Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these."
- 5- McDonald & Sanders, page 32-33: *Closed list*; page 30: "But it is necessary to keep in mind Bruce Metzger's distinction between "a collection of authoritative books" and "an authoritative collection of books."
- 6- Comfort, Philip Wesley, ed. *The Origin of the Bible*. p. 52.
- 7- Miller, John W. *The Origins of the Bible*. pps. 128, 135.
- 8- Beckwith, Roger. *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*. p. 18.
- 9- MacDonald, Lee M. *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*. p. 29.
- 10- Beckwith, Roger. *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*. p. 235-236.
- 11- *Ibid.*, 38-40.
- 12- Leonhard Rost. *Judaism Outside the Hebrew Canon*. p. 24.
- 13- *Ibid.*
- 14- Beckwith, Roger. *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*. p. 276.
- 15- Metzger, Bruce M. *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*. p. 8.
- 16- McDonald & Sanders, ed., *The Canon Debate*, page 60, chapter 4: The Formation of the Hebrew

Canon: Isaiah as a Test Case by Joseph Blenkinsopp.

- 17- Philip R. Davies in *The Canon Debate*, page 50: "With many other scholars, I conclude that the fixing of a canonical list was almost certainly the achievement of the Hasmonean dynasty."
- 18- McDonald & Sanders editors. *The Canon Debate, 2002*, chapter 6: Questions of Canon through the Dead Sea Scrolls by James C. VanderKam, page 94, citing private communication with Emanuel Tov on biblical manuscripts: Qumran scribe type c.25%, proto-Masoretic Text c. 40%, pre-Samaritan texts c.5%, texts close to the Hebrew model for the Septuagint c.5% and nonaligned c.25%.
- 19- *Jewish Encyclopedia*: Samaritans
- 20- *Jewish Encyclopedia*: Sadducees: "With the destruction of the Temple and the state, the Sadducees as a party no longer had an object for which to live. They disappear from history, though their views are partly maintained and echoed by the Samaritans, with whom they are frequently identified (see Hippolytus, and other Church Fathers, who ascribe to the Sadducees the rejection of the Prophets and the Hagiographa; comp. also Sanh. 90b, where "Zadduqim" stands for "Kutim" (Samaritans).
- 21- *Jewish Encyclopedia* - Samaritans
- 22- McDonald & Sanders's 2002 *The Canon Debate*, page 259: "the Septuagint was not in itself formally closed."
- 23- Everett Ferguson, "*Factors leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon*," in *The Canon Debate*. pp. 302–303.
- 24- *Ibid.* pp. 301.
- 25- Mark A. Noll. *Turning Points*. pp 36–37.
- 26- H. J. De Jonge, "*The New Testament Canon*," in *The Biblical Canons*. p. 315.
- 27- *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (volume 1) p. 308.
- 28- Lindberg, Carter (2006). *A Brief History of Christianity*. p. 15.
- 29- David Brakke, "*Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty Ninth Festal Letter*," pp. 395–419.
- 30- Everett Ferguson, "*Factors leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon*," in *The Canon Debate*. p. 320.
- 31- F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*. p. 225
- 32- Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origins, Development, and Significance*. pp. 237–238.
- 33- F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*. p. 215.

- 34- *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Volume 1. p. 305.
- 35- Melito's canon is found in Eusebius EH4.26.13–14.
- 36- *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
- 37- According to the article *Apostolic Succession*, many Protestants oppose the Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession, and some of them do not do away completely with this idea, but redefine it as obedience to the message of the Apostles, contained by the Bible, i.e. such authority being based upon the authority of the Bible, not upon the authority conferred through some churchly rituals.
- 38- Lee McDonald, James A. Sanders, Editors. *The Canon Debate*; p 382.
- 39- Augustine. *The Canonical Books*, Book 2, Chapter 8.
- 40- Ibid. p 385.
- 41- Ibid. p 432.
- 42- Ibid. p 421. (Adapted from Trypho 65.2)
- 43- Ibid. p 428.



### *Chapter Three*

#### *The Jewish Canon*

*200 BC - The Prophets (accepted by all)*

*130 BC - The Law, the Prophets, the Ancestral Writings - The Wisdom of Sirach*

*100 BC - The Writings (accepted by all)*

*150 BC - The Septuagint (Greek Version of the Hebrew Scriptures including many books considered to be apocryphal) - Philip Schaff*

*1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC - All the Books of the Jewish Canon except Esther - Dead Sea Scrolls*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC - 22 Books in the Old Testament Canon - Book of Jubilees*

The canon of Scripture began long before the time of Christ. This original canon consisted of the Pentateuch which are the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books were established as Scripture long before any other books and were acknowledged to be the inspired word of God. We could call this original canon the “Mosaic Canon of Scripture” as it was first given to Moses (Leviticus 24:4 “*Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said*” and Leviticus 24:12 “*The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.*”) and then later given to Joshua (Joshua 1:8,9 “*Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful*”). As time went by, more books gained recognition until the collection contained nearly all the books of the Old Testament as we know it today. This Old Testament canon is called the “Jewish Canon”.

The Jewish people call the Old Testament the Tanakh. The name "Tanakh" is a Hebrew acronym formed from the initial Hebrew letters of the Tanakh's three traditional subdivisions: The Torah, which is the "Teaching," also known as the Five Books of Moses; The Nevi'im which is the "Prophets" and Ketuvim or the "Writings" - hence *TaNakh*. The elements of the Tanakh are incorporated in various forms in the Christian Bible.

According to the Talmud, much of the contents of the Tanakh were compiled by the "Men of the Great Assembly" by 450 BC, and have since remained unchanged (1). According to Jewish tradition, the Great Assembly ("The Men of the Great Assembly"), also known as the

Great Synagogue, was an assembly of 85 (based on Nehemiah 1) scribes, sages, and prophets, in the period from the end of the prophets up to the time of the development of Rabbinic Judaism, marking a transition from an era of prophets to an era of Rabbis. They were in a period of about two generations. The members of the Great Assembly are designated in the Mishnah as those who occupied a place in the chain of tradition between the Prophets and the earliest scholars known by name (2). "The Prophets transmitted the Torah to the men of the Great Synagogue. . . . Simon the Just was one of those who survived the Great Synagogue, and Antigonus of Soko received the Torah from him (3)." "Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi received from the Prophets; and the men of the Great Synagogue received from Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (4)."

The Tanakh is also called "Mikra" ("reading" or "that which is read"). The three-part division reflected in the acronym "Tanakh" is well attested to in documents from the Second Temple period and in Rabbinic literature. During that period, however, "Tanakh" was not used as a word or term. Instead, the proper title was "Mikra", because the biblical texts were read publicly. "Mikra" is thus analogous to the Latin term "Scriptus", meaning "that which is written" (as in "Scripture" or "The Holy Scriptures"). Mikra continues to be used in Hebrew to this day alongside Tanakh to refer to the Hebrew Scriptures. In modern spoken Hebrew both are used interchangeably (5).

### *The Books of the Jewish Canon*

The Jewish Canon has twenty-four books because of the way the books are viewed. The Tanakh counts as one book what are sometimes counted as two in Christian Bibles (e.g. 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings and so forth), and counts *Trei Asar* (the Twelve Prophets; though literally, "twelve") as a single book. A slightly different accounting can be found in the book *Against Apion*, by the 1st-century Jewish historian Josephus, who describes 22 sacred books (6). Some scholars have suggested that he considered Ruth part of Judges and Lamentations part of Jeremiah; as the Christian translator Jerome recorded in the 4th century AD (7). Other scholars suggest that at the time Josephus wrote, such books as Esther and Ecclesiastes were not yet considered canonical (8).

The books of the Jewish Canon arranged in their three sections are as follows:

First is the Torah. The Torah consists of the first five books of the Bible, commonly referred to as the "Five Books of Moses." Printed versions of the Torah are often called *Chamishei Chumshei Torah* (literally the "five fifths of the Torah"), and informally "a *Chumash*." These books are:

1. Genesis [Breishit]
2. Exodus [Shmot]
3. Leviticus [Vayikra]
4. Numbers [Bamidbar]
5. Deuteronomy [D'varim]

The Hebrew names of the books of the Torah are based on the first prominent word in each book. The English names are not translations of the Hebrew, but are rather Greek names created for the Septuagint which are, in turn, based on Rabbinic names describing the thematic content of each of the Books.

Next is the *Nevi'im*. The *Nevi'im* consists of eight books in the Jewish tradition, although most versions of the Old Testament count the number of books as totaling 21. This division includes the books which, as a whole, cover the chronological era from the entrance of the Israelites into the Land until the Babylonian captivity of Judah (the "period of prophecy"). However, they exclude Chronicles, which covers the same period. The *Nevi'im* are often divided into the Earlier Prophets, which are generally historical in nature, and the Later Prophets, which contain more exhortational prophecies. These books are:

1. Joshua [Y'hoshua]
2. Judges [Shophtim]
3. Samuel (I & II) [Sh'muel]
4. Kings (I & II) [M'lakhim]
5. Isaiah [Y'shayahu]
6. Jeremiah [Yir'mi'yahu]
7. Ezekiel [Y'khezqel]
8. The Twelve Prophets
  - a. Hosea [Hoshea]
  - b. Joel [Yo'el]
  - c. Amos [Amos]
  - d. Obadiah [Ovadyah]
  - e. Jonah [Yonah]
  - f. Micah [Mikhah]
  - g. Nahum [Nakhum]
  - h. Habakkuk [Havakuk]
  - i. Zephaniah [Ts'phanyah]

- j. Haggai [Khagai]
- k. Zechariah [Z'kharyah]
- l. Malachi [Mal'akhi]

Finally is the *Ketuvim* ("Writings") or "scriptures". These are sometimes also known by the Greek title "Hagiographa" and consists of eleven books. These encompass all the remaining books, and include the Five Scrolls. In the Jewish version, Ketuvim consists of eleven books, counting Ezra and Nehemiah as one book and I and II Chronicles as a single book.

The "Sifrei Emet," "Books of Truth":

- 1. Psalms [Tehilim]
- 2. Proverbs [Mishlei]
- 3. Job [Iyov]

The "Five Megilot" or "Five Scrolls":

- 4. Song of Songs [Shir Hashirim]
- 5. Ruth [Rut]
- 6. Lamentations [Eikhah]
- 7. Ecclesiastes [Kohelet]
- 8. Esther [Esther]

The rest of the "Writings":

- 9. Daniel [Dani'el]
- 10. Ezra-Nehemiah [Ezra v'Nekhemia]
- 11. Chronicles (I & II) [Divrei Hayamim] (9)

### *Criteria for Inclusion in the Jewish Canon*

According to Gerald Larue in his book *Old Testament Life and Literature* (10), the criteria used in the selection of sacred books to be included in the Jewish canon have not been set forth in any "clear-cut delineation" but appear to have included the following:

The writing had to be composed in Hebrew. The only exceptions, which were written in Aramaic, were Daniel 2-7, writings attributed to Ezra (Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26), who was recognized as the founding father of post-Exilic Judaism, and Jer. 10:11. Hebrew was the language of Sacred Scripture, Aramaic the language of common speech.

The writing had to be sanctioned by usage in the Jewish community. The use of Esther at Purim made it possible for it to be included in the canon. Judith, without such support, was not acceptable.

The writings had to contain one of the great religious themes of Judaism, such as election, or the covenant. By reclassifying the Song of Songs as an allegory, it was possible to see in this book an expression of covenantal love.

The writing had to be composed before the time of Ezra, for it was popularly believed that inspiration had ceased then. Jonah was accepted because it used the name of an early prophet and dealt with events before the destruction of Nineveh, which occurred in 612 BC. Daniel had its setting in the Exile and therefore was accepted as an Exilic document (11).

### *Support for the Jewish Canon*

#### *2 Esdras*

The first reference to a 24-book Jewish canon is found in 2 Esdras 14:45-46, which was probably written in the first half of the second century AD:

“Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first, and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people.” (RSV note: The "seventy" might refer to the Septuagint, apocrypha, or mystical works).

#### *Pharisees*

The Pharisees also debated the status of these extra-canonical books; in the 2nd century, Rabbi Akiva declared that those who read them would not share in the afterlife (12).

#### *Mishnah*

The Mishnah, compiled by the second century, describes some of the debate over the status of some books of *Ketuvim*, and in particular whether or not they render the hands "impure". *Yadaim 3:5* calls attention to the debate over Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. The *Megillat Ta'anit*, in a discussion of days when fasting is prohibited but that are not noted in the Bible, mentions the holiday of Purim.

Based on these, and a few similar references, Heinrich Graetz concluded in 1871 that there had been a Council of Jamnia (or Yavne in Hebrew – discussed in chapter two) which had decided Jewish canon sometime in the late 1st century (c. 70–90). This became the prevailing scholarly consensus for much of the 20th century. However, from the 1960s onwards, based on the work of J.P. Lewis, S.Z. Leiman, and others, this view increasingly came into question. In

particular, later scholars noted that none of the sources actually mentioned books that had been withdrawn from a canon, and questioned the whole premise that the discussions were about canonicity at all, asserting that they were actually dealing with other concerns entirely.

### *Josephus*

According to Michael Barber, the earliest and most explicit testimony of a Hebrew canonical list comes from Josephus the Jewish historian. He writes (at about 100 AD):

“For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have], but only twenty-two books, which contain all the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life.”

He goes on to say:

"It is true our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of the prophets since that time."

One can deduce from this that a canon was established in a previous time (normally this is taken to be the time of Ezra). Likewise, he presents an argument why it might be considered closed -- that there was an exact succession of prophets that was not maintained after that time. But when he says "not of like authority" is he expressing a universal view by all rabbis of the time that the other books have no authority, or does this mean that various rabbis in various parts of the world ascribe varying degrees of authority to the books? If the latter, then his statement would be more consistent with the idea of a recently closed canon, a canon closed after Christians had appeared on the scene. It is probably best not to interpret Josephus' statement too strongly in any event because his canon does not include Ecclesiastes -- a book that everyone, Jewish and Christian, now accepts (13).

Josephus refers to sacred scriptures divided into three parts: the five books of the Torah; thirteen books of the Nevi'im, and four other books of hymns and wisdom (14). The number of 22 books mentioned by Josephus does not correspond to the number of books in the current

canon. Some scholars have suggested that he considered Ruth part of Judges, and Lamentations part of Jeremiah. Other scholars suggest that at the time Josephus wrote, such books as Esther and Ecclesiastes were not yet considered canonical.

According to Larue, Josephus' listing represents what came to be the Jewish canon, although scholars were still wrestling with problems of the authority of certain writings at the time that he was writing (15). Significantly, Josephus characterizes the 22 books as canonical because they were divinely inspired; he mentions other historical books that were not divinely inspired and that he therefore did not believe belonged in the canon.

### *The Council of Jabneh (Jamnia)*

Before Vespasian's departure, and before his son Titus came and destroyed Jerusalem, the Pharisaic sage and Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai obtained his permission to establish a Judaic school at Yavne/Jamnia. Zakkai was almost killed during the war and had to be smuggled away from Jerusalem during the siege of Titus in a coffin by his students. Later this school became a major center of Talmudic study (16). Zakkai founded a school of Jewish law there, and it became a major source for the later Mishnah (17). However, some sources suggest that this was after 90 AD (18). His school is often understood as a wellspring of Rabbinic Judaism. The Council of Yavne or Council of Jamnia was a council under Rabbi Yohanan's leadership that was responsible for defining the canon of the Hebrew Bible.

Some scholars say that this council established and closed the canon authoritatively for nearly all Jews. It certainly has been their canon ever since. Yet it should be noted that the council did not speak for all Jews, as there were Jews living in Ethiopia who either did not hear of it or did not accept the decision of Jamnia. To this day they use a different canon than their Palestinian brethren (19). There is no scholarly consensus as to when the Jewish canon was set or closed. Nevertheless, the outcomes attributed to the Council of Jamnia did occur whether gradually or as the ruling of a definitive, authoritative council.

The destruction of Jerusalem put as abrupt an end to the disputes of the schools as it did to the contests between political parties (Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots). It was then that a disciple of Hillel, the venerable Johanan ben Zakkai, founded a new home for Jewish Law in Jabneh (Jamnia), and thus evoked a new intellectual life from the ruins of a fallen political existence. The college at Jabneh, which at once constituted itself the successor of the Great Sanhedrin of Jerusalem by putting into practice the ordinances of that body as far as was necessary and practicable, attracted all those who had escaped the national catastrophe and who

had become prominent by their character and their learning.

Moreover, it reared a new generation of similarly gifted men, whose task it became to overcome the evil results of still another dire catastrophe — the unfortunate Bar Kokba war with its melancholy ending. During the interval between these two disasters (56-117AD), or, more accurately, until the War of Quietus under Trajan, the school at Jabneh was the recognized tribunal that gathered the traditions of the past and confirmed them; that ruled and regulated existing conditions; and that sowed the seeds for future development. Next to its founder, it owed its splendor and its undisputed supremacy especially to the energetic Gamaliel, a great-grandson of Hillel, called Gamaliel II., or Gamaliel of Jabneh, in order to distinguish him from his grandfather, Gamaliel I.

To him flocked the pupils of Johanan ben Zakkai and other masters and students of the Law and of Biblical interpretation. Though some of them taught and labored in other places — Eliezer ben Hyrcanus in Lydda; Joshua ben Hananiah in Beḳiin; Ishmael ben Elisha in Kefar Aziz, Akiba in Bene Berak; Hananiah ben Teradyon in Siknin — Jabneh remained the center; and in "the vineyard" of Jabneh, as they called their place of meeting, they used to assemble for joint action.

In the fertile ground of the Jabneh Academy the roots of the literature of tradition — Midrash and Mishnah, Talmud and Aggadah — were nourished and strengthened. There, too, the way was paved for a systematic treatment of Halakah and exegesis. In Jabneh were held the decisive debates upon the canonicity of certain Biblical books; there the prayer-liturgy received its permanent form; and there, probably, was edited the Targum on the Pentateuch, which became the foundation for the later Targum called after Onkelos.

It was Jabneh that inspired and sanctioned the New Greek version of the Bible — that of Akylas (Aquila). The events that preceded and followed the great civil revolution under Bar Kokba (from the year 117 to about 140) resulted in the decay and death of the school at Jabneh. According to tradition (R. H. 31b), the Sanhedrin was removed from Jabneh to Usha, from Usha back to Jabneh, and a second time from Jabneh to Usha. This final settlement in Usha indicates the ultimate spiritual supremacy of Galilee over Judea, the latter having become depopulated by the war of Hadrian. Usha remained for a long time the seat of the academy; its importance being due to the pupils of Akiba, one of whom, Judah ben Ilai, had his home in Usha. Here was undertaken the great work of the restoration of Palestinian Judaism after its disintegration under Hadrian. The study of the Law flourished anew; and Simon, a son of Gamaliel, was invested with the rank that had been his father's in Jabneh. With him the rank of patriarch became



hereditary in the house of Hillel, and the seat of the academy was made identical with that of the patriarch (20).

### *Was the Jewish Canon Closed?*

*(And if so how did we get the New Testament into the Bible?)*

The book of Deuteronomy includes a prohibition against adding or subtracting (4:2, 12:32) which might apply to the book itself (i.e. a closed book, a prohibition against future scribal editing) or to the instruction received by Moses on Mt. Sinai (21). The book of 2 Maccabees, itself not a part of the Jewish canon, describes Nehemiah (around 400 BC) as having "founded a library and collected books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings" (2:13-15) (22). The Book of Nehemiah suggests that the priest-scribe Ezra brought the Torah back from Babylon to Jerusalem and the Second Temple (8-9) around the same time period. Both I and II Maccabees suggest that Judas Maccabeus (around 167 BC) likewise collected sacred books (3:42-50, 2:13-15, 15:6-9), indeed some scholars argue that the Jewish canon was fixed by the Hasmonean dynasty (23). However, these primary sources do not suggest that the canon was at that time closed; moreover, it is not clear that these sacred books were identical to those that later became part of the canon. As mentioned above, there is no scholarly consensus as to when the Jewish canon was closed.

The basis of Christianity is found in the authority of Scripture. If we can't identify what is Scripture, then we can't properly distinguish any theological truth from error. Concerning a measure or standard used to determine which books should be classified as Scripture, a key verse to understanding the process and purpose and perhaps timing of the giving of Scripture is Jude 3, which states that a Christian's faith "was once for all delivered to the saints." Since our faith is defined by Scripture, Jude is essentially saying that Scripture was given once for the benefit of all Christians. We can be confident that God has not left us without a witness. The same supernatural power God used to produce His word has also been used to preserve it.

Psalms 119:160 states that the entirety of God's word is truth. Starting with that premise, we can compare writings outside the accepted canon of Scripture to see if they meet the test. As an example, the Bible claims that Jesus Christ is God (Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 1:22-23; John 1:1, 2, 14; 20:28; Acts 16:31, 34; Philippians 2:5-6; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1). Yet many extra-biblical texts, claiming to be Scripture, argue that Jesus is not God. When clear contradictions exist, the established Bible is to be trusted, leaving the others outside the sphere of Scripture (24).

One way to attempt to settle the issue is to appeal to the Jewish people. They, after all, were on the scene longer than Christians, and the Old Testament scriptures were given to the world through the Jews.

If the Jews recognized a canon and understood it to be closed (i.e. that no more books could be added to it) in the time before Christ, then it should remain fixed in the form they established. This logically follows if you believe the Bible is inspired. It seems unthinkable that the text should be inspired, but that the canon should not also be God-given in whatever final form it comes to us. If this ability to discern the canon is God-given then Christians should regard a Jewish canon arising from the pre-Christian era as binding upon them, and should be no more able to change it than they are able to change the contents of the individual books.

On the other hand, if the Jews had not discerned or closed their canon before the time of Christ (i.e. determined that no more books could be added to it), if they only came to believe that the canon was closed only at a later date, then Christians should not be overly concerned with their conclusions -- for it would be logical to conclude that the Holy Spirit's inspiration now belonged to the Christians. So the first question we must ask before determining what the final canon should be is now this: Did the Jews of the pre-Christian era have a definite and closed canon?

If the canon of the Bible had been fixed before the time of the apostles, then why does 2 Pet 3:16 speak of Paul's writing as Scriptures? Surely this would be an unnatural term for a Jew who had believed in a closed canon of the Bible. It may even have been that Jews were expecting new Scripture to be written when the Messiah came. The important point here is that the concept of a "New Testament" as distinct from an "Old Testament" is not found until the second century - - before that there is only "Scripture (25)."

We will discuss this more in later chapters but for now we conclude with two facts: 1) The Jewish Canon of Scripture is what we today call the 39 books of the Old Testament and 2) The Jewish Canon was not closed by the end of the Old Testament age allowing for the addition of the New Testament books. At best the Jewish Canon was closed at the Council of Jamnia in 90 AD after the New Testament age was almost over.

### *Questions for Chapter Three*

- 1- What is the "Mosaic" Canon?
- 2- What is the Jewish Canon?
- 3- What is the Tanakh and what does it mean?

- 4- What were the criteria for inclusion into the Jewish Canon?
- 5- Where do we find support for the Jewish Canon?
- 6- What is the Council of Jamnia?
- 7- Did the Council of Jamnia close the Canon of Scripture?
- 8- Did the Jewish canon close the canon of Scripture?
- 9- Why does this matter?
- 10- How did the New Testament books get into the Canon of Scripture?

### *Footnotes for Chapter Three*

- 1- Talmud. Bava Basra 14b-15a, Rashi to Megillah 3a, 14a.
- 2- Mishnah (Ab. i. 1).
- 3- Mishnah (Ab. i. 1 et seq.).
- 4- Mishnah (Ab. R. N. i.).
- 5- Biblical Studies. *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation*. Norton Irish Theological Quarterly. 2007; 72: 305-306.
- 6- Josephus, *Against Apion*, 8.
- 7- Jerome, *Prologus Galeatus* (English translation).
- 8- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh>.
- 9- *Ibid*.
- 10- Larue, Gerald A. (1968). *Old Testament Life and Literature*. Whole Chapter 31.
- 11- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development\\_of\\_the\\_Jewish\\_Bible\\_canon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_Jewish_Bible_canon).
- 12- Sanhedrin 10:1.
- 13- Mike Barber. "Loose Canons: The Development of the Old Testament (Part 1)" <http://singinginthereign.blogspot.com/2006/03/loose-canons-development-of-old.html>.
- 14- Josephus. *Against Apion* Book 1.8.
- 15- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development\\_of\\_the\\_Jewish\\_Bible\\_canon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_Jewish_Bible_canon).
- 16- 3828 in Hebrew calendar, or 68 BC; Talmud Gittin 56a-b, p.95.
- 17- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Jewish-Roman\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Jewish-Roman_War).
- 18- W. Corduan. *Neighboring Faiths*, p. 54.
- 19- *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 6, p 1147.
- 20- Jewish Encyclopedia. *Academies in Palestine*. 1905.  
<http://jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=711&letter=A&search=Academy%20of%20Jabneh>.
- 21- McDonald & Sanders. *The Canon Debate*, Chapter 4: *The Formation of the Hebrew Canon: Isaiah as a*

*Test Case*. p. 60.

22- AFL Klijn. *A Library of Scriptures in Jerusalem*. *Studia Codicologica*. p. 267-268.

Note 2:13-15. This fact, not totally reliable, completes what we read in 1 Chr 29:29-30; 2 Chr 9:29; 16:11... Ezra 7:25-26; Ne 8; regarding the formation of the nucleus of the Bible, a task which was achieved not by Nehemiah, but rather by Ezra.

23- Philip Davies. *The Canon Debate*, p. 50.

"With many other scholars, I conclude that the fixing of a canonical list was almost certainly the achievement of the Hasmonean dynasty."

24- <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/sbrandt/canon.htm>.

25- Everett Ferguson, "Factors leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon," in *The Canon Debate*. p. 301.

*Chapter Four*  
*The Septuagint – the Bible of Jesus*  
*And the Masoretic Text*

200 BC - *The Prophets (accepted by all)*  
130 BC - *The Law, the Prophets, the Ancestral Writings - The Wisdom of Sirach*  
100 BC - *The Writings (accepted by all)*  
150 BC - *The Septuagint (Greek Version of the Hebrew Scriptures and including many books considered to be apocryphal) - Philip Schaff*  
7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Century AD - *Masoretic Text (Aleppo Codex – 10<sup>th</sup> Century)*  
*The Hebrew Canon (OT) with Vowel Points*

*The Septuagint*

The Septuagint or simply "LXX" is the Koine Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, translated in stages between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC in Alexandria. It is the oldest of several ancient translations of the Hebrew Bible into the Greek language, the common language of the eastern Mediterranean from the time of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC). The word "septuaginta" means "seventy" in Latin and derives from a tradition that seventy (or seventy-two) Jewish scholars translated the Pentateuch (Torah) from Hebrew into Greek for Ptolemy II Philadelphus, 285–246 BC.

The tradition preserved in the Pseudepigraphical *Letter of Aristeas* which connects the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek with the patronage of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, is probably exaggerated. However, Walter Kaiser in his *A History of Israel* says, "There can be little doubt that the Law was translated in Philadelphus's time since Greek quotations from Genesis and Exodus appear in Greek literature before 200 B.C. The language of the Septuagint is more like Egyptian Greek than it is like Jerusalemite Greek, according to some (1)."

The so-called *Letter of Aristeas* or *Letter to Philocrates* is a Hellenistic work of the second century BC, one of the Pseudepigrapha (2). Josephus ascribes to the writer, Aristeas, a letter written to Philocrates, describing the Greek translation of the Hebrew Law by seventy-two interpreters sent into Egypt from Jerusalem at the request of the Librarian of Alexandria, resulting in the Septuagint translation. It is the earliest text to mention the Library of Alexandria (3).

It was not until the time of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) that the Greek translation

of the Jewish scriptures came to be called by the Latin term *septuaginta* (70 rather than 72). In his *City of God* 18.42, while repeating the story of Aristeas, Augustine adds the remark, "It is their translation that it has now become traditional to call the Septuagint." Augustine thus indicates that this name for the Greek translation of the scriptures was a recent development. But he offers no clue as to which of the possible antecedents led to this development: Exodus 24:1-8, Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.57, 12.86), or some other. However, this name *Septuagint* appears to have been a fourth- to fifth-century development (4).

The Septuagint includes some books not found in the Hebrew Bible. Many Protestant Bibles follow the Jewish canon and exclude the additional books. Roman Catholics, however, include some of these books in their canon while Eastern Orthodox Churches use all the books of the Septuagint. Anglican lectionaries also use all of the books except Psalm 151, and the full King James Bible in its Authorized Version includes these additional books in a separate section labeled *Apocrypha*. Only the books of the Jewish canon are quoted in the New Testament however, with only one exception in the Book of Jude which has a quote from Enoch.

The Septuagint was held with great respect in ancient times; Philo and Josephus ascribed divine inspiration to its authors (5) (see appendix #5). Besides the Old Latin versions, the LXX is also the basis for the Slavonic, Syro-Hexaplar (but not the Peshitta), Old Armenian, Old Georgian and Coptic versions of the Old Testament (6). Of significance for all Christians and for Bible scholars, the LXX is quoted by the New Testament and by the Apostolic Fathers. While Jews have not used the LXX in worship or religious study since the second century AD, recent scholarship has brought renewed interest in it in Judaic Studies. Some of the Dead Sea scrolls attest to Hebrew texts other than those on which the Masoretic Text (MT) (see below) was based; in many cases, these newly found texts accord with the LXX version. The oldest surviving codices of LXX (Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus) date to the fourth century (7).

### *Creation of the Septuagint*

Jewish scholars first translated the Torah into Greek in the third century BC (8). Further books were translated over the next two centuries. It is not altogether clear which was translated when, or where; some may even have been translated twice, into different versions, and then revised. The quality and style of the different translators also varied considerably from book to book, from the literal to paraphrasing to interpretative. According to one assessment "the Pentateuch is reasonably well translated, but the rest of the books, especially the poetical books,

are often very poorly done and even contain sheer absurdities (9).”

As the work of translation progressed gradually, and new books were added to the collection, the compass of the Greek Bible came to be somewhat indefinite. The Pentateuch always maintained its pre-eminence as the basis of the canon; but the prophetic collection changed its aspect by having various Hagiographa incorporated into it. Some of the newer works, those called *anagignoskomena* in Greek, are not included in the Hebrew canon (see appendix #6). Also, the Septuagint version of some works, like Daniel and Esther, are longer than those in the MT (10). Some of the later books (Wisdom of Solomon, 2 Maccabees, and others) apparently were composed in Greek (11).

The authority of the larger group of writings, out of which the *Ketuvim* (“the Writings”) were selected, had not yet been determined, although some sort of selective process must have been employed because the Septuagint did not include other well-known Jewish documents such as Enoch or Jubilees or other writings that are now part of the Pseudepigrapha. It is not known what principles were used to determine the contents of the Septuagint beyond the Law and the Prophets.

### *The New Testament and the Septuagint*

What Bible does the New Testament quote? Not the Hebrew Bible, since the majority of the New Testament was composed in Greek. The Bible used for most Scripture quotations in the New Testament is the same Bible used by the Ethiopian Jews mentioned above and the same Bible used by Christians in the earliest centuries of the Church -- the Septuagint.

One of the reasons that the LXX is of value is that it expresses the opinions of the Jewish people in the times prior to Christ, during an age where later opinions of him could not have biased their writings or thoughts with respect to Christian issues. In some cases also, it may well reflect an earlier text than the MT or the present day Hebrew.

For example, Isaiah 7:14 became a controversial verse for Jews and Christians practically from the start: “*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*” This verse reflects a pre-Christian, Jewish interpretation of the admittedly more vague Hebrew text. The LXX used the word *virgin* in its translation, and after Christians came on the scene and used this word as prophetic of the type of birth Christ it became an embarrassment to the Jews. What this verse said about the virgin birth of the Messiah, together with the fact that the LXX was the version quoted by the authors of the New Testament, combined with its widespread use before and after the time of Christ caused

many to think that the LXX itself was inspired.

Another strong reason that many believed in the LXX's inspiration was that a legend sprang up about its composition -- that the books were translated independently by 72 scholars and that they arrived at, word for word, the identical translation. A version of that legend narrated by Philo of Alexandria states that although the translators were kept in separate chambers, they all produced identical versions of the text in seventy-two days. Although this story may be improbable, it underlines the fact that some ancient Jews wished to present the translation as authoritative (12). A version of this legend is found in the Tractate Megillah of the Babylonian Talmud, which identifies fifteen specific unusual translations made by the scholars. Only two of these translations are found in the extant LXX. (13).

Unfortunately, the oldest copies of the LXX currently in our possession date from the 4th century, and must have been copied by Christian hands. The antiquity of the translations can be established, however, from other considerations. The canon of the LXX is larger than the present canon used by the Jews, and includes the books disputed between Catholics and Protestants (as well as the additions to Daniel and Esther).

The LXX was not generally available in the form of a modern Bible (although there are some copies, called codices, which were bound in a form like a modern book), but as a collection of scrolls, and thus its table of contents was less fixed. Furthermore, even in the ancient codices there is some variation in the contents. One finds books there that both Catholics and Protestants consider to be non-canonical. In all cases the disputed books are present in the codices, the only exception is that Maccabees is absent from one copy of the LXX named Codex Vaticanus.

In any event, one must recognize that at the time the New Testament was written the LXX was in wide use and was widely respected by the authors of the New Testament and the Jewish people living at that time -- otherwise the New Testament writers would not have made use of it. Rapidly, however, it became more a Christian than a Jewish book. In essence the LXX became *the* Christian Old Testament.

### *The Masoretic Text*

The Masoretic Text (MT) is the Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible (Tanakh). It defines not just the books of the Jewish canon, but also the precise letter-text of the biblical books in Judaism, as well as their vocalization and accentuation for both public reading and private study. The MT is also widely used as the basis for translations of the Old Testament in Protestant Bibles, and in recent decades also for Catholic Bibles.



The MT was primarily copied, edited and distributed by a group of Jews known as the Masoretes between the seventh and tenth centuries AD. The Masoretes were groups of scribes and Bible scholars working between the 7th and 11th centuries, based primarily in Israel in the cities of Tiberius and Jerusalem, as well as in Babylonia. Each group compiled a system of pronunciation and grammatical guides in the form of diacritical notes on the external form of the Biblical text in an attempt to fix the pronunciation, paragraph and verse divisions and cantillation of the Jewish Bible, the Tanakh, for the worldwide Jewish community (14). The Masoretes devised the vowel notation system for Hebrew that is still widely used as well as the trope symbols used for cantillation “Trope” is the notation for accentuation and musical reading of the Bible in Jewish religious liturgy). “Cantillation” is the ritual chanting of readings from the Bible in synagogue services.

By long tradition, a ritual Torah scroll shall contain only the Hebrew consonantal text - nothing may be added, nothing taking away. However, perhaps because they were intended for personal study rather than ritual use, the Masoretic codices provide extensive additional material, called *masorah*, to show correct pronunciation and cantillation, protect against scribal errors, and annotate possible variants. The manuscripts thus include vowel points, pronunciation marks and stress accents in the text, short annotations in the side margins, and longer more extensive notes in the upper and lower margins and collected at the end of each book.

### *The Ben Asher Family*

The Ben Asher family of Masoretes was largely responsible for the preservation and production of the Masoretic Text, although an alternate Masoretic text of the Ben Naphtali Masoretes which differs slightly from the Ben Asher text existed. The halakhic authority Maimonides endorsed the Ben Asher as superior.

Aaron ben Moses ben Asher (10th century, died circa 960) refined the Tiberian system for writing down vowel sounds in Hebrew, which is still in use today, and serves as the basis for grammatical analysis. For over a thousand years he has been regarded by Jews of all streams around the world as having produced the most accurate version of the Masoretic text. Since his day, both handwritten manuscripts of the Tanakh and printed versions strove to emulate his achievement and continue to do so. He lived and worked in the city of Tiberius on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee (15) (see Appendix #7). Ben-Asher was the last and most prominent member of the Ben-Asher dynasty of grammarians from Tiberias, which shaped the most accurate version of the Masorah – the Aleppo Codex - and, therefore, the Hebrew Bible (16).

### *The Text*

Though the consonants created by the Masoretes differ little from the text generally accepted in the early second century (and also differ little from some Qumran texts that are even older), it has numerous differences of both greater and lesser significance when compared to (extant 4th century) manuscripts of the Septuagint, that were in popular use in Egypt and Palestine and that are often quoted in the Christian New Testament.

The Hebrew word *masorah* is taken from Ezekiel 20:37 and means originally "fetter". The fixation of the text was considered to be in the nature of a fetter upon its exposition. When, in the course of time, the Masorah had become a traditional discipline, the term became connected with the verb (= "to hand down"), and acquired the general meaning of "tradition."

*Mesorah* refers to the transmission of a tradition. In a very broad sense it can refer to the entire chain of Jewish tradition but in reference to the Masoretic text the word *mesorah* has a very specific meaning: the diacritic markings of the text of the Hebrew Bible and concise marginal notes in manuscripts (and later printings) of the Hebrew Bible which note textual details, usually about the precise spelling of words. The oldest manuscripts containing substantial parts of the Masoretic Text known to still exist date from approximately the ninth century AD (17).

The consonants in the Codex were copied by the scribe Shlomo ben Buya'a in Israel circa 920. The text was then verified, vocalized, and provided with Masoretic notes by Aaron ben Asher. The Leningrad Codex, which dates to approximately the same time as the Aleppo codex, has been claimed to be a product of the Ben-Asher scriptorium. However, its own colophon says only that it was corrected from manuscripts written by Ben-Asher; there is no evidence that Ben-Asher himself ever saw it.

The earliest labors of the Masoretes included standardizing division of the text into books, sections, paragraphs, verses, and clauses; the fixing of the orthography, pronunciation, and cantillation; the introduction or final adoption of the square characters with the five final letters; some textual changes to guard against blasphemy and the like (though these changes may pre-date the Masoretes); the enumeration of letters, words, verses, etc., and the substitution of some words for others in public reading.

Since no additions were allowed to be made to the official text of the Bible, the early Masoretes adopted other expedients: e.g., they marked the various divisions by spacing, and gave indications of halakic and haggadic teachings by full or defective spelling, abnormal forms of letters, dots, and other signs. Marginal notes were permitted only in private copies (18).

The language of the Masoretic notes is partly Hebrew and partly Aramaic. The Masoretic annotations are found in various forms: (a) in separate works, (b) in the form of notes written in the margins and at the end of codices. In rare cases, the notes are written between the lines. The first word of each Biblical book is also as a rule surrounded by notes. The latter are called the Initial Masorah; the notes on the side margins or between the columns are called the Small or Inner Masorah; and those on the lower and upper margins, the Large or Outer Masorah. The name "Large Masorah" is applied sometimes to the lexically arranged notes at the end of the printed Bible, usually called the Final Masorah, or the Masoretic Concordance.

The Small Masorah consists of brief notes with reference to marginal readings, to statistics showing the number of times a particular form is found in Scripture, to full and defective spelling, and to abnormally written letters. The Large Masorah is more copious in its notes. The Final Masorah comprises all the longer rubrics for which space could not be found in the margin of the text, and is arranged alphabetically in the form of a concordance. The quantity of notes the marginal Masorah contains is conditioned by the amount of vacant space on each page. In the manuscripts it varies also with the rate at which the copyist was paid and the fanciful shape he gave to his gloss.

In most manuscripts, there are some discrepancies between the text and the Masorah, suggesting that they were copied from different sources or that one of them has copying errors. The lack of such discrepancies in the Aleppo Codex is one of the reasons for its importance; the scribe who copied the notes, presumably Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, probably wrote them originally.

### *The Aleppo Codex*

The Aleppo Codex is a manuscript of the Hebrew Bible according to the Tiberian *Masorah*, produced and edited by the influential masorete Aaron ben Asher in the 10th Century AD. It was at one time the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible (today there exist scrolls of individual books of the *Tanakh* which are much older such as the Dead Sea scrolls) however approximately one-third of it, including nearly all of the Torah, has been missing since 1947.

It is considered the most authoritative document in the *Masorah*, the tradition by which the Hebrew Scriptures have been preserved from generation to generation (19). Surviving examples of Response literature (in rabbinic literature, the Responsa are known as "questions and answers" and comprise the body of written decisions and rulings given by "decisors of Jewish law"), show the Aleppo Codex to have been consulted by far-flung Jewish scholars

throughout the Middle Ages.

Modern studies have shown the Aleppo Codex to be the most accurate representation of Masoretic principles to be found in any extant manuscript, containing very few errors among the millions of orthographic details that make up the Masoretic text. Thus, the Aleppo Codex is seen as the most authoritative source document for both the original biblical text and its vocalization (cantillation) as it has been proven to have been the most faithful to the Masoretic principles (20).

The Aleppo Codex was the manuscript used by the rabbi and scholar Maimonides (1135-1204) when he set down the exact rules for writing scrolls of the Torah in his *Mishneh Torah*. This *halachic* ruling gave the Aleppo Codex what is for Jews the seal of supreme textual authority, even though Maimonides only quoted it for paragraphing and other details of formatting, and not for the text itself. "The codex which we used in these works is the codex known in Egypt, which includes 24 books, which was in Jerusalem," he wrote.

After its creation in the 10th Century, the Codex was given to the Jewish community of Jerusalem during the mid-11th century. However, it was among the works held ransom by the Crusaders during the First Crusade. After being rescued by the elders of Ashkelon, it was transported to Egypt along with Jewish refugees (21). It later resurfaced in the Rabbanite synagogue in Cairo, where it was consulted by Maimonides, and Maimonides' descendants brought it to Aleppo, Syria, at the end of the 14th century. The Codex remained in Syria for five hundred years, until Muslim anti-Jewish riots desecrated the synagogue where it resided. The Codex disappeared, and re-emerged in 1958, when it was smuggled into Israel by Syrian Jew Murad Faham, and presented to the president of the state, Itzhak Ben-Zvi. On arrival, it was found that parts of the codex had been lost. The Aleppo Codex was entrusted to the Ben-Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

The beginning (nearly all of the Torah) and end of the manuscript are missing, as well as some pages in between. When the Aleppo Codex was complete (until 1947), it followed the Tiberian textual tradition in the order of its books, similar to the Leningrad Codex, and which also matches the later tradition of Sephardic biblical manuscripts. Torah and Nevi'im appear in the same order found in most printed Hebrew bibles, but the order for the books for Ketuvim differs markedly.

In the Aleppo Codex, the order of Ketuvim is: Chronicles, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah. The current text is

missing almost the entire Torah (Genesis through most of Deuteronomy). It begins with the last word of Deuteronomy 28:17 ("and your kneading trough"). After that, the books of Nevi'im appear in their traditional order (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets). The Ketuvim follow as above, but currently end at the last leaf in Song of Songs 3:11 ("daughters of Zion..."). Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah are missing (22).

## *Conclusion*

### *Relationship between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text*

The sources of the many differences between the Septuagint and the MT have long been discussed by scholars. The most widely accepted view today is that the original Septuagint provided a reasonably accurate record of an early Semitic textual variant, now lost, that differed from ancestors of the Masoretic text. Ancient scholars, however, did not suspect this. Early Christians, who were largely unfamiliar with Hebrew texts, and were thus only made aware of the differences through the newer Greek versions, tended to dismiss the differences as a product of uninspired translation of the Hebrew in these new versions.

Following the Renaissance, a common opinion among some humanists was that the LXX translators bungled the translation from the Hebrew and that the LXX became more corrupt with time. The discovery of many fragments in the Dead Sea scrolls that agree with the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic Text proved that many of the variants in Greek were also present in early Semitic manuscripts (23). However, the text of the LXX is in general close to that of the Masoretic.

### *Use of the Septuagint*

#### *Jewish Usage*

By the 3rd century BC, most Jewish communities were located in the Hellenistic world. Outside of Judea, many Jews may have needed synagogue readings or texts for religious study to be interpreted into Greek, producing a need for the LXX. Alexandria held the greatest Diaspora Jewish community of the age and was also a great center of Greek letters. Alexandria is thus likely the site of LXX authorship, a notion supported by the legend of Ptolemy and the 72 scholars. The Septuagint enjoyed widespread use in the Hellenistic Jewish Diaspora and even in Jerusalem, which had become a rather cosmopolitan (and therefore Greek-speaking) town. Both

Philo and Josephus show a reliance on the Septuagint in their citations of Jewish scripture.

Starting approximately in the 2nd century AD, several factors led most Jews to abandon use of the LXX. Christians of necessity used the LXX, as it was the only version widely comprehensible to most, if not all, the early Christians. The association of the LXX with a rival religion may have rendered it suspect in the eyes of the newer generation of Jews and Jewish scholars. Perhaps more importantly, the Greek language—and therefore the Greek Bible—declined among Jews after most of them fled from the Greek-speaking eastern Roman Empire into the Aramaic-speaking Persian Empire when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans.

Instead, Jews used Hebrew/Aramaic Targum manuscripts later compiled by the Masoretes; and authoritative Aramaic translations, such as those of Onkelos and Rabbi Yonathan ben Uziel. What was perhaps most significant for the LXX, as distinct from other Greek versions, was that the LXX began to lose Jewish sanction after differences between it and contemporary Hebrew Scriptures were discovered. Even Greek-speaking Jews — such as those remaining in Palestine — tended less to the LXX, preferring other Jewish versions in Greek, such as that of Aquila (24), which seemed to be more concordant with contemporary Hebrew texts (25).

### *Christian Usage*

The early Christian Church continued to use the Greek texts since Greek was the language of the Roman Empire at the time, and the language of the Church. In addition the Church Fathers tended to accept Philo's account of the LXX's miraculous and inspired origin. Furthermore, the New Testament writers, when citing the Jewish scriptures or when quoting Jesus doing so, freely used the Greek translation, implying that the Apostles and their followers considered it reliable.

When Jerome undertook the revision of the Old Latin translations of the Septuagint, he checked the Septuagint against the Hebrew that was then available. He came to believe that the Hebrew text better testified to Christ than the Septuagint (26). He broke with church tradition and translated most of the Old Testament of his Vulgate from Hebrew rather than Greek. As mentioned earlier, his choice was severely criticized by Augustine, his contemporary; and a flood of still less moderate criticism came from those who regarded Jerome as a forger. But with the passage of time, acceptance of Jerome's version gradually increased until it displaced the Old Latin translations of the Septuagint.

The Hebrew text diverges in some passages that Christians hold to prophesy Christ, and

the Eastern Orthodox Church still prefers to use the LXX as the basis for translating the Old Testament into other languages. The Orthodox Church of Constantinople, the Church of Greece and the Cypriot Orthodox Church continue to use it in their liturgy today, *untranslated* (27). Many modern critical translations of the Old Testament, while using the Masoretic text as their basis, consult the Septuagint as well as other versions in an attempt to reconstruct the meaning of the Hebrew text whenever the latter is unclear, undeniably corrupt, or ambiguous.

Many of the oldest Biblical verses among the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly those in Aramaic, correspond more closely with the LXX than with the Masoretic text (although the majority of these variations are extremely minor, e.g. grammatical changes, spelling differences or missing words, and do not affect the meaning of sentences and paragraphs) (28). This confirms the scholarly consensus that the LXX represents a separate Hebrew-text tradition from that which was later standardized as the Masoretic text (29).

#### *Questions for Chapter Four*

- 1- What is the Septuagint?
- 2- What does Septuagint mean and why was it written?
- 3- What books are in the Septuagint?
- 4- What Bible does the New Testament quote?
- 5- Which books of the Septuagint are quoted in the New Testament?
- 6- What is the Masoretic Text?
- 7- Who were the Masoretes?
- 8- Why are the Masoretes important?
- 9- Who was the most famous Masorete and why?
- 10- What is the Aleppo Codex?
- 11- Why are there differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text?

#### *Footnotes for Chapter Four*

- 1- Walter Kaiser. *A History of Israel*. p. 467.
- 2- Pseudepigrapha (from Ancient Greek for "false") are falsely attributed works, texts whose claimed authorship is unfounded; a work, simply, "whose real author attributed it to a figure of the past."
- 3- Bauckham, Richard; "Pseudo-Apostolic Letters", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vo. 107, No. 3, September 1988, pp.469–494.

- 4- Josephus. *Antiquities* XII:ii passim.
- 5- Augustine. *City of God* 18.42.
- 6- Philo. *De Mutatione Nominum*, 8 ( i.587).
- 7- Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*. 1995.
- 8- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint#cite\\_note-2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint#cite_note-2).
- 9- Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.2.11-15.
- 10- Sir Godfrey Driver. *Introduction to the Old Testament of the New English Bible*.  
<http://www.bible-researcher.com/driver1.html>.
- 11- Henry Swete. *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*. page 47, footnote 1.
- 12- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books\\_of\\_the\\_Bible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books_of_the_Bible).
- 13- Martin Hengel. *The Septuagint*, p. 26.
- 14- *Babylonian Talmud*, pages 9a-9b.
- 15- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masoretet>.
- 16- Aaron Dotan. "Was Aharon Ben Asher Indeed a Karaite?" in S.Z. Leiman, *The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible: An Introductory Reader*.  
[http://wiki-trust.cse.ucsc.edu/index.php/Aaron\\_ben\\_Moses\\_ben\\_Asher](http://wiki-trust.cse.ucsc.edu/index.php/Aaron_ben_Moses_ben_Asher).
- 17- M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, "The Aleppo Codex and the Rise of the Masoretic Bible Text" *The Biblical Archaeologist* 42.3 (Summer 1979), pp. 145-163.
- 18- A seventh century fragment containing the Song of the Sea (Exodus 13:19-16:1) is one of the few surviving texts from the "silent era" of Hebrew Biblical texts between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Aleppo Codex.
- 19- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masoretic>.
- 20- M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, "The Aleppo Codex and the Rise of the Massoretic Bible Text" in *The Biblical Archaeologist* 42.3 (Summer 1979), pp. 145-163.
- 21- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleppo\\_Codex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleppo_Codex).
- 22- Judith Olszowy-Schlanger. *Karaite Marriage Documents from the Cairo Geniza: Legal Tradition and Community Life in Mediaeval Egypt and Palestine*, pg. 148.
- 23- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleppo\\_Codex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleppo_Codex).
- 24- Rick Jones. Table: Dead Sea Scrolls-Septuagint Alignments Against the Masoretic Text.  
[http://www.geocities.com/r\\_grant\\_jones/Rick/Septuagint/spappendix.htm](http://www.geocities.com/r_grant_jones/Rick/Septuagint/spappendix.htm).
- 25- Aquila of Sinope was a 2nd Century AD native of Pontus in Anatolia known for producing an exceedingly literal translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek around 130 AD. He was a proselyte to Judaism and a disciple of Rabbi Akiba (d. circa 135 AD). He is generally regarded as being he who was named Onkelos, the writer of Targum Onkelos. Aquila's version is said to



have been used in place of the Septuagint in the synagogues. The Christians generally disliked it, alleging without due grounds that it rendered the Messianic passages, such as Isaiah 7:14, incorrectly, but Jerome and Origen speak in its praise. Origen incorporated it in his *Hexapla*.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquila\\_of\\_Sinope](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquila_of_Sinope)

26- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint>.

27- Kevin Edgecomb. "Jerome's Prologue to Genesis" in *Biblicalia*.

<http://www.bombaxo.com/blog/?p=214>

28- George Fox. "Septuagint" on BU School of Theology.

[http://sthweb.bu.edu/index.php?option=com\\_awiki&view=mediawiki&article=Septuagint&Itemid=171](http://sthweb.bu.edu/index.php?option=com_awiki&view=mediawiki&article=Septuagint&Itemid=171)

29- William Priestly. The Dead Sea Scrolls. [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_dss.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_dss.html).

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint>

*Chapter Five*  
*The Dead Sea Scrolls*  
*And the Targum*

*(Translations and Commentaries of the Hebrew Old Testament  
Before the Babylonian exile)*

- 150 BC - The Septuagint (Greek Version of the Hebrew Scriptures including many books considered to be apocryphal) - Philip Schaff*
- 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC - All the Books of the Jewish Canon except Esther - Dead Sea Scrolls*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC - 22 Books in the Old Testament Canon - Book of Jubilees*
- 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD- "The laws and the sacred oracles of God enunciated by the holy prophets, and hymns, and psalms, and all kinds of other things" - Philo*
- 1<sup>st</sup> Century - "The law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms" - The NT Luke 24:44*
- 90 AD - 22 Books in the Canon - Council of Jamnia*
- 93-95 AD - 22 Books in the Canon - Josephus, Bryennius List, Canon of Epiphanius*
- 100 AD - 24 Books in the Canon (Ezra and Nehemiah separated) - 4 Ezra*
- 20BC – 900 AD - The Law and the Prophets - The Targums*

*Description*

The Dead Sea Scrolls consist of roughly 850 scrolls and partial scrolls covering the whole Old Testament except for the book of Esther. An additional 15-20,000 fragments that make up another 500 scrolls, for a total of 900 scrolls, were also found. The first seven scrolls were discovered in cave #1 60 years ago by shepherds in caves close to the Dead Sea called Qumran (See Appendix #7 for a full list of Dead Sea Scrolls). These documents include texts from the Hebrew Bible and were discovered between 1947 and 1979 in eleven caves in and around the Wadi Qumran (near the ruins of the ancient settlement of Khirbet Qumran, on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea) in the West Bank.

The texts are of great religious and historical significance, as they include practically the only known surviving copies of Biblical documents made before 100 AD. They are written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, mostly on parchment, but with some written on papyrus (1). The scrolls were found in 11 caves, ranging in distance of 125m (Cave 4) to about 1000m (Cave 1) from the settlement at Qumran, located 1km off the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. None of them were found at the actual settlement.

## *Discovery*

### *Cave 1*

It is generally accepted that a Bedouin goat- or sheep-herder by the name of Muhammad edh-Dhib made the first discovery toward the beginning of 1947. In the most commonly told story the shepherd threw a rock into a cave in an attempt to drive out a missing animal under his care. The shattering sound of pottery drew him into the cave, where he found several ancient jars containing scrolls wrapped in linen. Dr. John C. Trever carried out a number of interviews with several men going by the name of Muhammad edh-Dhib, each relating a variation on this tale.

The scrolls were first brought to a Bethlehem antiquities dealer named Ibrahim 'Ijha, who returned them after being warned that they may have been stolen from a synagogue. The scrolls then fell into the hands of Khalil Eskander Shahin, "Kando", a cobbler and antiques dealer. By most accounts the Bedouin removed only three scrolls following their initial find, later revisiting the site to gather more, possibly encouraged by Kando. Alternatively, it is postulated that Kando engaged in his own illegal excavation: Kando himself possessed at least four scrolls.

Arrangements with the Bedouins left the scrolls in the hands of a third party until a sale of them could be negotiated. That third party, George Isha'ya, was a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church, who soon contacted St. Mark's Monastery in the hope of getting an appraisal of the nature of the texts. News of the find then reached Metropolitan Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, more often referred to as Mar Samuel.

After examining the scrolls and suspecting their age, Mar Samuel expressed an interest in purchasing them. Four scrolls found their way into his hands: the now famous Isaiah Scroll (1QIs<sup>a</sup>), the Community Rule, the Habakkuk Peshar (Commentary), and the Genesis Apocryphon. More scrolls soon surfaced in the antiquities market, and Professor Eleazer Sukenik, an Israeli archaeologist and scholar at Hebrew University, found himself in possession of three: The War Scroll, Thanksgiving Hymns, and another more fragmented Isaiah scroll. By the end of 1947, Sukenik received word of the scrolls in Mar Samuel's possession and attempted to purchase them. No deal was reached, and instead the scrolls found the attention of Dr. John C. Trever, of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR). Dr. Trever compared the script in the scrolls to the Nash Papyrus, the oldest Biblical manuscript at the time, finding similarities between the two. Similarities were also discovered between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nash Papyrus and with the Septuagint (2).

Dr. Trever, a keen amateur photographer, met with Mar Samuel on February 21, 1948, when he photographed the scrolls. The quality of his photographs often exceeded that of the

scrolls themselves over the years, as the texts quickly eroded once removed from their linen wraps.

In March of that year, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War prompted the removal of the scrolls from the country for safekeeping. The scrolls were removed to Beirut. In early September 1948, Mar Samuel brought Professor Ovid R. Sellers, the new Director of ASOR, some additional scroll fragments that he had acquired. By the end of 1948, nearly two years after the discovery of the scrolls, scholars had yet to locate the cave where the fragments had been found. With the unrest in the country, no large scale search could be undertaken. Sellers attempted to get the Syrians to help locate the cave, but they demanded more money than Sellers could offer. Cave 1 was finally discovered on January 28, 1949 by a United Nations observer.

After some time, the Dead Sea Scrolls went up for sale in a June 1, 1954 advertisement in the Wall Street Journal:

MISCELLANEOUS FOR SALE  
THE FOUR DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Biblical manuscripts dating back to at least 200 B.C.  
are for sale. This would be an ideal gift to an educational  
or religious institution by an individual or group.

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On July 1, after some delicate negotiations, the scrolls, accompanied by the Metropolitan and two others, came to the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. There they were purchased by General Yigael Yadin one of Israel's foremost archaeologists and the son of Professor Eleazer Sukenik, for \$250,000. Only some of this Mar Samuel actually got: due to a mix up in paperwork, the US government received most of the money, due to taxes (3).

*Cave 2*

Bedouins discovered 300 fragments of other scrolls in Cave 2, including Jubilees & Ben Sirach in the original Hebrew.

*Cave 3*

One of the most curious scrolls is the Copper Scroll. Discovered in Cave 3, this scroll records a list of 67 underground hiding places throughout the land of Israel. According to the scroll, the deposits contain certain amounts of gold, silver, aromatics, and manuscripts. These are believed to be treasures from the Temple at Jerusalem that were hidden away for safekeeping. The Copper Scroll is currently being translated and the first two sections reveal the location of gold ingots and silver in the form of Shekels (a coin used in Israel in ancient times). According to Biblical Currency is equal to .364 oz. (troy). In a value of silver, it is equal to \$7.28. As for

gold, it is equal to \$364.

#### *Cave 4*

80% of all the scrolls were found here and 90% were published. Cave 4 had 15,000 fragments from 500 different texts.

#### *Caves 5 and 6*

Caves 5 and 6 were discovered shortly after cave 4. Caves 5 and 6 yielded a modest find.

#### *Caves 7–10*

Archaeologists excavated caves 7 through 10 in 1955, but did not find many fragments. Cave 7 contained seventeen Greek documents (including 7Q5, which would be the subject of controversy in the succeeding decades). Cave 8 only had five fragments and cave 9 held 18. Cave 10 contained nothing but a single ostrakon.

#### *Cave 11*

The Temple Scroll, so called because more than half of it pertains to the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem, was found in Cave 11, and is the longest scroll. It is now 26.7 feet (8.15 m) long; the total length of the original scroll may have been over 28 feet (8.75 m). The Temple Scroll document was regarded by Yigael Yadin as the Torah according to the Essenes. Hartmann Steggemann, a contemporary and friend of Yadin, believed the scroll was not to be considered as the Torah of the Essenes and was a document without any special significance. Steggemann notes the scroll is not once mentioned or referred to in other Essene writings found.

### *Publication*

Publication of the scrolls has taken many decades, and the delay has been a source of academic controversy. As of 2007 two volumes remain to be completed, with the whole series, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert*, running to thirty nine volumes in total. Many of the scrolls are now housed in the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem (4).

Some of the documents were published in a prompt manner: all of the writings found in Cave 1 appeared in print between 1950 and 1956; the finds from 8 other caves were released in a single volume in 1963; and 1965 saw the publication of the Psalms Scroll from Cave 11. Translation of these materials quickly followed.

The exception to this was the documents from Cave 4, which represent 40% of the total finds. The publication of these had been entrusted to an international team led by Father Roland de Vaux, a member of the Dominican Order in Jerusalem. This group published the first volume of the material entrusted to them in 1968, but spent much of their energies defending their theories regarding the materials, instead of publishing them. Geza Vermes, who had been

involved from the start in the editing and publication of these documents, blamed the delay—and eventual failure—on de Vaux's selection of a team unsuited to the quality of work he had planned, as well as relying on "his personal, quasi-patriarchal authority" to control the completion of the work.

As a result, a large part of the finds from Cave 4 were not made public for many years. Access to the scrolls was governed by a "secrecy rule" that allowed only the original International Team or their designates to view the original materials. After de Vaux's death in 1971, his successors repeatedly refused even to allow the publication of photographs of these materials, preventing other scholars from making their own judgments. This rule was eventually broken: first by Ben Zion Wacholder's publication in the fall of 1991 of 17 documents reconstructed from a concordance that had been made in 1988 and had come into the hands of scholars outside of the International Team; next, in the same month, by the discovery and publication of a complete set of photographs of the Cave 4 materials at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, that were not covered by the "secrecy rule". After some delays these photographs were published by Robert Eisenman and James Robinson in *A Facsimile Edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, two volumes, Washington, D.C., 1991. As a result, the "secrecy rule" was lifted.

Publication accelerated with the appointment of the respected Dutch-Israeli textual scholar Emanuel Tov as editor-in-chief in 1990. Publication of the Cave 4 documents soon commenced, with five volumes in print by 1995. As of 2007 two volumes remain to be completed, with the whole series, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert*, running to thirty nine volumes in total.

In December 2007, the Dead Sea Scrolls Foundation commissioned London publisher Facsimile Editions to publish exact facsimiles of three scrolls: 1QIs<sup>a</sup> the Great Isaiah Scroll, 1QS the Order of the Community and 1QpHab the *Pesher* to Habakkuk. Of the first three facsimile sets, one was exhibited at the *Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* exhibition in Seoul, South Korea, and a second set was purchased by the British Library in London (5).

### *Significance*

The significance of the scrolls relates in a large part to the field of textual criticism. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible were Masoretic texts dating to 9th century. The Biblical manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls push that date back to the 2nd and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Before this discovery, the earliest

extant manuscripts of the Old Testament were in Greek in manuscripts such as Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus and most important, the Leningrad Codex from 1008 AD (6 – see note).

Although a few of the Biblical manuscripts found at Qumran differ significantly from the Masoretic text, most do not. The scrolls thus provide new variants and the ability to be more confident of those readings where the Dead Sea manuscripts agree with the Masoretic Text or with the early Greek manuscripts. Further, the sectarian texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls, most of which were previously unknown, offer new light on one form of Judaism practiced during the Second Temple period.

The original copies of the Old Testament were written on leather or papyrus from the time of Moses (c. 1450 B.C.) to the time of Malachi (400 B.C.). Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls we did not possess copies of the Old Testament earlier than A.D. 895. The reason for this is simply that the Jews had an extreme veneration for the text which impelled them to bury copies that had become too old for use. In fact, the Masoretes who between A.D. 600 and 950 added accents and vowel points and in general standardized the Hebrew text, devised complicated safeguards for the making of copies.

When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, they gave us a Hebrew text from the third to first century B.C. of all but the book of Esther of the Old Testament. This was of the greatest importance, for it provided a much earlier check on the accuracy of the Masoretic text, which has now proved to be extremely accurate (7). It is important to note also however, that the Dead Sea Scrolls are almost identical to the Septuagint in their Biblical manuscripts.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are also significant in what they tell us about the closed canon of Scripture by 100 AD. The Dead Sea Scrolls do refer to the Torah and Nevi'im and suggest that these portions of the Bible had already been canonized before 68 AD. Also there is a scroll that contains all or parts of 41 Biblical Psalms, although not in the same order as in the current Book of Psalms. This scroll does include though eight texts not found in the Book of Psalms, and suggests that the Book of Psalms had not yet been canonized (8).

According to Michael Barber, quoting *The Canon Debate*, edited by Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, the theory that there was a closed Hebrew canon of second Temple Judaism was further challenged by the textual variants found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. He writes that "Up until recently it was assumed that "apocryphal" additions found in the books of the LXX represented later augmentations in the Greek to the Hebrew texts. In connection with this, the Masoretic text (MT) established by the rabbis in the medieval period has been accepted as the faithful witness to the Hebrew Bible of the first century. Yet, this presupposition is now

being challenged in light of the Dead Sea Scrolls (9).”

Evidence that supports these challenges include the fact that "copies of some Biblical books found at Qumran reveal sharp divergences from the MT." As an example of such evidence, Barber asserts that "scholars were amazed to find that the Hebrew copies of 1 and 2 Samuel found in Cave 4 agree with the LXX against the MT. One of these fragments is dated into the third century B. C. and is believed to be the very oldest copy of a Biblical text found to date. Clearly the Masoretic version of 1-2 Samuel is significantly inferior here to the LXX (10)”.

Because of their similarities to the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text the Dead Sea Scrolls are further evidence of which books of the Old Testament were considered to be the Canon of Scripture by the days of Jesus. And we can see that the Old Testament Canon was not closed at this time because many of the “Writings” were still under dispute and several apocryphal books were still being examined.

### *The Scrolls and the New Testament*

The Scrolls are also important for what they show us of New Testament times. It is true that none of the New Testament books were in the Dead Sea Scrolls. However the Qumran Community existed at the same time of Jesus and the scrolls were written down in the years just proceeding what we call the New Testament era. Randall Price quoting Qumran scholar Geza Vermes in his book *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* says that the scrolls “are the only suitable comparative material” to the New Testament. Price goes on to say that “no other documents that record similar material preceded and were contemporaneous with first-century Jewish Christianity. Both the New Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls were produced in the matrix of what is known as ‘Palestinian Judaism’.” Vermes continues on to say that comparison between the two bodies of literature is not only reasonable it is indispensable (11)!”

### *Frequency of books found*

The Dead Sea Scroll books of the Bible are ranked below according to number of manuscripts found (top 16 according to Theodor H. Gaster in *The Dead Sea Scriptures*) (12):

<u>Books</u>	<u>Number Found</u>
Psalms	39
Deuteronomy	33
1 Enoch	25
Genesis	24



Isaiah	22
Jubilees	21
Exodus	18
Leviticus	17
Numbers	11
Minor Prophets	10
Daniel	8
Jeremiah	6
Ezekiel	6
Job	6
1 & 2 Samuel	4

### *The Targum*

A Targum (lit. "translation or interpretation") is an *Aramaic Translation* of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) written or compiled from the Second Temple period until the early Middle Ages (late first millennium). The two major genres of Targum reflect two geographical and cultural centers of Jewish life during the period of their creation, namely the Land of Israel and Babylonia. Aramaic was the dominant Jewish language for hundreds of years in these major Jewish communities.

To facilitate the study of the Tanakh and make its public reading understood, authoritative translations were required. As translations, the *targumim* (a translation or paraphrase in Aramaic of a book or division of the Old Testament (13)) largely reflect midrashic (a Hebrew word referring to a method of reading details into, or out of, a Biblical text (14)) interpretation of the Tanakh of the time, and favor anthropomorphisms instead of allegorical readings (15).

Rabbinic literature, in its broadest sense, can mean the entire spectrum of rabbinic writings throughout Jewish history. But the term often refers specifically to literature from the Talmudic era, as opposed to medieval and modern rabbinic writing, and thus corresponds with the Hebrew meaning "Literature [of our] sages [of] blessed memory."

### *Two Targumim*

The two most important *targumim* for liturgical purposes are: Targum Onkelos on the Torah (The Law) and Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Nevi'im (The Prophets). These two *targumim* are mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud as *Targum dilan* ("our Targum"), giving

them official status. In the synagogues of Talmudic times, Targum Onkelos was read alternately with the Torah (The Law), verse by verse, and Targum Jonathan was read alternately with the selection from Nevi'im (The Prophets). This custom continues today in Yemenite Jewish synagogues. The Yemenite Jews are the only Jewish community to continue the use of Targum as liturgical text, as well as to preserve a living tradition of pronunciation for the Aramaic of the *targumim* (according to a Babylonian dialect).

Besides its public function in the synagogue, the Talmud also mentions *targum* in the context of a personal study requirement: "A person should always review his portions of scripture along with the community, reading the scripture twice and the *targum* once" (Berakhot 8a-b) (16). This too refers to Targum Onkelos on the public Torah reading and to Targum Jonathan on the Haftarah (selections) from Nevi'im. The private study requirement to review the Targum was never entirely relaxed, even when Jewish communities had largely ceased speaking Aramaic, and the Targum never ceased to be a major source for Jewish biblical exegesis.

For these reasons, the Targum is still almost always printed alongside the text in Jewish editions of the Bible with commentaries. Nevertheless, later halakhic authorities argued that the requirement to privately review the *targum* might also be met by reading a translation in the current vernacular in place of the official Targum, or else by studying an important commentary containing midrashic interpretation.

### *Significance*

The Targum is in the arena of commentary and not part of the canon. Historically however, it gives us checks on what was included in the canon. What books were considered to be the Canon of Scripture and commentary was written on them? According to the Targum the Law and the Prophets only were considered to be the canon. Like the Dead Sea Scrolls, the books of the Apocrypha and much of the Pseudepigrapha which were written by Jews during the inter-testamental era, the Targums, written after the time of Jesus were also written by Jews concerning which books believed to be Scripture or could at least be considered for Scripture (17).

The Aramaic Targums, these commentaries, paraphrases and quotes of the Old Testament, give us the data for being assured of having an accurate text of the Old Testament (18). Other early checks on the Hebrew text include the Septuagint translation (middle of third century B.C.), quotations in early Christian writers, and the Latin translation of Jerome (A.D. 400) which was made directly from the Hebrew text of his day.

### *Questions for Chapter Five*

- 1- What is the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls?
- 2- How were the Dead Sea Scrolls Discovered?
- 3- What was the oldest text before the Dead Sea Scrolls?
- 4- What books were covered by the Dead Sea Scrolls?
- 5- How do the Scrolls affect the Masoretic Text?
- 6- How do the Scrolls affect the Septuagint?
- 7- How do the Scrolls relate to the new Testament?
- 8- What is the Targum?
- 9- What are the two official Targum and how are they used?
- 10- What do the Targums say about the Canon of Scripture?

### *Footnotes for Chapter Five*

- 1- <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/27/israel>
- 2- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nash\\_Papyrus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nash_Papyrus)
- 3- Randal Price. *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. pps. 30-50.
- 4- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discoveries\\_in\\_the\\_Judean\\_Desert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discoveries_in_the_Judean_Desert)
- 5- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead\\_Sea\\_Scrolls](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead_Sea Scrolls)
- 6- The Leningrad Codex (or *Codex Leningradensis*) is one of the oldest manuscripts of the complete Hebrew Bible produced according to the Tiberian mesorah; it is dated 1008 according to its colophon. The Aleppo Codex, against which the Leningrad Codex was corrected, was the first such manuscript and is several decades older, but parts of it have been missing since 1947, making the Leningrad Codex the oldest complete codex of the Tiberian mesorah that has survived intact to this day. In modern times, the Leningrad Codex is most important as the Hebrew text reproduced in *Biblia Hebraica* (1937) and *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1977). It also serves scholars as a primary source for the recovery of details in the missing parts of the Aleppo Codex.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leningrad\\_Codex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leningrad_Codex)
- 7- Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, pp. 45-46.
- 8- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development\\_of\\_the\\_Jewish\\_Bible\\_canon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_Jewish_Bible_canon).
- 9- Michael Barber. *Singing in the Rain*. [singinginthereign.blogspot.com/2006/03/loose-canon-development-of-old.html](http://singinginthereign.blogspot.com/2006/03/loose-canon-development-of-old.html)

- 10- *The Canon Debate*, McDonald & Sanders editors, 2002, chapter 6: *Questions of Canon through the Dead Sea Scrolls* by James C. Vander Kam, p. 94.
- 11- Randal Price. *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. p. 166.
- 12- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead\\_Sea\\_Scrolls#cite\\_note-3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead_Sea Scrolls#cite_note-3)
- 13- <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/targumim>.
- 14- The term *midrash* also can refer to a compilation of Midrashic teachings, in the form of legal, exegetical, homiletical, or narrative writing, often configured as a commentary on the Bible or Mishnah. There are a large number of "classical" Midrashic works spanning a period from Mishnaic to Geonic times, often showing evidence of having been worked and reworked from earlier materials, and frequently coming to us in multiple variants.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbinic\\_literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbinic_literature).
- 15- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbinic\\_literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbinic_literature).
- 16- Berakhot ("Benedictions") is the first *masekhet* ("tractate") of Seder Zeraim ("Order of Seeds") of the Mishnah, the first major text of Jewish law. It primarily addresses the rules regarding the Shema, the Amidah, Birkat Hamazon ("Grace after Meals"), Kiddush ("Sanctification"), Havdalah ("Separation") and other blessings and prayers. It is the only tractate in *Zeraim* to have a Gemara ("Completion") from both the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud.
- 17- Curt Daniel. "The Case Against Accepting the Apocrypha" in *The Canon of Scripture*  
<http://faithbibleonline.net/TheCanonofScripture.htm>.
- 18- Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, pp. 45-46.  
[http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=697](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=697).

## *Chapter Six*

### *Criteria for Canonicity*

*(Why certain books were eventually accepted into the New Testament Canon, while others were rejected.)*

#### *Introduction*

As we look at the reasons why certain books were included in the Old and New Testament Canons and why others were left out, it is interesting to see how these books first came to God's people. Each Testament was canonized at different times before they were put together into what we call the Scriptures today. The details of these compilations are important for us to know as we look at the criteria that were used to include them.

The Old Testament Canon and the New Testament Canon were compiled in different and interesting ways. The Old Testament Canon was begun by God when He gave the law to Moses in about 1450 BC. The Lord Himself added to the canon through Moses, until we had the first five books of the Bible – the Pentateuch. Then there were added to the canon, over the next 1030 years, the Prophets and the Writings. The Old Testament Canon, as we know it today, is essentially finished being written by 420 BC, however, it was not formally canonized until many centuries later.

It is interesting to note that the entire Old Testament Canon came through one nation and one people and that all its books were written through the prophets and leaders of that one nation, the nation of Israel. The Old Testament Canon in its entirety, was written in the language of Israel, Hebrew, with a few exceptions when quoting or referring someone of another nation. The message and teachings of the Old Testament were directed “to” and “for” and sometimes “at” the people of God, the Hebrews. The unifying message of the Old Testament is that salvation is to be found through the Messiah whom God will send to them some day in the future.

The books of the New Testament Canon were all written in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, before 100 AD in less than about 60 years, although, as with the Old Testament canon, they were not “canonized” for several hundred years later. All the books of the New Testament Canon were written before the canonization process concerning them had even begun. All its authors were Hebrews except one – Luke – and yet the language that the New Testament books were written in is Greek, the formal or public language of the day instead of Hebrew or Aramaic, the common languages of the people of Israel in this time period.

All the books of the New Testament Canon were written by the Apostles or by those

associated with the Apostles and leaders of the New Testament Church and all these books were originally written to the Church and for the Christians of the 1st century. All the books were written in one generation as is seen in the life of the Apostle John who lived through the entire New Testament period and whose last book closes the New Testament canon. The unifying message of the New Testament is that salvation is to be found through the Messiah whom God did send and who we now know was the Lord Jesus Christ.

One very significant difference between the Old and New Testament Canons is the way God's worked through His people to gather the books to be in the canon. In the Old Testament God used His people to *recognize* the books that He had given to them. In the New Testament canon God used His people to *determine* which books were to be included. In both cases there had to be a list of reasons or criteria for the inclusion of any particular book. In this chapter we are going to look at those criteria.

### *The Canon*

The study of the canon of Scripture explores on how we may attain a conviction that the 39 books of the OT and the 27 books of the NT constitute the full collection of the inspired authoritative books that God intended for his people and that this collection is pure (the canon does not include any intruding book that should not be included) and complete (no book that should be there has been omitted). We want to study the criteria for canonicity in this chapter so we can understand how the Scriptures came together.

The Christians of the first century would not have understood what a criteria or a canon was. They accepted the Old Testament scriptures as they received them; the authority of those Scriptures was ratified by the teaching and example of the Lord and the Apostles. The teachings and example of the Lord and the Apostles were considered to be part of Scripture from God.

It is interesting to note that as we look at the canon of Scripture – that is a closed set of books, so that it is known precisely which books are included and which are not, that the heretic Marcion (c. 140 AD) must be credited as the compiler of the first NT canon. This included the Gospel of Luke (with slight modifications) and ten letters of Paul, the Pastoral Epistles being excluded. But if Marcion produced the first actual canon, the idea of a canon was certainly in the air at the time and Marcion's action simply forced the Christian church to consider the matter more seriously than ever before.

The canon, as we will learn, was more or less fixed by the last quarter of the second century, though it is true that its outer limits did remain fluid for another two centuries or more.

By the end of the second century or earlier it was agreed that further additions were not admissible. Though giving full credit to Marcion for pushing the church to determine the canon, it is an exaggeration to claim that “the idea and the reality of a Christian Bible were the work of Marcion (1)”.

### *The Facts*

We have dealt with the issue of the Jewish or Old Testament Canon in previous chapters and now we want to look at the New Testament canon. The New Testament is a collection of 27 early Christian writings composed by various authors from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> to very early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD. Some interesting facts about the New Testament are:

- > All 27 of these books and letters were originally written in *Greek* (the "Koine" or "common" Greek of the time), although some may have had older Aramaic sources.
- > Most of these writings were already considered "biblical" or "scriptural" by Christians by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.
- > There were many other works written by Christians in the first few centuries that were not included in the New Testament.
- > The official list of 27 approved writings (the NT "canon") was not finalized until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.
- > The NT consists of a variety of *different* works in *different* literary genres just like the Old Testament (2).

### *Ten Stages of New Testament Formation and Transmission*

Another interesting fact of the New Testament is how it came down to us. The following scheme lists 10 stages in the process of the forming and giving of the New Testament Scriptures, many of which overlap. These are:

*The Historical Jesus* - words are spoken and deeds are performed by Jesus himself during his lifetime on earth.

*Oral Tradition* - traditions and beliefs about Jesus are developed and passed on by early Christian communities.

*Written Sources* - some of the miracles and/or sayings of Jesus are compiled and recorded in early written documents.

*Written Texts* - individual letters, full Gospels, etc., are written with particular messages for particular situations.

*Distribution* - some writings are copied and shared with other Christian communities throughout the

Mediterranean.

*Collection* - certain Christians begin collecting the letters of Paul and gathering together several different Gospels.

*Canonization* - four Gospels, several collections of letters, and a few other texts are accepted as authoritative scriptures.

*Translation* - biblical texts are translated into ever more ancient and modern languages: Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, etc.

*Interpretation* - the meaning of the scriptures is investigated on various levels: literal, spiritual, historical, social, etc.

*Application* - communities and individuals use the NT for practical purposes: liturgical, moral, sacramental, theological, etc (3).

### *The New Testament Canon: An Overview by Genre*

As we look at these books and how they were included in the New Testament it will be helpful to know what genre of book these are. As in the Old Testament which had the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, these various groupings came into the canon at different times.

Four "Gospels": The life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel He proclaimed; the authorship of these books is attributed to the four "Evangelists"; the verbal portraits of Jesus were written for various early Christian communities (Matthew wrote to the Hebrews, Luke wrote to the Greeks, etc.); and these books are similar to ancient biographies in form. These books are:

#### *The Synoptic Gospels:*

Matthew

Mark

Luke

#### *The Fourth Gospel:*

John

One "Acts": This book is a partial narrative account of the growth of the Early Church. It is a continuation of Luke's Gospel; it contains historical materials, and is a general "history" of the important points of apostolic Christianity.

#### The Acts of the Apostles

Twenty-One "Letters" or "Epistles": written by (or attributed to) various early Christian leaders, known as "apostles".



Thirteen Letters attributed to Paul: real letters written by Paul (or his associates) to particular communities or individuals, concerning various local problems and issues:

*Letters sent to Christian communities in the following cities:*

Romans  
I & II Corinthians  
Galatians  
Ephesians  
Philippians  
Colossians  
I & II Thessalonians

*Letters addressed to individual Christian leaders:*

1 & II Timothy  
Titus  
Philemon (4)

One Biblical Sermon: The Book of Hebrews seems to be a wonderful expository sermon that may have been given in the synagogue. Scholars are divided on who wrote this book with half giving Paul the credit and half giving someone else the authorship. This sermon interprets Jesus in light of the Old Testament.

Hebrews (5)

Seven Catholic Epistles or General Letters: authorship attributed to other apostles (for whom they are named); most of these are not written to individual communities, but to broader audiences ("*catholic*" = "general, universal"):

James  
I & II Peter  
I, II & III John  
Jude

One "Apocalypse": a highly symbolic narrative that gives us a glimpse into the end of time and provides hope for a better future:

The Book of Revelation (6)

### *What was the "Criteria for Canonization"?*

There are various views of what the criteria was but for the most part they are different ways of breaking down the same main points. Most sources list the four main criterions below

which were mentioned earlier in Chapter Two:

Apostolic Origin — attributed to and based on the preaching/teaching of the first-generation apostles (or their close companions).

Universal Acceptance — acknowledged by all major Christian communities in the ancient world (by the end of the fourth century).

Liturgical Use — read publicly when early Christian communities gathered for the Lord's Supper (their weekly worship services).

Consistent Message — containing a theological outlook similar or complementary to other accepted Christian writings, including the divinity *and* humanity of Jesus.

Other sources, such as Roger Nicole in his article "The Canon of the New Testament" in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, expand on these four and turn them into seven criteria. We will look at Nicole's seven criteria as a way of more fully understanding how the New Testament Canon was completed.

### *Apostolicity*

This criterion points to the obvious fact that the apostles were appointed by Jesus to carry on and perpetuate his teaching ministry under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19–20; John 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:13; 17:25–26). They functioned with this conviction as a premise (Acts 15:28; 1 Cor 2:4–5, 12–13; Gal 1:8, 15; Eph 2:20; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Pet 3:16; Rev 22:18–19; etc.). Applied to the subject of canonicity, the principle could be stated as follows: For a NT book to be canonical it is necessary and sufficient that it should have been written by an apostle or by a person who wrote under their guidance and supervision. This criterion would cover all 27 books of the New Testament. Canonicity therefore, would be implied in apostolic authorship (7).

Tertullian, the "Father of Latin Theology" (ca. 160-225), witnesses to the authority of writings in the Western church. He stressed the criterion of apostolicity. For example, in his writing *Against Marcion* he clearly distinguishes gospels of apostolic origin and gospels written by disciples of apostles. He writes: "Of the apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instill faith into us; whilst of apostolic men; Luke and Mark renew it afterwards (8)."

"The principle of canonicity was not apostolic authorship," contended Warfield, "but *imposition by the apostles as law*." The practical effect of this subtle distinction is to allow for the inclusion of books such as Mark, Luke, James, Jude and Hebrews which were not actually penned by the apostles, but were, according to tradition, written under apostolic sanction.

Warfield asserted that the canon of Scripture was complete when the last book of the New Testament was penned by the Apostle John circa A.D. 95. From the divine standpoint the canon of Scripture was complete (9).

### *Orthodoxy*

Paul gives an initial criteria for the teachings of the New Testament when he tells the people to *test the spirits* and later he states that one of the spiritual gifts was the ability to *discern the spirits* (I Corinthians 12:10). Additionally Paul gives the definitive criterion to apply to teachings is their testimony to Christ; “*no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit*” (I Corinthians 12:3). Later John tells us in I John 4:2 that “*every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.*” Such Scriptural tests anticipated the later insistence on orthodoxy as a criterion of canonicity (10).

It goes almost without saying that any canonical book must be orthodox. God would not permit his Word to teach falsehood as well as truth. The early Church did often mention this as a criterion and was helped in discarding unworthy materials by the application of this principle. One problem with this criterion is that it tends to circular reasoning. Orthodoxy must be defined by the canon, and here it seems that the canon is defined by orthodoxy.

### *Christocentricity*

This criterion, advocated by Martin Luther, was grounded in the correct observation that the whole Bible as a redemptive book has Jesus Christ as its center. As Pascal later wrote: “Jesus Christ whom both Testaments regard, the Old as its hope, the New as its model, and both as their center (11).”

### *Inspiration*

Since all the canonical books are inspired by God, some authors, including notably Laird Harris in his book *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, have suggested that inspiration is really the criterion to be applied (12). There is indeed a correspondence between inspiration and canonicity. The statement of 2 Tim 3:16 is true for both testaments: “*All Scripture is God-breathed.*” No non-inspired book has a place in the canon.

This is a difficult criterion to work with however, because we cannot tell if a book is inspired just by reading it. If this principle were as simple as it is thought to be by those who support it, it is difficult to understand why it took the Church some 300 years to make up its

mind on the exact list of NT books and why the problem of the OT Apocrypha still plagues some to this day.

### *The Testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Individual Christian*

This criterion emphasizes that the supreme authority of Scripture is grounded in God's own validation and not in a human decision. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* stated: "The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God by their majesty and purity...but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very word of God (13)."

The great positive significance of this remark is to be found in the fact that here the authority of Scripture is not grounded in a human decision, be it ever so impressive, but in the witness of God himself, the Holy Spirit, working in the minds and hearts of Christian people. This is an extremely important criterion.

### *The Authority of the Church*

It is the contention of the Roman Catholic Church that it is the prerogative of the Church to establish the canon and that those who reject the Church's authority have by that act logically cut themselves off from the principle that alone undergirds the appropriateness of the NT canon. "Scripture was produced by and attested in the Church," they say, "not the Church by Scripture."

It is true that God gave his word to his people and that the question of the canon is to be settled in the community of faith. And for all our disagreements, the Roman Catholic Church certainly does have an appropriate NT canon in that it contains the 66 books of the canon and sets the Apocryphal books in a separate section.

However, there are several fallacies in the Roman Catholic argument: (1) The OT existed before the NT Church. (2) The Church is under the authority of the Word and has no authority over the Word. (3) Any authority the Church may have is designated to her by God. (4) The Roman Church has made a serious mistake by legislating the canonicity of the OT Apocrypha in spite of Jerome's clear warnings (14).

*The Witness of the Holy Spirit Given Corporately To God's People  
And Made Manifest by a Nearly Unanimous  
Acceptance of the NT Canon in Christian Churches*

It is important to distinguish carefully between the sixth criteria (Authority of the Church) and this seventh criterion. Here the purely designative function of the churches is specified, and it is viewed not as an act of authority but as the result of a special guidance of the Holy Spirit in this area.

This formulation takes account of the stunning near-unanimity of Christian churches on the scope of the NT canon: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Quaker, Disciples, and Adventist all acknowledge precisely the same 27 books of the NT. **Even non-Christian sects and cults** such as Universalist-Unitarian, Mormon, Christian Science and Jehovah's Witness churches **acknowledge these same 27 books**. "Acceptance of this canon is not sufficient for a badge of orthodoxy, as our list makes abundantly plain, but on the question of the canon they do agree. We offer the explanation that this near-unanimity is due to the Holy Spirit's action and is not merely a fortuitous coincidence (15)." The consensus of churches on the NT is an index and evidence of the Holy Spirit's guidance. The Holy Spirit is the moving authoritative force.

There is a notable parallel here with the establishment of the OT canon. God entrusted his OT oracles to the Jews (Rom 3:2), and they were providentially guided in the recognition and preservation of the OT. Jesus and the apostles confirmed the rightness of their approach while castigating their attachment to a tradition that was superimposed on the Word of God (Matt 15:1–20; Mark 7:1–23). God entrusted his NT oracles to his people in the churches, and they are nearly unanimous in the recognition of the NT canon.

It stands to reason, of course, that no book could be canonized unless the church used it! Thus, "Although a number of Christians have thought that church councils determined what books were to be included in the biblical canons, a more accurate reflection of the matter is that the councils recognized or acknowledged those books that had already obtained prominence from usage among the various early Christian communities (16)." It appears that the books that finally were canonized are those that enjoyed a special status and were utilized both frequently and universally by the church (17).

This criterion accommodates many of the factors that are included in the criteria

previously discussed: (1) All NT writings are apostolic in the broad sense of the term. (2) They surely are orthodox. (3) They are centered in Christ and his work. (4) They are indeed inspired. (5) The Holy Spirit does bear witness to them, although not merely to individuals seeking to determine the canon. (6) They are officially endorsed by the churches. Many confessions give them specific endorsement, including the canons of the council of Trent, Philaret's Longer Catechism of the Russian Church, the Gallic Confession, the Belgic Confession, the 39 Articles, the Irish Articles of Religion, the Westminster Confession, the Savoy Declaration, the Second London Baptist Confession and the Confession of the Waldenses (18).

The early Church did not have access to this criterion, however it was closer to the living voice of Jesus and the apostles and thus could and did struggle better through a determination that we might not be capable to make today. We receive as canonical today the Scriptures of the OT and all the books that have been transmitted to us, under that title, by the universal consent of the Jewish people, to whom the oracles of God were entrusted under the Lord's guidance. And we receive equally as canonical the Scriptures of the NT and all the books that, under the guidance of the same Providence, have been transmitted to us as such by the universal consent of the churches of the Christian world (19).

### *Conclusion*

Modern historical revisionists often use language like that of "suppression" or "censorship" to speak of the emerging Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic approach to extra-canonical documents, as if there once was a time when some group of so-called Christians somewhere had agreed on a larger canon only to have the majority of believers whittle their canon down. Nothing could be further from the truth. The canon gradually grew up from smaller collections. It is possible that some Gnostic sect somewhere put forward some of their unique documents as on a par with Scripture, but, if so, that evidence has been lost. What remains suggests that although they played a special role in the communities of those who created them, the Gnostic literature was never put forward for formal inclusion in a finalized canon of the New Testament (20).

While Catholics and Protestants to this day disagree on the canon of the Old Testament, both branches of Christianity along with Eastern Orthodoxy agree on the contents of the New. For sixteen centuries there has been no significant controversy within Christianity regarding the extent of the New Testament canon. Christians are on solid ground in affirming that these twenty-seven books belong in the New Testament and that other ancient writings were excluded

for good reason.

### *Questions for Chapter Six*

- 1- Why study the canon of Scripture?
- 2- Who made the first New Testament canon?
- 3- How was the New Testament transmitted to us?
- 4- What are the New Testament Genres?
- 5- What is Apostolicity?
- 6- What is Orthodoxy?
- 7- What is Inspiration?
- 8- What is Christocentricity?
- 9- What is the Testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Individual Christian
- 10- What is the Authority of the Church?
- 11- What is the Witness of the Holy Spirit Given Corporately To God's People and Made Manifest by a Nearly Unanimous Acceptance of the NT Canon in Christian Churches?

### *Footnotes for Chapter Six*

- 1- F.F. Bruce, "New Light on the Origins of the New Testament," *Faith & Thought* 101.2: pps. 158-162.
- 2- Felix Just. *The New Testament Canon*. catholicresources.org/Bible/NT\_Canon.htm.
- 3- *Ibid*.
- 4- Notes on the Pauline Letters:
  - 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are usually called the "Pastoral Letters" since they are addressed to leaders or "shepherds" of Christian communities.
  - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are sometimes called "Prison Letters" since Paul apparently wrote them while in prison (Eph 3:1; 4:1; Phil 1:7, 13-14; Col 4:3, 10; Philemon 9-10).
  - Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1Thessalonians, Philemon are often called the "Undisputed Letters," since most scholars agree they were written by Paul himself.
- 5- The author calls this work a "message of encouragement" (Hebrews 13:22), a designation that is given to a synagogue sermon in Acts 13:15. Hebrews is probably therefore a written homily, to which the author gave an epistolary ending (Hebrews 13:22-25).
- 6- Felix Just. *The New Testament Canon*. catholicresources.org/Bible/NT\_Canon.htm.

- 7- Roger Nicole. "The Canon Of The New Testament". *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40.2 (March 1997).
- 8- Peter Balla. *Evidence for an Early Christian Canon: Second and Third Century*, p 382.
- 9-B. B. Warfield, "The Formation of the Canon of the New Testament," *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. p. 415.
- 10- F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Intervarsity Press, 1988) p. 255.
- 11- R. Pascal, *Pensées* 740.
- 12- R. L. Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957).
- 13- *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question 4.
- 14- Roger Nicole. "The Canon Of The New Testament". *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40.2 (March 1997).
- 15- *Ibid.*
- 16- McDonald, Lee M. *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*.  
<http://www.tektonics.org/lp/ntcanon.html#inspir>.
- 17- Arthur Patzia. *The Making of the New Testament*. [www.tektonics.org/lp/ntcanon.html#inspir](http://www.tektonics.org/lp/ntcanon.html#inspir).
- 18- A. Lecerf. *An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics*. p. 319-354.
- 19- *Confession of the Evangelical Free Church of Geneva*. Cf. *Creeds of Christendom* (4th ed.) 3.781.
- 20- Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds., *The Canon Debate*. p. 591-97.



## *Chapter 7*

### *Christian Canons of the New Testament*

*1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC - All the Books of the Jewish Canon except Esther - Dead Sea Scrolls*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC - 22 Books in the Old Testament Canon - Book of Jubilees*

*1<sup>st</sup> Century AD- "The laws and the sacred oracles of God enunciated by the holy prophets, And hymns, and psalms, and all kinds of other things" - Philo*

*1<sup>st</sup> Century - "The law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms" - The NT Luke 24:44*

*90 AD - 22 Books in the Canon - Council of Jamnia*

*93-95 AD - 22 Books in the Canon – Josephus, Bryennius List, and Canon of Epiphanius*

*100 AD - 24 Books in the Canon (Ezra and Nehemiah separated) - 4 Ezra*

### *Is the Jewish Canon Closed?*

The basis of Christianity is found in the authority of Scripture. If we can't identify what is Scripture, then we can't properly distinguish any theological truth from error. Concerning a measure or standard used to determine which books should be classified as Scripture, a key verse to understanding the process and purpose and perhaps timing of the giving of Scripture is Jude 3, which states that a Christian's faith "was once for all delivered to the saints." Since our faith is defined by Scripture, Jude is essentially saying that Scripture was given once for the benefit of all Christians. We can be confident that God has not left us without a witness. The same supernatural power God used to produce His word has also been used to preserve it.

Psalms 119:160 states that the entirety of God's word is truth. Starting with that premise, we can compare writings outside the accepted canon of Scripture to see if they meet the test. As an example, the Bible claims that Jesus Christ is God (Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 1:22-23; John 1:1, 2, 14; 20:28; Acts 16:31, 34; Philippians 2:5-6; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1). Yet many extra-biblical texts, claiming to be Scripture, argue that Jesus is not God. When clear contradictions exist, the established Bible is to be trusted, leaving the others outside the sphere of Scripture (1).

Since our faith is defined by Scripture, it is vitally important for us to know what the measure and standard of our faith is. One way to attempt to settle the issue of a closed canon of Scripture and therefore know what the Scriptures actually are is to appeal to the Jewish people. They, after all, were on the scene longer than Christians, and the Old Testament scriptures were given to the world through the Jews.

If the Jews recognized a canon and understood it to be closed (i.e. that no more books

could be added to it) in the time before Christ, then it should remain fixed in the form they established. This logically follows if you believe the Bible is inspired. It seems unthinkable that the text should be inspired, but that the canon should not also be God-given in whatever final form it comes to us. If this ability to discern the canon is God-given then Christians should regard a Jewish canon arising from the pre-Christian era as binding upon them, and should be no more able to change it than they are able to change the contents of the individual books.

On the other hand, if the Jews had not discerned or closed their canon before the time of Christ (i.e. determined that no more books could be added to it), if they only came to believe that the canon was closed only at a later date, then Christians should not be overly concerned with their conclusions -- for it would be logical to conclude that the Holy Spirit's inspiration now belonged to the Christians. So the first question we must ask before determining what the proper canon should be is now this: Did the Jews of the pre-Christian era have a definite and closed canon?

### *Evidences for a Closed Canon*

At the head of this chapter I listed many of the times and sources that give us a statement of what books were considered to be officially part of the canon of the Jewish Canon. These same sources are used as evidence for a closed canon. After all these are the only books of Scripture that these sources recognize and therefore there is a closed canon by default – i.e. – the books listed are the only books of Scripture. However, there is a vast difference between saying these books belonged to the Bible and that no other book could. Added to these evidences are the following ones.

### *The Septuagint*

What Bible does the New Testament quote? Not the Hebrew Bible, since the majority of the New Testament was composed in Greek. As we saw in Chapter Four, the Bible used for most Scripture quotations in the New Testament is the same Bible used by Christians in the earliest centuries of the Church - the Septuagint (LXX) (2).

At the time the New Testament was written the LXX was in wide use and was widely respected by the authors of the New Testament and the Jewish people living at that time -- otherwise the New Testament writers would not have made use of it. The writers of the New Testament and the people in the New Testament all seemed to believe that the Septuagint was the Old Testament Canon of Scripture.

## *Philo*

Of some interest are the writings of Philo, a prolific Alexandrian Jew who lived in roughly the time of Christ. Though he gives us no canon, it is worthy of note that he does not use the apocryphal books. However, Philo (while prolific) is not the only rabbi of the period to leave us writings. The Catholic Encyclopedia notes that a few Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis quoted the deuterocanonical books, apparently as Scripture.

## *The Development of the Christian Canon*

If the canon of the Bible had been fixed before the time of the apostles by the Jewish scholars, then why does 2 Pet 3:16 speak of Paul's writing as Scriptures? Surely this would be an unnatural term for a Jew who had believed in a closed canon of the Bible. It may even have been that Jews were expecting new Scripture to be written when the Messiah came. The important point here is that the concept of a "New Testament" as distinct from an "Old Testament" is not found until the second century -- before that there is only "Scripture (3)."

If the Jews did not settle on a canon, then when did the Christians? To some extent we have considered this when we looked at the significance of the LXX, but it does not really fix the canon -- although it does support a larger collection than the Jewish/Protestant one. Here we consider the writings of the early Christians. How did they make the Canon of Scripture as we know it today?

## *The Early Church*

Early Christianity, which began within first-century Judaism, became clearly distinct from Rabbinic Judaism. It continued to revere the Jewish Bible, generally using the Septuagint translation that was in use among Greek-speaking Jews and Gentile Godfearers or the Targums in use among Aramaic speakers, and added to it the writings that would become the New Testament, thus developing the first Christian Biblical canons. The Early Church defended Christian beliefs against criticism by non-Christian Jews and followers of other Roman religions and survived various persecutions.

What started as a religious movement within Second Temple Judaism became, by the end of this period, the favored religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine the Great, and a significant religion also outside of the empire. The First Council of Nicaea marks the end of this era and the beginning of the period of the first seven Ecumenical Councils (325 - 787).

Although the Early Church used the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX), the apostles did not otherwise leave a defined set of new scriptures; instead the New Testament developed over time. The development of the New Testament canon was, like that of the Old Testament, a gradual process.

### *New Testament Writers*

Certainly the New Testament writers constitute the earliest group of early Christian writers. It has been suggested by some that the New Testament, upon which all Christian sects agree for its canon, defines an Old Testament implicitly by the books it quotes. Unfortunately, this would mean that we must regard the book of Enoch as part of the Old Testament since it is quoted in Jude, and only a very few groups of Christians regard Enoch as canonical. This, however, is not the only case where the New Testament makes use of what is widely regarded as Apocryphal sources (i.e. "non-canonical" sources). On the other hand, Ecclesiastes, Esther, and Canticles (various prayers and songs in the Old Testament) are not quoted -- so if the New Testament *defines* a canon then these omissions must be explained.

### *Early Church Fathers*

The period immediately following the passing of the Apostles is known as the period of the Church Fathers. Many of these men walked with the Apostles and were taught directly by them. Polycarp and Papias, for instance, are considered to have been disciples of the Apostle John. Doctrinal authority during this period rested on two sources, the Old Testament and the notion of Apostolic succession, being able to trace a direct association to one of the Apostles and thus to Christ. Although the New Testament Canon was written, it was not yet seen as a separate body of books equivalent to the O.T. Six church leaders are commonly referred to: Barnabas, Hermas, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Papias, and Ignatius (4).

Although these men lacked the technical sophistication of today's theologians, their correspondence confirmed the teachings of the Apostles and provides a doctrinal link to the N.T. Canon itself. Christianity was as yet a fairly small movement. These Church Fathers, often elders and bishops in the early Church, were consumed by the practical aspects of Christian life among the new converts. These men clearly believed that Jesus was God as was the Holy Spirit, but they had yet to clarify in writing the problems that might occur when attempting to explain this truth.

The early Church Fathers had no doubt about the authority of the O.T., often prefacing their quotes with "For thus saith God" and other notations. As a result they tended to be rather

moralistic and even legalistic on some issues. Because the N.T. Canon was not yet settled, they respected and quoted from works that have generally passed out of the Christian tradition. The books of Hermas, Barnabas, Didache, and 1 and 2 Clement were all regarded highly (5). As Berkhof writes concerning these early Church leaders, "For them Christianity was not in the first place a knowledge to be acquired, but the principle of a new obedience to God (6)."

Although these early Church Fathers may seem rather ill-prepared to hand down all the subtle implications of the Christian faith to the coming generations, they form a doctrinal link to the Apostles (and thus to our Lord Jesus Christ), as well as a witness to the growing commitment to the Canon of Scripture that would become the N.T. As Clement of Rome said in first century, "Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit (7)."

### *Justin Martyr*

Justin Martyr voiced his belief in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the N.T. text (100-165 AD), just as Augustine would two centuries later. The writings attributed to the apostles circulated amongst the earliest Christian communities. The Pauline epistles were circulating in collected form by the end of the first century AD. Justin Martyr, in the early second century, mentions the "memoirs of the apostles," which Christians called "gospels" and which were regarded as on par with the Old Testament (8).

### *Apostolic Fathers*

A four gospel canon (the *Tetramorph*) was asserted by Irenaeus, 160 AD (9). As Bishop of Lyon, Irenaeus mentions all of the books of the New Testament except Jude, 2 Peter, James, Philemon, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation (10). By the early 200's, Origen may have been using the same 27 books as in the modern New Testament, though there were still disputes over the canonicity of Hebrews, James, II Peter, II and III John, and Revelation (11). Likewise by 200 AD the Muratorian Fragment shows that there existed a set of Christian writings somewhat similar to what is now the New Testament, which included four gospels and argued against objections to them (12). This Fragment listed all the books of the Bible except for 1 John, 1 and 2 Peter, Hebrews, and James by around A.D. 180 Thus, while there was a good measure of debate in the Early Church over the New Testament canon, the major writings were accepted by almost all Christians by the middle of the second century (13).

## *Origen*

Origen did much study on the Bible. He learned Hebrew and labored carefully to produce the best texts. He noticed many differences between the Hebrew passages used by the Jews and the passages in use by Christians - not just in the disputed books, but in Job, Exodus, and others. He makes this remark, however, that is in line with the arguments we have made above: "And, forsooth, when we notice such things, we are forthwith to reject as spurious the copies in use in our Churches, and enjoin the brotherhood to put away the sacred books current among them, and to coax the Jews, and persuade them to give us copies which shall be untampered with, and free from forgery! Are we to suppose that that Providence which in the sacred Scriptures has ministered to the edification of all the Churches of Christ, had no thought for those bought with a price, for whom Christ died; whom, although His Son, God - who is love - spared not, but gave Him up for us all, that with Him He might freely give us all things (14)?"

## *The Greek Church Fathers*

In his Easter letter of 367 AD, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, gave a list of exactly the same books as what would become the New Testament canon, and he used the word "canonized" (*kanonizomena*) in regards to them. This was the first use of the word "canon in the literature of the church (15). In 365, Athanasius listed the complete twenty-seven books of the New Testament which he regarded as the "only source of salvation and of the authentic teaching of the religion of the Gospel (16)."

While Athanasius stands out in the Eastern Church, Jerome is his counterpart in the West. Jerome wrote a letter to Paulinus, Bishop of Nola in 394 AD listing just 39 O.T. books and our current 27 N.T. ones. It was in 383 AD that Bishop Damascus had Jerome work on a Latin text to standardize the Scripture. The resulting Vulgate was used throughout the Christian world (17).

## *Latin Church Fathers*

The African Synod of Hippo, in 393 AD, approved the New Testament, as it stands today, together with the Septuagint books, a decision that was repeated by Councils of Carthage in 397 and 419. These councils were under the authority of St. Augustine, who regarded the canon as already closed (18). The criteria used for determining the canonicity of the books included the internal witness of the Holy Spirit in general, and specifically Apostolic origin or sanction, usage by the Church, intrinsic content, spiritual and moral effect, and the attitude of the

early church.

Pope Damasus I's Council of Rome in 382 AD, if the *Decretum Gelasianum* is correctly associated with it, issued a biblical canon identical to that mentioned above (19), or if not the list is at least a sixth century compilation (20). Likewise, Damasus's commissioning of the Latin Vulgate edition of the Bible, 383 AD, was instrumental in the fixation of the canon in the West (21).

In 405, Pope Innocent I sent a list of the sacred books to a Gallic bishop, Exsuperius of Toulouse. When these bishops and councils spoke on the matter, however, they were not defining something new, but instead "were ratifying what had already become the mind of the Church (22). Thus, from the fourth century, there existed unanimity in the West concerning the New Testament canon (as it is today) (23) and by the fifth century the East, with a few exceptions, had come to accept the Book of Revelation and thus had come into harmony on the matter of the canon (24).

### *Reformation Period*

In this period the issue of canonical authority was addressed within the bigger battle between Roman Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation. In 1545 the Council of Trent was called as a response to the Protestant heresy by the Catholic Church. As usual, the Catholic position rested upon the authority of the Church hierarchy itself. It proposed that all the books found in Jerome's Vulgate were of equal canonical value (even though Jerome himself separated the Apocrypha from the rest) and that the Vulgate would become the official text of the Church. The council then established the Scriptures as equivalent to the authority of tradition (*Prima Scriptura*).

The reformers were also forced to face the Canon issue. Instead of the authority of the Church, Luther and the reformers focused on the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. Luther was troubled by four books, Jude, James, Hebrews, and Revelation, and though he placed them in a secondary position relative to the rest, he did not exclude them. John Calvin also argued for the witness of the Spirit (25). In other words, it is God Himself, through the Holy Spirit who assures the transmission of the text down through the ages, not the human efforts of the Catholic Church or any other group. Calvin rests the authority of the Scripture on the witness of the Spirit and the conscience of the godly.

A full dogmatic articulation of the canon was made for the various communions of the church during the Reformation period. Such articulations were made at the Council of Trent of

1546 for Roman Catholicism, the Thirty-Nine Articles of 1563 for the Church of England, the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 for British Calvinism, and the Synod of Jerusalem of 1672 for the Greek Orthodox (26).

Although the early church, up until the Reformation, was not yet united as to which books belonged in the Canon, they were certain that the books were inspired by God and contained the Gospel message that He desired to communicate to a fallen world. After the Reformation, the books of the Canon were widely agreed upon.

### *Modern Interpretation*

Many Christian groups today still do not accept the theory that the Christian Bible was not known until various local and Ecumenical Councils, which they deem to be "Roman-dominated", made their official declarations. For example the Ethiopian and Syriac Christian churches which were not part of these councils developed their own biblical traditions.

These groups believe that, in spite of the disagreements about certain books in early Christianity and, indeed, still today, the New Testament supports the view that Paul (2 Timothy 4:11–13), Peter (2 Peter 3:15–16), and ultimately John (Revelation 22:18–19) finalized the canon of the New Testament. Some note that Peter, John, and Paul wrote 20 (or 21) of the 27 books of the NT and personally knew all the other NT writers. (Books not attributed to these three are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, James, and Jude. The authorship of Hebrews has long been disputed.) (27).

As mentioned in the chapter two, many modern Protestants point to the following four "Criteria for Canonicity" to justify the selection of the books that have been included in the New Testament:

*Apostolic Origin* — attributed to and based on the preaching/teaching of the first-generation apostles (or their close companions).

*Universal Acceptance* — acknowledged by all major Christian communities in the ancient world (by the end of the fourth century).

*Liturgical Use* — read publicly when early Christian communities gathered for the Lord's Supper (their weekly worship services).

*Consistent Message* — containing a theological outlook similar or complementary to the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The basic factor for recognizing a book's canonicity for the New Testament was divine inspiration, and the chief test for this was apostolicity. The term *apostolic* as used for the test of



canonicity does not necessarily mean apostolic authorship or derivation, but rather *apostolic authority*. According to these Protestants' *Apostolic authority* is never detached from the authority of the Lord (28).

### *Conclusion*

As one reviews the unfolding story of how the Canon of Christian Scriptures has been formed and then interpreted, we can get a fairly accurate picture of the changes that have taken place in the thinking of Western civilization. Two thousand years ago men walked with Christ and experienced His deity first hand. God, through the Holy Spirit, led many of these men to compose an inspired account of their experiences which revealed to the following generations what God had done to save a fallen world. This text along with the notion of apostolic succession was accepted as authoritative by the emerging Christian population, and would eventually come to dominate much of Western thought. In the sixteenth century, the Reformation rejected the role of tradition, mainly the Roman Catholic Church, when it had begun to supersede the authority of Scripture. Thus the Reformers and now the Protestant Church, believe in the Scriptures alone (*Sola Scriptura*) as the vessel of divine truth and instruction.

### *Questions for Chapter Seven*

- 1- Why is it important to know if the Canon is closed?
- 2- What about all the other books from the same time period?
- 3- What difference does it make if the Jewish canon is closed or not?
- 4- What did the New Testament writers believe was the Old Testament canon?
- 5- Does the Septuagint prove the Jewish or Old Testament Canon was closed?
- 6- What did the Early Church view as the books of the canon?
- 7- When was the New Testament canon accepted?
- 8- How did the word "canon" come to be in the church and what was meant by this term?
- 9- What was the issue that forced the Reformers to deal with the canon issue?
- 10- What are the "Criteria for Canonicity"?


### *Footnotes for Chapter Seven*

- 1- <http://www.gotquestions.org/canon-of-Scripture.html>.
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According to the article Apostolic Succession, many Protestants oppose the Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession. Some of them do not do away completely with this idea, but redefine it as obedience to the message of the Apostles, contained by the Bible, i.e. such authority being based upon the authority of the Bible, not upon the authority conferred through

some churchly rituals.



## *Chapter Eight* *Canonical Criticism*

### *What Effect Does the Canon Have on the Church Today?*

In the preceding chapters we have seen that the 66 Books of the Bible, alone, are the inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God. We have seen how the Old and New Testament canons were compiled and the reasons and criteria for that compilation. We have seen the history of the canon and have seen the significance of the Biblical canons to the Jews and to Christians and to the different denominations and sections of the Church. But the big question is what does the canon matter and how does it apply to the Church of all ages but especially for the Church of today?

In previous chapters we have seen that the canon was important because we must have a standard to know and live God's word and that standard has to be unchanging. So we must know what writings are truly the writings of God to us His people. A belief in a wholly-inspired Bible is the very foundation principle of the Christian faith. The canon is also important because it defines which writings (or books as we call them) are to be included in this wholly inspired Bible. The Biblical canon is the set of books Christians regard as divinely inspired and thus constituting the Christian Bible.

Additionally the canon is important for us to understand because it shapes our theological beliefs. The basis of Christianity is found in the authority of Scripture. If we can't identify what is Scripture, then we can't properly distinguish any theological truth from error. The canon helps us to understand truth. God reveals truth in His word and as we go through life and other writings and teachings come to us as truth we need to know if these other things match God's truth or not so that we can be faithful in our walk with Christ. Psalm 119:160 states that the entirety of God's word is truth. Starting with that premise, we can compare writings and teachings outside the accepted canon of Scripture to see if they meet the test of matching God's truth.

The study of the canon is important because it provides us with the assurance that God's word is fully finished. We do not have to wonder if things have been left out or if things still need to be added. And we can also fend off the attacks of the world that want to treat the Scriptures as any other book to be dissected and pulled apart at our discretion. Because of the Canon of Scripture we may now have the conviction that the books of the Bible constitute the

full collection of the inspired authoritative books that God intended for his people and that this collection is pure (the canon does not include any intruding book that should not be included) and complete (no book that should be there has been omitted). God's Word is faithful and trustworthy and just as He gave it to us.

Theologically there are two important questions concerning the Canon of Scripture. One we have already addressed in early chapters – Authority. By this we mean, do the Scriptures have authority over the Church or does the Church have authority over the Scriptures. By defining the canon and understanding how it came to us we can now see that the Scriptures always have authority over the Church.

The other important question is how are we to study the Scriptures and their teachings? This discipline of study is called Canonical Criticism. On one side of the issue are the conservative Biblical Scholars who believe that the 66 Books of the Bible make up the Scriptures and therefore they must be studied as a whole. Naturally we can study the individual books and all the details about them and the circumstances in which they were written. However, by inclusion in the Canon of Scripture they become part of the whole. Their individual messages join together to give one message – the whole Council of God. Therefore, no matter how much we study them individually they will speak to the central message of all the Scriptures and they will give no contradictory teachings of that message.

Liberal Biblical Scholars, on the other hand, say just the opposite. They believe that the Scriptures can very much be looked at as individual books which not only do not have to match each other but in many cases clearly contradict each other. There may be a central message of the Scriptures but if there is, not all the books speak to it. Or perhaps not all the parts of each book speak to it. Additionally discussion on books that should have been included or could have been included or need to be included today is still open to us. Furthermore, the books of Scripture can be judged, evaluated and interpreted by and with other ancient books of the times of the Bible – they are not considered to be brought together into a singular work by a holy God.

This study of Canonical Criticism is very relevant to our church and ministry today and many people are affected by it. Everything in our culture and our society tells us that the Bible isn't true and can't be true for the reasons in the above paragraph. As we seek to do missions and outreach and evangelism and even personal witnessing we are always asked, "How do you know the Bible is true?" We have to understand that when they ask this question they not only are looking for a standard of truth but have also had the baggage of our culture filling their minds.

For example recently the National Geographic channel on TV – a very reputable company when it comes to historical things, did a show on Noah and the Ark. They said there was no flood; there was only a large local river that flooded its banks. And the only reason Noah got on his boat (no ark and no animals) was to escape his creditors. How could they say this? They based their study on weather conditions of 4000 years ago, the geology of the area, the business and agricultural culture and practices of the day, population shifts in a certain era and much more. In other words, it is an acceptable practice to study the teachings of Scripture according to the various sciences of study in the world today. The Scriptures are simply another document to be verified or denied by the sciences of the world.

So what do we say when confronted with questions of the authority and truthfulness of God's Holy Word? A strong part of our response has to be how we view the Scriptures and that is why Canonical Criticism is important for us to know. So we want to take a deeper look into this Biblical study discipline.

### *Definition*

Ever since Canonical Criticism became a discipline of Biblical studies in the 1970's, the study of the New Testament Canon has inspired fresh debate and vigorous dialogue. This is not surprising as this study goes into the fundamental question of the authority of Church and boundary of Canon. The "canonical process" was a long and complicated adventure and seems to have brought scholars closer together on several of the more important issues of Scripture and its study. However, there is always the lingering question of the Church and the canon.

Unlike earlier criticisms (source, form, etc.), canonical criticism is a more recent type of Biblical criticism and places greater emphasis on the final form of the canonical text. It is less interested in the stages of development that led to the writing of the individual books of the Bible or even the various literary aspects of the books. Rather it takes more seriously the fact that the Bible is a collection of canonical writings regarded as sacred and normative in two communities of faith: Israel and the church. It looks at the Bible as a whole document.

Brevard S. Childs is the scholar who has brought this criticism to the forefront in today's world. He has written prolifically on the subject, and states that canonical criticism is "an examination of the final form of the text as a totality, as well as the process leading to it (1)." Previous criticism asked questions about the origins, structure and history of the text, but canonical criticism addresses questions of meaning, both for the community which used it (and later communities which are regarded as being as important as the original community for which

the text was produced), and in the context of the wider canon of which it forms a part.

This emphasis on the canonical form of the Biblical text implies several things. First, the Biblical writings possess another dimension, one that may not have been there when the individual books were originally composed but one they have acquired nevertheless. Even if a book was composed without the initial intention or expectation that it would eventually become normative for Israel or the church, the fact that it acquired this status means that it must be read from this added perspective. In interpreting the text, readers must not only ask historical and literary questions about the text, but also how and why the text has addressed communities of faith. Their canonical status means that the texts have acquired a universal audience - communities of faith in every age and place who read them not simply to ask what their original authors intended but what they are saying to the living community of faith in the present.

Second, as part of a collection of Biblical writings, a book acquires a canonical context. It is no longer read in isolation but along with the other Biblical witnesses in all their variety. As such, it is no longer a single voice to be heard alone but stands as part of a chorus of voices to be heard along with the rest. Interpreters can no longer inquire solely into the message of a single text but must investigate this message as part of the entire canonical message, the sum total of all the canonical witnesses heard together (2). This is important for us to understand since it will protect us from false prophets who proclaim a message from God based on a verse or passage of Scripture taken out of the context of the whole. The concept of preaching, teaching and studying the "whole council of God" comes from seeing the Scriptures as a singular message from God. The Scriptures are not to be picked apart and preached through isolated verses as happens so very frequently in the church world today.

### *Brevard S. Childs*

Brevard Childs, Stirling Professor at Yale University was the scholar who brought canonical criticism to the forefront in modern times. Though not a theological conservative he took the conservative position in his development of Canonical Criticism. He originated and initially used the term "canon criticism" in the 1970s but dropped it as a misleading label for his own approach. It does not occur in either his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* or *The New Testament as Canon*. For Childs, "canon criticism" wrongly suggested a "criticism" parallel to other standard Biblical methodologies (e.g., source, form, and redaction criticism).

Childs prefers to speak of a "canonical approach," highlighting how "the canonical shape" of a Biblical book established possibilities and limits to its interpretation as a part of

Jewish and Christian scripture. He starts with "the final text" of scripture and makes observations about how diverse, even contradictory church traditions share a canonical context together. Rather than allowing the reader to pick and choose what elements of traditions seem the most appealing, this canonical context deepened the demand for interpretation in specific ways and in certain significant theological directions (3).

"I have always objected to the term "canon(ical) criticism" as a suitable description of my approach. I do not envision my approach as involving a new critical methodology analogous to literary, form, or redactional criticism. Rather, the crucial issue turns on one's initial evaluation of the nature of the Biblical text being studied. By defining one's task as an understanding of the Bible as the sacred Scriptures of the church, one establishes from the outset the context and point-of-standing of the reader within the received tradition of a community of faith and practice. Likewise, Scripture is also confessed to be the vehicle of God's self-disclosure which continues to confront the church and the world in a living fashion. In sum, its content is not merely a literary deposit moored in the past, but a living and active text addressing each new generation of believer, both Jew and Christian.

Biblical interpretation is a critical enterprise requiring exact handling of the language, history, and cultures of its recipients. The crucial hermeneutical issue turns on how one uses all this wealth of information. The goals of interpretation can be defined in countless different ways, but for those confessing its role as sacred Scripture the goal is to penetrate deeply into its content, to be illuminated theologically by its Word, and to be shaped and transformed by its gracious disclosure which witness is continually made alive by its divine communicator.

The divine and human dimensions of Scripture can never be separated as if there were a kernel and a husk, but the heart of the Bible lies in the mystery of how a fully time-conditioned writing, written by fragile human authors, can continually become the means of hearing the very Word of God, fresh and powerful, to recipients open to faithful response (4)."

Childs, in his many books, would ultimately review the entire modern history of Biblical interpretation in his commentary, but then ask the all-important question of what it meant to interpret a particular book or passage in canonical context, that is, as part of the received text that the Church confesses as Scripture, including what its position (i.e. between which books) by later editors in the shape of the canon might mean for how we should read this final version of the



text. His focus on the final version of the canonical text had few followers among Biblical scholars but it probably did inadvertently lead to many Biblical scholars shifting from an exclusive concentration on reconstructing historical events behind the Biblical text and paying more attention to the final text itself (5).

### *History*

Most scholars would acknowledge that the study of the Biblical Canon as a "subject" can be traced to one of the liberal pioneers of Biblical criticism, J. S. Semler (1725-1791) (6). Semler's approach sought to "de-canonize" the Biblical documents from their dogmatic and apologetic position. Semler was successful in that he influenced a large group of scholars immediately afterwards to move away from understanding the New Testament Canon as a historical continuity of New Testament tradition (7). In response to the radical and "anti-canon" position of Semler (which in effect questioned the authoritative form of the apostolic writings themselves), there emerged a group of scholars who sought to defend the historical continuity of the New Testament documents.

Within this movement conservative scholars played an influential part in the developing dialogue. Their position, closely aligned to the teaching of the Early Church (8), argued for the process of canonization to have begun as near as possible to the time of the apostles, establishing both the history of the canonization itself and the authenticity of the documents. So from the late eighteenth century onwards interest in the Biblical Canon became a matter for study and of controversy, for in the final analysis it was a question of authority between the church and the canon and so it caused a great divide between the opposing sides.

From this inheritance both liberals, with a rationalist bend to their approach to Biblical theology, and more conservative scholars, who held more strongly onto the belief of revelation, have gone on to formulate their respective methodologies and critical standards. The position of the conservatives whose fundamental thesis was that the New Testament Canon came into being by the end of the first century, was criticized by the liberals as it was their conviction that one of the major factors in the formulation of the New Testament Canon was the post-apostolic liturgical use of the Christian texts to ascribe to them a canonical status and of the Church's ongoing clash with Gnosticism. The famous liberal professor of theology Frederick Schleiermacher, who had earlier contended that the authority of a New Testament document depended not on its authorship but on its content, wanted to distinguish between the collecting process, which ultimately shaped the collection of the authoritative books, and the original

setting of each of the texts separately (9). It is from the debate between these two traditions, the conservative (arguing for growth) and the more liberal (arguing for selection) (10), that canonical criticism takes shape.

Eventually positions similar to Schleiermacher's were introduced to the United States. "As a result of the historical critical study of the New Testament a broad consensus emerged by the end of the nineteenth century which continued into the twentieth century in which the New Testament Canon was regarded solely as a post-apostolic development without any real significance for understanding the shaping of the New Testament itself (11)." This changed in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century from the accepted view through the writings of Childs and through his debates with James Sanders who took a position similar to Schleiermacher's.

### *Difficulty of Study*

The complexity and difficulty of the investigation of the history of the New Testament Canon has not been denied by scholars. The fundamental reason for this difficulty is that the primary evidence for such studies has to be collected from Early Christian literature, which can be "largely a matter of tradition and somewhat arbitrary (12)." In turn this creates the problem of the authenticity and the dating of many of these early writings; this is particularly problematic for the first two generations after the time of the Apostles, the most important period. And even when a consensus on these matters is found to be acceptable, the question arises as to the best way of how this determining evidence should be interpreted.

However, the recent reawakening and strong interest in canonical studies, (inspired by Childs) has seen good progress and some common ground toward the view of the canon being finished in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. At the same time, canonical criticism itself is engaged in a lively and productive discussion. For conservatives the fundamental claim "is that the canonical text alone is the medium of divine revelation (13)." Others, however, see other paradigms emerging "across five cultures" during the written history of the Biblical documents and speaks of the "monotheizing pluralism" of the canon (14).

Biblical scholars, whether from a canonical criticism approach or not and from diverse confessional traditions, have come closer to collective judgment on a number of issues relating both to the New Testament Canon and to the interpretation of relevant New Testament selections (i.e. Mk 12:24; Jn 10:35; Rom 15:4; 2Tim 3:15-16; 2Pet 1:19-21, 3:15-16). Significantly, even where there still remains a great divide on the question of the authority of Scripture or Tradition

for instance, the dialogue that canonical criticism has inspired within Biblical theology has helped to narrow the differences on the most important questions.

At the forefront of this modern-day consensus is the widespread recognition of these scholars, that the development and dynamics of the formation of the Biblical Canon were much more involved and intricate than was earlier believed. Bruce Metzger addresses this when he says, "discussion of the *notae canonicitatis*, therefore, should distinguish between the ground of canonicity and the grounds for the conviction of canonicity. The former has to do with the idea of the canon and falls within the province of theology; the latter has to do with the extent of the canon and falls within the domain of the historian (15)." Though both sides of the issue are clear in what they believe about the canon, the discussions prove to be much deeper than one would expect.

The phenomenal unearthing in 1945 of the Gnostic library of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt has also revealed to investigators, that the highly interiorized struggle of the believing community to define the nature of the Gospel and the Scriptures were an essential component of the operation in which the decisions of the Early Church were made regarding canonicity (16). Finally, the process to the establishment of the New Testament Canon as an infallible witness to an authoritative list of divinely inspired books was a gradual and often contradictory process, marked by stages and diverse, sometimes unpredictable causes (17).

### *The Canon and the Church*

Generally speaking, canonical criticism focuses on the final form of the Scripture as well as to build its theology on the Scriptures as the whole, such that the Scriptures should be respected in the life and worship of the church. In recent years scholarly interest in the canon of the New Testament has two focal points, historical and hermeneutical. Scholars of Biblical canon are also interested in the canon's formation in the earliest church. Some scholars share common criticism in historical-critical analysis. Historical-critical analysis is primarily concerned with particular Biblical writings in the diversity of the earliest church. "Historical analysis leads to an effort to recover the original form and function of ancient Israeli traditions and to conjecture about the original pre-Biblical social settings in which they were once heard or read (18)." Conservative Canonical Criticism however, states that these pre-Biblical social settings do not determine the inspiration or canonicity of the individual books.

There is important canonical criticism in the issue of the authority of the canon and the authority of the church. That is, canonical criticism studies the relationship between the

authorship of the Scriptures and its canonization in the situation of the earliest church. “The idea of a Biblical canon includes two integral ingredients: a canonical collecting of writings and a collection of canonical writings (19),” i.e. an authoritative collecting of writings and a collection of authoritative writings. “A canonical collection of writing” emphasizes the final literary form. The writings become authoritative for the church by their inclusion in the collection. “A collection of canonical writings” emphasizes religious function in communities. “A collection of canonical writings” possesses an intrinsic worth and the writings’ authority is grounded in their nature and source. The church recognizes the authority of the Scriptures (20).

The methodological interests of canonical criticism follows one of the two emphasis from Brevard S. Childs and James A. Sanders. “A canonical approach of Childs posits hermeneutical value in the final literary form” like a canonical collection of writing. The Scriptures support “both the subject matter for the church’s theological reflection and the theological boundaries” within Christian theology and ethics. The final form of the Scriptures combines its subject matter as final literary form within theological understanding (21).

“The canonical criticism of Sanders posits value in the act of interpretation that enables the Bible to function canonically in shaping the theology and guiding the praxis of the church.” For Sanders, canonical criticism is more about relating to, or dealing with phenomena (like language or culture) as they occur or change over a period of time and involves Biblical interpretation for the community’s faith and life (22). Therefore, according to Sanders, canonical criticism concentrates on how a Biblical text becomes canonical in the act of interpretation.

Though the forms of canonical criticism developed by its two major proponents, Childs and Sanders, differ, one can identify common elements. Specifically canonical criticism is concerned with how scripture’s final form was created within a believing community and how the meanings created by that final form continue to guide the reading practices of the community (23).

### *Use of Canonical Criticism*

Theological reflection on the Scriptures has two tasks: Biblical exegesis and theological interpretation, such as how the text was read in new situation. Biblical exegesis is aimed at a coherent exposition of Scriptures’ plain meaning in the final form of the canon. Plain meaning finds a standard meaning. Biblical exegesis in canonical criticism seeks to restore to full volume the voice of every Biblical writer so that the whole meaning of Scripture can then be vocalized as a chorus of its various parts. Biblical exegesis supports theological norms and ethical principle,

but it has a limitation in time and space as the changing of time and space.

Theological interpretation gives the subject matter of Scriptures its meaning for today. Interpretation relocates religious authority in the social contexts of the faith community where the Word of God is ultimately heard and embodied. Interpretation reflects the meaning for new readers and new situation. However, Biblical writings are written by particular authors for particular readers in particular time and space. In these cases, current readers will not find the same application necessarily in the understanding of the first readers. However the inspired Scriptural truths are applicable to every person in every era.

Canonical criticism inquires into the form and function of the Bible. The attention of the canonical text is “for an appreciation of how the religious construe reality and how competence in Biblical interpretation is recognized in earlier period.” Then it does the same for the current world, that is it shows how the church of the current time understands what the Scriptures are and what they say to us today. The canonical approach should offer a foundational description of the Scripture for a diverse tradition in time and space (24).

### *Conclusion*

The value of Canonical Criticism is the modern application of the Reformation principle of Biblical interpretation, the analogy of faith. It is, according to Raymond E. Brown, the reminder that “despite the meaning they have in themselves, the individual books of the Bible are not normative taken alone. These books did not come down to us separately but as part of a collection. And they were not accepted as authoritative by the Jewish and Christian communities in isolation but as normative collections (25).” For Christians today the “normative collection of Scripture”, is held to be revealed by God and serving as the basis of religious authority.

Canonical criticism is explicitly focused on the canon in its final form. Canonical critics focus on how the final form of the Scriptures has created the context within which all of its materials are now to be read, as a movement from judgment to salvation (26).

### *Questions for Chapter Eight*

- 1- What is Canonical Criticism?
- 2- What is Canonical Criticism dealing with?
- 3- How is this different from the canon itself?
- 4- What does this teach us about the way we must study the Scriptures?

- 5- Who is Brevard Childs?
- 6- What was his position?
- 7- How did Canonical Criticism come about?
- 8- Why is Canonical Criticism hard to study?
- 9- What is the heart of Canonical Criticism?
- 10- What is the value of Canonical Criticism for today?

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- John Miller. *The Origins of the Bible*. New York: Paulist Press, 1994.  
The author clearly defines how he perceives the Hebrew Bible came into being through the rivalries of the different priestly groups each pushing their own agenda.
- Leon Morris. *New Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan Publishing, 1986.
- Mark Noll. *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*. Ada, MI; Baker Academic, 1997.  
The book looks both at the historical roots and at the different paths the Christian church has taken.
- Randal Price. *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Eugene Oregon; Harvest House Publishers, 1977. 525 pages.  
A history of the Dead Sea Scrolls based on meticulous research and firsthand interviews with the people closest to the scrolls.
- James Pritchard. *The Ancient Near East, Vol. I, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Princeton, NJ; Princeton Press, 1973. 380 pages.  
Ancient near eastern documents which are important for understanding Biblical peoples and their writings.
- Leonhard Rost. *Judaism Outside the Hebrew Canon*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1971.
- Dorothy and Joseph Samachson. *Good Digging, The Story of Archaeology*. New York, NY; Rand McNally, 1961. 224 pages.  
A study of what archaeology is and how it is conducted.
- Hershel Shanks. *Recent Archaeology in the Land of Israel*. Washington, DC; Biblical Archaeology Society, 1985. 194 pages.  
A summary of important discoveries since the founding of the state of Israel.
- Hershel Shanks, ed. *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls*. New York: Random House, 1992. McDonald & Sanders.
- Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. *The Apocrypha*. Cambridge, London, England; University Press, no date given. 172 pages.  
A copy of the books of the Apocrypha.

Merrill C. Tenny. *New Testament Times*. Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Books, 2004. 364 pages.

This book is designed to help us understand the world of the first century to better understand the Scriptures and their history.

5178 pages.

*The Canon of Scripture*  
(Biblical Studies)

Rev. G. Michael Saunders, Sr.

Teacher's Manual

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## *Preface*

The study of the Canon of Scripture is a very interesting study for any person who loves the history of the Bible or the history of the Church or any of the people involved in these histories. There are many discoveries both through writings and archaeology; there is a good deal of adventure in the discoveries; there is a great deal of controversy, and plenty of theology. The study of the history of how the Canon comes together is a very profitable and interesting study for all who undertake it.

However these are not the true reasons why we should study the Canon of Scripture. I believe the study of the Canon of Scripture goes to the heart of our Christian Faith. If we do not know which books that were written by people of all ages are inspired of God and are part of His infallible rule, then we have no standard from which to learn and understand the glorious things of God. If we can never be sure which books are parts of the Scriptures, and are from God Himself, we will never have a measuring standard for truth. If we cannot know which books are from God and which are not then we cannot know which part of the Gospel story, the story of our Lord Jesus is true or not, is real or not.

How will we contend for the Gospel? How will we fight error, sin and wickedness? How shall we declare the unconditional love of Jesus Christ? How can we know to be cleansed of unrighteousness? Which parts of the Bible are true and which are myth, superstition or tradition? All of these problems are resolved when we have a Canon of Scripture.

Of course in the church of today and in theological circles the question is do we actually have a Canon of Scripture and how can we know? Who put this Canon together and why did they get to do it instead of someone else? Are the Scriptures simply a tool that the church uses to have its way in the world? Or is the Canon of Scripture created by God Himself as He orchestrates how His Word was gathered and put together. Is God the one who governs His Church through His word? Is the Canon of Scripture our only rule of faith and practice?

The Canon of Scripture is either God's Holy Word binding our lives and consciences or it is something else. Let us discover what the Canon is all about.

## *Introduction*

### *Course Description*

This course is part of the Biblical Studies course and provides the fundamentals in understanding how the Scriptures came together from 66 individual books to one “Word of God”. This course will demonstrate the significance and importance of understanding how the Canon of Scripture was compiled. It will also show how understanding the Canon affects us in our churches and ministries as we seek to use the Word of God to accomplish His purposes on earth until He returns.

The course is not auto-didactic. Nor is it principally academic in nature. A mature teacher must be prepared to play the role of mentor to his students, rather than a mere instructor.

The number of students in the class should be small, to allow for the interchange necessary in the mentoring process. Eight to twelve students are the ideal number. The course should be as practical as possible, dealing with real life situations and problems that the leader will encounter personally and in the context of his ministry.

Finally, the teacher must keep in mind at all times, the goal for this class is for the student to understand the Canon and its aid to ministry in the church today. The goal is to teach the students how to use their understanding of the Canon of Scripture in the life and ministry of the local church including how to use it for the spread of the Gospel.

### *Purpose of the Course*

To establish in the mind of the student the importance and significance of the Canon of Scripture:

Why does the canon matter?

How does it apply to the Church in the past?

How does it apply to the Church of today?

How do we define which writings are to be included in the Bible?

How does the Canon shape our theology and bible Study?

### *Summary of Course Content*

This course will give the student the information needed for teaching on the authority and trustworthiness of God’s Word. This course will teach how we can use this knowledge in spreading the Gospel. It will also strengthen the students understanding and faith in the

Scriptures.

*Course Materials.*

Michael Saunders. *The Canon of Scripture*. Miami, Florida; M.I.N.T.S., 2008.

F.F. Bruce. *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL; IVP Academic Press, 1988. 334 pages.

Randal Price. *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Eugene Oregon; Harvest House Publishers, 1977. 525 pages.

*Objectives of the Course*

- 1- Student participation in classroom discussion
- 2- Student comprehension of course materials
- 3- Student familiarization with course bibliography
- 4- Student completion of papers and assignments that can be used in the church and/or ministry settings
- 5- Student's retention of course materials and application to real ministry
- 6- Student's application of course materials to their own ministry

*These objectives will be evaluated in four ways (See evaluation of the course).*

*Structure of the Course*

*How the course will be conducted.*

1. For students studying at a distance and not attending course lectures:
  - a. The student will contact the MINTS Academic Dean in order to enroll in the course and be designated a supervising professor.
  - b. The student will identify his or her mentor, who will locally oversee the course. The mentor will verify that all of the lessons have been read and the homework completed. Note: The supervising professor of MINTS must approve the mentor.
  - c. The student will download the course syllabus and begin studies.
  - d. The mentor will send the lesson completion chart, the exam completion chart and the case study to the supervising professor.
  - e. The supervising professor will review and record the grades, ensure that they are registered with the MINTS Registrar and that the final grade is sent to the student and mentor.



2. For students studying at a distance who attend course lectures:
  - a. MINTS provides an orientation to the course (by invitation by a professor).
  - b. The student will attend 15 hours of lectures.
  - c. The student will complete the lesson assignments and give them to the professor, who also serves as the mentor.
  - d. The supervising MINTS professor will review the student's work (attendance, lesson completion and case study grade) and have the final grade registered with the MINTS Registrar. The Registrar will send the group leader the student's final grade.

### Lesson Development

#### Lesson 1 - "Sola Scriptura" - Authority and Inspiration of Scripture

##### *Homework:*

1. Read Chapters one and two of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper on Sola Scriptura.

#### Lesson 2 - Definition of the Canon of Scripture

##### *Assignment Due This Week:*

One page paper on Sola Scriptura.

##### *Homework:*

1. Read Chapter three of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper defining the Canon of Scripture.

#### Lesson 3 – The Jewish Canon

##### *Assignment Due This Week:*

1. One page paper defining the Canon of Scripture.

##### *Homework:*

Read Chapter four of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.

Write a one page paper defining the Jewish Canon with an outline of how it came down to us today and discussing whether it is a closed Canon or not.

#### Lesson 4 – The Septuagint – Bible of Jesus and The Masoretic Text

*Assignment Due This Week:*

One page paper defining the Jewish Canon with an outline of how it came down to us today and discussing whether it is a closed Canon or not.

*Homework:*

1. Read Chapter five of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper explaining how we got the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text.

Lesson 5 - The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Targums

*Assignment Due This Week:*

1. Write a one page paper explaining how we got the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text.

*Homework:*

1. Read Chapter six of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper explaining how we found the Dead Sea Scrolls and what they contribute to the Canon of Scripture.

Lesson 6 – Christian Canons of the New Testament

*Assignment Due This Week:*

1. One page paper explaining how we found the Dead Sea Scrolls and what they contribute to the Canon of Scripture.

*Homework:*

1. Read Chapter seven of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper on the Christian Canon of the New Testament.

Lesson 7 – Criteria for Canonicity

*Assignment Due This Week:*

One page paper on the Christian Canon of the New Testament.

*Homework:*

1. Read Chapter eight of Michael Saunders *The Canon of Scripture*.
2. Write a one page paper on the Criteria for Canonicity.
3. Write a one page paper on the 2 main issues of Canonical Criticism.

Lesson 8- Canonical Criticism

*Assignment Due This Week:*

1. Write a one page paper on the Criteria for Canonicity.
2. Write a one page paper on the 2 main issues of Canonical Criticism.

#### *Requirements of the course*

The student will attend 15 hours of class and participate in the discussion time.

Pass a short quiz at the end of each class (for credit students only).

The student will complete reading and writing assignments required between classes.

The students will become familiar with readings related to the course theme(s).

The student must turn in one written paper per week (for credit students only).

#### *Evaluation of the course*

Student participation: 20% attendance.

Quizzes: 20% for passing all quizzes.

Student homework: 20% for completed homework assignments.

Student readings: Bachelor level students will read 300 extra pages and write a 3-page book report. Master level students will read 500 pages and write a 5-page book report. Doctoral level students will read 5000 pages and present an annotated bibliography (20%).

Student ministry papers and assignments: 20% for passing all 8 one page papers.

#### *Evaluation of the course*

Student participation: 20%) attendance.

Quizzes: 20% for passing all quizzes.

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Student ministry papers and assignments: 20% for passing all 8 one page papers.

#### *Benefits of the course*

This course will give the student the knowledge of how the 66 books of the Bible came to be together and how this will benefit them in their own Biblical studies and provide a foundation for their preaching and teaching and evangelistic work.

### *Closing Remarks*

The student will be able to conclude this course with several very useful tools for ministry in Biblical Studies and Evangelistic outreach.

### *Questions for Chapter One*

What is Sola Scriptura?

Sola Scriptura (Latin "by scripture alone") is the assertion that the Bible as God's written word is self-authenticating, clear to the rational reader, its own interpreter (Scripture interprets Scripture), and sufficient of itself to be the final authority of Christian doctrine.

What is the position of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Oriental Orthodox Churches on Sola Scriptura and why?

They do not believe in Sola Scriptura because they teach that the Scriptures are an important but not exclusive part of the Sacred Tradition from which the Churches derive their doctrines. These bodies also believe that the Church has authority over the Scriptures because it actively selected which books were to be in the biblical canon.

What is Prima Scriptura?

Prima Scriptura suggests that ways of knowing or understanding God and His will, that do not originate from canonized scripture, are in a second place, perhaps helpful in interpreting that scripture, but testable by the canon and correctable by it, if they seem to contradict the scriptures.

How does sola Scriptura compare to Prima Scriptura?

Sola Scriptura rejects any original infallible authority, other than the Bible. In this view, all secondary authority is derived from the authority of the Scriptures and is therefore subject to reform when compared to the teaching of the Bible. Church councils, preachers, biblical commentators, private revelation, or even a message allegedly from an angel or an apostle are not an original authority alongside the Bible in the sola scriptura approach.

How does Sola Scriptura affect our view of the church?

Protestants argue that the Scriptures are guaranteed to remain true to their divine source;

and, thus, only insofar as the Church retains scriptural faith is it assured of God's favor.

How did the Reformers view the Scriptures and the church?

They believed that no matter how venerable the traditional source, traditional authority is always open to question by comparison to what the Scriptures say. The individual may be forced to rely on his understanding of Scripture even if the whole tradition were to speak against him. This, they said, had always been implicitly recognized in the Church, and remains a fail-safe against the corruption of the Church by human error and deceit.

What is Biblical Inspiration?

Biblical inspiration is the doctrine in Christian theology concerned with the divine origin of the Bible and what the Bible teaches about itself.

What do we believe about Biblical Inspiration?

Evangelical Christians see the Bible as a truly human product whose creation was superintended by the Holy Spirit, preserving the authors' works from error without eliminating their specific concerns, situation, or style. This divine involvement, they say, allowed the biblical writer to reveal God's own message to the immediate recipients of the writings and to those who would come later, communicating God's message without corrupting it. Some Evangelicals have sought to characterize the conservative or traditional view as verbal, plenary inspiration in the original manuscripts, by which they mean that every word (not just the overarching ideas or concepts) is meaningfully chosen under the superintendence of God.

What did Jesus think about the inspiration of the Old Testament?

One of Jesus' strongest statements concerning the Old Testament Law was His affirmation that heaven and earth would pass away before even the smallest portion of a letter (Matt. 5:17-18). Jesus also taught that these fractions of letters would never fail (Luke 16:17). Further, after citing a particular text in Psalm 82:6, Jesus stated that Scripture could not be nullified (John 10:35). These comments are striking reminders regarding the extent to which Jesus thought Scripture spoke the truth.

Why do we believe in the inspiration of the New Testament?

The chief impetus for believing in the inspiration of New Testament texts rests on the approved teachings of Jesus. He promised His disciples both that they were His special witnesses

and that they would be inspired and guided to all truth by the leading of the Holy Spirit. We also have many instances where New Testament authors claimed this promise personally for their own writings, as well as a few examples where they extended this promise to other qualified authors. Additionally, although we cannot pursue the issue here, we also have a great amount of New Testament texts that recognize the inspiration of various Old Testament figures and passages.

### *Questions for Chapter Two*

1-What is the Biblical Canon?

A Biblical canon or canon of scripture is a list or set of Biblical books considered to be authoritative as scripture by a particular religious community, generally in Judaism or Christianity. The Biblical canon is the set of books Christians regard as divinely inspired and thus constituting the Christian Bible.

2- How was the Biblical Canon formed?

These lists, or canons, have been developed through debate and agreement by the religious authorities of the Jewish and Christian faiths.

3-What is the difference between open and closed canons?

The closure of the canon reflects a belief that public revelation has ended and thus the inspired texts may be gathered into a complete and authoritative canon. By contrast, an open canon permits the addition of additional books through the process of continuous revelation.

4-What does “canon” mean?

The word "canon" is derived from the Greek word meaning "reed" or "cane," often used as a standard of measurement. Thus, a canonic text is a single authoritative edition for a given work.

5-What was the very first canon?

The first record we have of a Canon of Scripture is in Joshua 1:8 *“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful”*.

6-What are the main canon indicators?

Wisdom of Sirach, a book dated to approximately 130 BC.

Philo in *Contemplative Life*

Josephus' in *Contra Apion* 1.8, dated c. 93-95 AD.

The Bryennius List

The canon of Epiphanius

Council of Jamnia.

7-When was the Jewish Canon set?

Rabbinic Judaism recognizes the twenty-four books of the Masoretic Text, commonly called the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible. Evidence suggests that the process of canonization occurred between 200 BC and AD 200. However, these sources do not suggest that the canon was at that time closed; moreover, it is not clear that these sacred books were identical to those that later became part of the canon. Today, there is no scholarly consensus as to when the Jewish canon was set.

8- When was the Christian Canon set?

The major writings were accepted by almost all Christians by the middle of the second century. The African Synod of Hippo, in 393, approved the New Testament, as it stands today, together with the Septuagint books, a decision that was repeated by Councils of Carthage in 397 and 419. These councils were under the authority of St. Augustine, who regarded the canon as already closed. Nonetheless, a full dogmatic articulation of the canon was not made until the Council of Trent of 1546 for Roman Catholicism, the Thirty-Nine Articles of 1563 for the Church of England, the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 for British Calvinism, and the Synod of Jerusalem of 1672 for the Greek Orthodox.

9-What are the protestant Criteria for Canonicity?

*Apostolic Origin* — attributed to and based on the preaching/teaching of the first-generation apostles (or their close companions).

*Universal Acceptance* — acknowledged by all major Christian communities in the ancient world (by the end of the fourth century).

*Liturgical Use* — read publicly when early Christian communities gathered for the Lord's

Supper (their weekly worship services).

*Consistent Message* - containing a theological outlook similar or complementary to other accepted Christian writings.

10-How is the canon used to define orthodoxy?

This theological concern led the early church to employ the "rule of faith" as the criterion of "orthodoxy" to determine which writings could be used in the church.

### *Questions for Chapter Three*

What is the "Mosaic" Canon?

We could call this original canon the "Mosaic Canon of Scripture" as it was first given to Moses (Leviticus 24:4 & 12 and then later given to Joshua - Joshua 1:8, 9).

What is the Jewish Canon?

The Old Testament as we know it today is the "Jewish Canon".

What is the Tanakh and what does it mean?

The Jewish people call the Old Testament the Tanakh. The name "Tanakh" is a Hebrew acronym formed from the initial Hebrew letters of the Tanakh's three traditional subdivisions: The Torah, which is the "Teaching," also known as the Five Books of Moses; The Nevi'im which is the "Prophets" and Ketuvim or the "Writings" - hence *TaNakh*.

What were the criteria for inclusion into the Jewish Canon?

The writing had to be composed in Hebrew. 2) The writing had to be sanctioned by usage in the Jewish community. 3) The writings had to contain one of the great religious themes of Judaism, such as election, or the covenant. 4) The writing had to be composed before the time of Ezra.

Where do we find support for the Jewish Canon?

2 Esdras, Pharisees, Midrash, Josephus, Council of Jamnia

What is the Council of Jamnia?



The Council of Yavne or Council of Jamnia was a council under Rabbi Yohanan's leadership that was responsible for defining the canon of the Hebrew Bible.

Did the Council of Jamnia close the Canon of Scripture?

No. Some scholars say that this council established and closed the canon authoritatively for nearly all Jews. However, there is no scholarly consensus as to when the Jewish canon was closed.

Did the Jewish canon close the canon of Scripture?

The book of Deuteronomy includes a prohibition against adding or subtracting (4:2, 12:32) which might apply to the book itself (i.e. a closed book, a prohibition against future scribal editing) or to the instruction received by Moses on Mt. Sinai. The book of 2 Maccabees, itself not a part of the Jewish canon, describes Nehemiah (around 400 BC) as having "founded a library and collected books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings" (2:13-15). The Book of Nehemiah suggests that the priest-scribe Ezra brought the Torah back from Babylon to Jerusalem and the Second Temple (8-9) around the same time period. Both I and II Maccabees suggest that Judas Maccabeus (around 167 BC) likewise collected sacred books (3:42-50, 2:13-15, 15:6-9), indeed some scholars argue that the Jewish canon was fixed by the Hasmonean dynasty. However, these primary sources do not suggest that the canon was at that time closed; moreover, it is not clear that these sacred books were identical to those that later became part of the canon. As mentioned above, there is no scholarly consensus as to when the Jewish canon was closed.

Why does this matter?

The basis of Christianity is found in the authority of Scripture. If we can't identify what is Scripture, then we can't properly distinguish any theological truth from error. The same supernatural power God used to produce His word has also been used to preserve it.

How did the New Testament books get into the Canon of Scripture?

If the canon of the Bible had been fixed before the time of the apostles, then why does 2 Pet 3:16 speak of Paul's writing as Scriptures? The important point here is that the concept of a "New Testament" as distinct from an "Old Testament" is not found until the second century -- before that there is only "Scripture". The Jewish Canon was not closed by the end of the Old

Testament age allowing for the addition of the New Testament books. At best the Jewish Canon was closed at the Council of Jamnia in 90 AD after the New Testament age was almost over.

### *Questions for Chapter Four*

What is the Septuagint?

The Septuagint or simply "LXX" is the Koine Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, translated in stages between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC in Alexandria.

What does Septuagint mean and why was it written?

The word "septuaginta" means "seventy" in Latin and derives from a tradition that seventy (or seventy-two) Jewish scholars translated the Pentateuch (Torah) from Hebrew into Greek for Ptolemy II Philadelphus, 285–246 BC.

What books are in the Septuagint?

All the books of the Old Testament and of the Apocrypha.

What Bible does the New Testament quote?

Not the Hebrew Bible, since the majority of the New Testament was composed in Greek. The Bible used for most Scripture quotations in the New Testament is the same Bible used by the Ethiopian Jews and the same Bible used by Christians in the earliest centuries of the Church -- the Septuagint.

Which books of the Septuagint are quoted in the New Testament?

Only the books of the Jewish canon are quoted in the New Testament however, with only one exception in the Book of Jude which has a quote from Enoch.

What is the Masoretic Text?

The Masoretic Text is the Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible. It defines not just the books of the Jewish canon, but also the precise letter-text of the biblical books in Judaism, as well as their vocalization and accentuation for both public reading and private study.

Who were the Masoretes?

The Masoretes were groups of scribes and Bible scholars working between the 7th and 11th centuries, based primarily in Israel in the cities of Tiberius and Jerusalem, as well as in Babylonia.

Why are the Masoretes important?

The Masoretes devised the vowel notation system for Hebrew that is still widely used as well as the trope symbols used for cantillation (“Trope” is the notation for accentuation and musical reading of the Bible in Jewish religious liturgy). “Cantillation” is the ritual chanting of readings from the Bible in synagogue services.

Who was the most famous Masorete and why?

Aaron ben Moses ben Asher (10th century, died circa 960) refined the Tiberian system for writing down vowel sounds in Hebrew, which is still in use today, and serves as the basis for grammatical analysis. Ben-Asher was the last and most prominent member of the Ben-Asher dynasty of grammarians from Tiberias, which shaped the most accurate version of the Masorah – the Aleppo Codex - and, therefore, the Hebrew Bible. The Ben Asher family of Masoretes was largely responsible for the preservation and production of the Masoretic Text. The halakhic authority Maimonides endorsed the Ben Asher as superior.

What is the Aleppo Codex?

The most authoritative source document for both the original biblical text and its vocalization (cantillation) as it has been proven to have been the most faithful to the Masoretic principles.

Why are there differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text?

The most widely accepted view today is that the original Septuagint provided a reasonably accurate record of an early Semitic textual variant, now lost, that differed from ancestors of the Masoretic text. However, the text of the LXX is in general close to that of the Masoretic.

### *Questions for Chapter Five*

What is the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls?

The texts are of great religious and historical significance, as they include practically the only known surviving copies of Biblical documents made before 100 AD. This significance of the scrolls relates in a large part to the field of textual criticism.

How were the Dead Sea Scrolls Discovered?

Mohammed – Kando – Metropolitan Samuel – Yigael Yadin – Shrine of the Book.

What was the oldest text before the Dead Sea Scrolls?

Masoretic texts dating to 9th century, Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus and most important, the Leningrad Codex from 1008 AD.

What books were covered by the Dead Sea Scrolls?

All the Old Testament except for the Book of Esther, many books of the Apocrypha and many sectarian documents.

How do the Scrolls affect the Masoretic Text?

Although a few of the Biblical manuscripts found at Qumran differ significantly from the Masoretic text, most do not. The scrolls thus provide new variants and the ability to be more confident of those readings where the Dead Sea manuscripts agree with the Masoretic Text or with the early Greek manuscripts.

How do the Scrolls affect the Septuagint?

It is important to note also however, that the Dead Sea Scrolls are almost identical to the Septuagint in their Biblical manuscripts.

How do the Scrolls relate to the new Testament?

They are the “are the only suitable comparative material” to the New Testament.

What is the Targum?

The Targum (lit. "translation or interpretation") is an *Aramaic Translation* of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) written or compiled from the Second Temple period until the early Middle Ages (late first millennium).

What are the two official Targum and how are they used?

The two most important *targumim* for liturgical purposes are: Targum Onkelos on the Torah (The Law) and Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Nevi'im (The Prophets). These two *targumim* are mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud as *Targum dilan* ("our Targum"), giving them official status. In the synagogues of Talmudic times, Targum Onkelos was read alternately with the Torah (The Law), verse by verse, and Targum Jonathan was read alternately with the selection from Nevi'im (The Prophets).

What do the Targums say about the Canon of Scripture?

Historically however, it gives us checks on what was included in the canon. What books were considered to be the Canon of Scripture and commentary was written on them? According to the Targum the Law and the Prophets only were considered to be the canon.

### *Questions for Chapter Six*

Why study the canon of Scripture?

The study of the canon of Scripture explores on how we may attain a conviction that the 39 books of the OT and the 27 books of the NT constitute the full collection of the inspired authoritative books that God intended for his people and that this collection is pure (the canon does not include any intruding book that should not be included) and complete (no book that should be there has been omitted). We want to study the criteria for canonicity in this chapter so we can understand how the Scriptures came together.

Who made the first New Testament canon?

Marcion the heretic in 140 AD.

How was the New Testament transmitted to us?

The Historical Jesus - Oral Tradition - Written Sources - Written Texts - Distribution - Collection - Canonization - Translation - Interpretation - Application

What are the New Testament Genres?

Four "Gospels", One "Acts", Twenty-One "Letters" or "Epistles" (Thirteen Letters attributed to Paul), One Biblical Sermon, Seven Catholic Epistles or General Letters, One "Apocalypse"

What is Apostolicity?

The Bible was written by the Apostles or men under the mentorship of the Apostles.

What is Orthodoxy?

God would not permit his Word to teach falsehood as well as truth. The early Church did often mention this as a criterion and was helped in discarding unworthy materials by the application of this principle.

What is Inspiration?

Since all the canonical books are inspired by God, some authors, including notably Laird Harris in his book *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, have suggested that inspiration is really the criterion to be applied. There is indeed a correspondence between inspiration and canonicity. The statement of 2 Tim 3:16 is true for both testaments: “*All Scripture is God-breathed.*” No non-inspired book has a place in the canon.

What is Christocentricity?

This criterion, advocated by Martin Luther, was grounded in the correct observation that the whole Bible as a redemptive book has Jesus Christ as its center. As Pascal later wrote: “Jesus Christ whom both Testaments regard, the Old as its hope, the New as its model, and both as their center.”

What is the Testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Individual Christian

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* stated: “The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God by their majesty and purity...but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very word of God.”

What is the Authority of the Church?

(1) The OT existed before the NT Church. (2) The Church is under the authority of the Word and has no authority over the Word. (3) Any authority the Church may have is designated to her by God. (4) The Roman Church has made a serious mistake by legislating the canonicity of the OT Apocrypha in spite of Jerome’s clear warnings.

What is the Witness of the Holy Spirit Given Corporately To God's People and Made Manifest by a Nearly Unanimous Acceptance of the NT Canon in Christian Churches?

The consensus of churches on the NT is an index and evidence of the Holy Spirit's guidance. The Holy Spirit is the moving authoritative force.

### *Questions for Chapter Seven*

Why is it important to know if the Canon is closed?

The basis of Christianity is found in the authority of Scripture. If we can't identify what is Scripture, then we can't properly distinguish any theological truth from error. Since our faith is defined by Scripture, it is vitally important for us to know what the measure and standard of our faith is.

What about all the other books from the same time period?

Many extra-biblical texts, claiming to be Scripture, argue against the teachings of Scripture. When clear contradictions exist, the established Bible is to be trusted, leaving the others outside the sphere of Scripture.

What difference does it make if the Jewish canon is closed or not?

If the Jews recognized a canon and understood it to be closed (i.e. that no more books could be added to it) in the time before Christ, then it should remain fixed in the form they established. On the other hand, if the Jews had not discerned or closed their canon before the time of Christ (i.e. determined that no more books could be added to it), if they only came to believe that the canon was closed only at a later date, then Christians should not be overly concerned with their conclusions -- for it would be logical to conclude that the Holy Spirit's inspiration now belonged to the Christians.

What did the New Testament writers believe was the Old Testament canon?

The writers of the New Testament and the people in the New Testament all seemed to believe that the Septuagint was the Old Testament Canon of Scripture.

Does the Septuagint prove the Jewish or Old Testament Canon was closed?

No. To some extent the significance of the LXX seems to do this, however, it does not

really fix the canon -- it even supports a larger collection of books of the OT than the Jewish/Protestant one.

What did the Early Church view as the books of the canon?

Although the New Testament Canon was written, it was not yet seen as a separate body of books equivalent to the O.T. Because the N.T. Canon was not yet settled, they respected and quoted from works that have generally passed out of the Christian tradition. The books of Hermas, Barnabas, Didache, and 1 and 2 Clement were all regarded highly.

When was the New Testament canon accepted?

The major writings of the new Testament were accepted by almost all Christians by the middle of the second century.

How did the word "canon" come to be in the church and what was meant by this term?

In his Easter letter of 367 AD, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, gave a list of exactly the same books as what would become the New Testament canon, and he used the word "canonized" (*kanonizomena*) in regards to them. This was the first use of the word "canon in the literature of the church. In 365, Athanasius listed the complete twenty-seven books of the New Testament which he regarded as the "only source of salvation and of the authentic teaching of the religion of the Gospel."

What was the issue that forced the Reformers to deal with the canon issue?

The reformers were forced to face the Canon issue because of the belief in the authority of the Church as part of revelation from God. The Reformers said that this was a false doctrine and that the authority of the Scripture rests on the witness of the Spirit and the conscience of the godly.

What are the "Criteria for Canonicity"?

Apostolic Origin, Universal Acceptance, Liturgical Use and a Consistent Message

### *Questions for Chapter Eight*

What is Canonical Criticism?



A study of the Scriptures that seeks to take more seriously the fact that the Bible is a collection of canonical writings regarded as sacred and normative in two communities of faith, Israel and the church. It looks at the Bible as a whole document.

What is Canonical Criticism dealing with?

Canonical criticism seeks to address questions of meaning, both for the community which used it (and later communities which are regarded as being as important as the original community for which the text was produced), and in the context of the wider canon of which it forms a part.

How is this different from the canon itself?

The canon seeks to show us which books are in the Bible. Canonical Criticism seeks to ask historical and literary questions about the text, but also how and why the text has addressed communities of faith. Their canonical status means that the texts have acquired a universal audience - communities of faith in every age and place who read them not simply to ask what their original authors intended but what they are saying to the living community of faith in the present.

What does this teach us about the way we must study the Scriptures?

As part of a collection of Biblical writings, a book of the Bible acquires a canonical context. It is no longer read in isolation but along with the other Biblical witnesses in all their variety. As such, it is no longer a single voice to be heard alone but stands as part of a chorus of voices to be heard along with the rest. Interpreters can no longer inquire solely into the message of a single text but must investigate this message as part of the entire canonical message, the sum total of all the canonical witnesses heard together.

Who is Brevard Childs?

The scholar who brought canonical criticism to the forefront in modern times.

What was his position?

The crucial issue turns on one's initial evaluation of the nature of the Biblical text being studied. By defining one's task as an understanding of the Bible as the sacred Scriptures of the church, one establishes from the outset the context and point-of-standing of the reader within

the received tradition of a community of faith and practice. Likewise, Scripture is also confessed to be the vehicle of God's self-disclosure which continues to confront the church and the world in a living fashion. In sum, its content is not merely a literary deposit moored in the past, but a living and active text addressing each new generation of believer, both Jew and Christian.

How did Canonical Criticism come about?

Most scholars would acknowledge that the study of the Biblical Canon as a "subject" can be traced to one of the liberal pioneers of Biblical criticism, J. S. Semler (1725-1791) (6). Semler's approach sought to "de-canonize" the Biblical documents from their dogmatic and apologetic position. Semler was successful in that he influenced a large group of scholars immediately afterwards to move away from understanding the New Testament Canon as a historical continuity of New Testament tradition (7). In response to the radical and "anti-canon" position of Semler (which in effect questioned the authoritative form of the apostolic writings themselves), there emerged a group of scholars who sought to defend the historical continuity of the New Testament documents.

Why is Canonical Criticism hard to study?

The fundamental reason for this difficulty is that the primary evidence for such studies has to be collected from Early Christian literature, which can be "largely a matter of tradition and somewhat arbitrary." In turn this creates the problem of the authenticity and age of many of these early writings; this is particularly problematic for the first two generations after the time of the Apostles, the most important period. And even when a consensus on these matters is found to be acceptable, the question arises as to the best way of how this determining evidence should be interpreted.

What is the heart of Canonical Criticism?

Generally speaking, canonical criticism focuses on the final form of the Scripture as well as to build its theology on the Scriptures as the whole, such that the Scriptures should be respected in the life and worship of the church.

What is the value of Canonical Criticism for today?

The value of Canonical Criticism is the modern application of the Reformation principle of Biblical interpretation, the analogy of faith. It is, according to Raymond E. Brown, the

reminder that “despite the meaning they have in themselves, the individual books of the Bible are not normative taken alone. These books did not come down to us separately but as part of a collection. And they were not accepted as authoritative by the Jewish and Christian communities in isolation but as normative collections.” For Christians today the “normative collection of Scripture”, is held to be revealed by God and serving as the basis of religious authority.