

## Bibliology- The study of the Bible

### III. Canonization

#### 1. Understanding Canonization?

- The word canon is derived from the Greek word “measuring rod”
- Biblical Canonization describes a list of scriptures that are considered authoritative or “God Breathed.”
  - a. The word “Bible” comes from *Biblion*, A Greek word meaning Papyrus Roll.
  - b. The word “Scripture” simply means something written.
- The books of the Bible that we use today have been *canonized*. This means that after a rigorous review, it has been determined that these books are *Holy Scripture*, or the inspired *Word of God*. This could not have been done without the use of explicit rules and standards.

#### 2. The Rules of Canonization.

1. Was it written by a prophet of God?
  - Deuteronomy 18:18 tells us that only a prophet of God will speak the Word of God. \*test of a prophet Duet. 18:20-21
  - Hebrews 1:1 shows that God has revealed himself through prophets.
  - 2 Peter 1:20-21 reminds us that Scripture is only written by men of God.
2. Does it have internal evidence within the book. Some books assert that they themselves or other books are Scripture.
  - The book of Joshua confirms the first five books of the law are Scripture in Joshua 1:8.
  - The book of Judges, written by the Prophet Samuel, also confirms Moses’s books as Scripture in Judges 3:1-4.
  - Daniel confirmed that Moses’s and Jeremiah’s books were Scripture (Daniel 9:2, 11, 13).
  - Peter confirmed that Paul’s writings were Scripture (2 Peter 3:16).
3. Did it have public recognition as God’s Word by God’s people?
  - In Israel and Judah, the priests publicly read and instructed out of the Bible. It was Moses who began the tradition. He *commanded* the Levites to read the Scriptures to the people. (Deuteronomy 31:9-12)
  - Ezra continued this same tradition by dutifully reading the books of the law. (Nehemiah 8:5)
  - Jesus also participated in this custom. (Luke 4:16)
  - Paul thanked the Thessalonians for receiving the apostles message as the Word of God. (1 Thes. 2:13)
  - Jews were passionate for their traditions. (Acts 13:15, Acts 15:21)
4. Does it have consistency with what had already been accepted as scripture?
  - Scripture will never contradict scripture! The best interpretation of scripture is scripture. (2 Tim. 3:16)
  - Does it tell the truth about God!
5. Is it Dynamic?
  - Does the book have the life-transforming power of God (Heb. 12:4)

**3. Old Testament Canon:** The completion of the canon of the Old Testament took place after the Babylonian captivity. The writings were collected after the people moved back into the land under Ezra and Nehemiah, because the Scriptures were needed. By 425 B.C., all the books of the Old Testament were written and collected.

- The men most responsible for the canonization of what we know as the Old Testament today were Ezra, Nehemiah and the body of priests and elders known as the Great Assembly. This great assembly consisted of 120 men of whom Ezra was the chief. Among its members are said to have been Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They pulled together all of God's revelation to that point into one complete book.
- When the King James Old Testament was established, it was separated into 39 books and reorganized into three basic classifications of law, history and poetry.
  - a. Just after his resurrection Jesus Christ gave us confirmation that the Old Testament was complete in these three divisions. (Luke 24:44).

**4. New Testament Canon \*** We know that Paul worked to protect a set of parchments. "The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments" (2 Timothy 4:13).

1. Three reasons for a need to determine a New Testament canonicity.
  - a. A heretic, Marcion (ca. 140 A.D), developed his own canon and began to propagate it. The church needed to offset his influence by determining what was the real canon of New Testament Scripture.
  - b. Many Eastern Churches were using books in services that were definitely spurious. It called for a decision concerning canon.
  - c. Edict of Diocletian (A.D. 303) declared the destruction of the sacred books of the Christians. Who wanted to die for just a religious book? They needed to know.
2. Athanasius of Alexandria (A.D. 367) gives us the earliest list of New Testament books which is exactly like our present New Testament. This list was in a festal letter to the churches.

**5. The Lost Books of the Bible (Hidden Books):** Simply put, these so called Lost books do not measure up or meet the requirements of Canonicity that the books of the Bible meet to be considered "Inspired by God"

1. The Apocrypha
  - Set of books written between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and first century A.D.
  - consists of several books that reflect some of the Jewish tradition and history that came after the time of Malachi.
  - They abound in historical and geographical inaccuracies and anachronisms.
  - They teach doctrines which are false and foster practices which are at variance with inspired scripture.
  - These books were never accepted by the Jews as Scripture and are not included in the Hebrew Bible.
  - They were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran.
  - Apocryphal books are alluded to in the New Testament and by the early church fathers but none of the allusions are called "Word of God" (Paul quotes pagan poets too, but not as scripture)
  - No Apocryphal book claims to be inspired.

3. The Gnostic Gospels: The Gnostic gospels and the writings related to them are part of the New Testament pseudepigrapha, which means “false writings.” They are so called because the author has used the name of some apostle rather than his own name, for example the Gospel of Peter and the Acts of John. These were not written by the apostles, but by men in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (and later) pretending to use apostolic authority to advance their own teachings. The books teach the doctrines of the two earliest heresies, both of which denied the reality of the Incarnation. They said that Jesus was really only a spirit that looked like a man; so His resurrection was just a return to spiritual form. They claim to provide information about Jesus’ Childhood, but the stories they record are highly unlikely and are not from eyewitnesses. No one ever accepted these as Scripture in any sense except the heretical factions which created them. They are not a legitimate part of the Christian tradition, but a record of the myths and heresies which arose outside of mainstream Christianity.

Are the Gnostic gospels on par with the inspired Scriptures? The following is a story from the Gospel of Thomas. Read it and decide for yourself.

“But the son of Annas the scribe was standing there with Joseph; and he took a branch of a willow and (with it) dispersed the water which Jesus had gathered together. When Jesus saw what he had done he was enraged and said to him: “you insolent, godless dunderhead, what harm did the pools and the water do to you? See, now you shall wither like a tree and shall bear neither leaves nor root nor fruit.” And immediately that lad withered up completely; and Jesus departed and went into Joseph’s house. But the parents of him that was withered took him away, bewailing his youth, and brought him to Joseph and reproached him: “What a child you have, who does such things.” (Gospel of Thomas 3:1-3)