

## Bible Canon

The Christian Bible is not really one book at all, but a collection of books written over thousands of years. Many different authors contributed to the Bible and the process of selecting what books went into it is called the canonization of Scripture. The subject of canonization of scripture is without consideration of the accuracy of the books canonized or whether or not interpolations came into play.

An overview of the history of canonization would be simply: After years of discussion, debate and discernment there were 73 books accepted as the New and Old Testaments. Influenced by the Council of Rome, in 382 A.D., Pope Damasus gave a decree listing the 73 Old and New Testament Books of the Bible. In 393 A.D. the Council of Hippo canonized those same 73 books. In 397, the Council of Carthage approved the same 73 books of scripture. In 405 A.D. Pope St. Innocent I approved the same 73 books and closed the canon of scripture.

Canon is derived from the Greek word for measuring rod. The word 'canon' describes the list of Scriptures that are considered authoritative. What is Scripture? Simply put, Scripture is writing or documents regarded as 'God breathed' or inspired. A proper study of this topic is aided by a definition of terms employed and a brief presentation of facts pertaining to writings, which are commonly regarded as scripture. Below is listed some pertinent terms and definitions:

Bible – from *Biblion*, a Greek word meaning papyrus roll. The plural is *ta bible* from which came the word bible.

Pentateuch – derived from the Greek for 'Five Rolls'. This is the term applied collectively to the first five books of the Old Testament; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The five of them together are known as Torah, which means 'Law' or 'teaching'. They are known as the Five Books of Moses because they deal with the events culminating in the birth, education, and public career, teaching, and abiding influence of Moses. The title indicated that the fivefold work is about Moses, rather than by Moses. Since Deuteronomy 34:5-7 contains an account of the death and burial of Moses, the entire contents could hardly have come from him. The work was probably put in its present form in the sixth century BC, when the nation, deprived of its homeland, assembled the accounts that had come down through generations of the unique way in which God had dealt with his people. It enshrines the thoughts of many men and is not to be attributed to a single individual.

Septuagint – A Greek version of the Hebrew Bible made in Egypt in the third century BC, arising out of the need for a Scripture that could be understood by Greek speaking Jews far from home and no longer familiar with Hebrew. It is said to have been done by seventy scholars. From this circumstance it derives its name, 'Septuaginta' being the Latin word for seventy.

Major and Minor Prophets - These terms refer strictly to size and not significance; the words *major* and *minor*, used in their original Latin sense, simply mean that some books (i.e. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekial) are larger in size, some (the Twelve) are shorter.

Books or writings referenced in the Bible but not included in the Bible:

There are many works quoted by the Bible that don't appear in the present canon. Some of the writings are included in the Apocrypha, and some are preserved in fragments by the Jews in Qumran (the site of the Dead Sea Scrolls). Listed below are sources referenced by Biblical writers which are not preserved in the present canon:

Book of the Covenant. Exodus 24:4-7

The Book of the Wars of Yahweh. Numbers 21:14

The Book of the Just (Jashar). Joshua 10:13

The Annals of King David. 1 Chronicles 27:24

More about David written by Nathan the prophet; a book by Samuel the Seer (not 1-2 Samuel), and a book by Gad the Seer. 1 Chron. 29:29

A biography of Solomon in the history of Nathan the prophet; Visions of Iddo the seer. 1 Chron. 29:29

The Annals of the Kings of Israel. 1 Kings 14:19, 2Chron. 33:18,cf.2 chron. 20:34

The Annals of the Kings of Judah. 1 Kings 14:29, 15:7

The Acts of Solomon. 1 Kings 11:41

Histories written by Shemaiah the prophet, and by Iddo the seer. 2 Chron. 12:15

Iddo's History of Judah. 2 Chron. 13:22

Annals of Jehu son of Hanani. 2 Chron. 20:34

An unknown and untitled work of Isaiah 2 Chron. 26:22

Sayings of the Seers. 2 Chron. 33:19

An unknown lament for Josiah by Jeremiah. 2 Chron. 35:25

#### New Testament quotes from unknown sources

Jude 14-16 1 Enoch 1:9

Jude 9 Unknown, perhaps The Assumption of Moses

Heb. 11:37 The Martyrdom of Isaiah

John 7:38 Unknown

Luke 1:49 Unknown

James 4:5 Unknown

2 Timothy 3:8f Jannes and Jambres

#### Who made the decisions regarding book to be considered Canon?

Ecclesiastical dignitaries simply ratified the convictions arising out of the experience of believers. Regarding the Old Testament, three stages can be noted; the Law was canonized about 400 BC, the Prophets about 200 BC, and the writings about 90 AD

#### New Testament Canon

The process of canonizing the New Testament took about 400 years. Christian churches, from the first, accepted Jewish scriptures as God's Word, and gave them, in their assemblies, the same place that they had enjoyed in the synagogues. As the writings of the Apostles appeared, they were added to these Jewish Scriptures, and were held in the same sacred regard. Each church wanted not only what had been addressed to itself, but also copies of other writings addressed to other churches.

There are hints within the New Testament itself that while the Apostles were yet living, and under their own supervision, collections of their writings began to be made for the churches and placed alongside the Hebrew scriptures as the inspired Word of God. Paul claimed for his teaching the inspiration of God (1 cor. 2:7-13,14:37 and 1 Thes. 2:13). So did John for the book of Revelation, (Rev. 1:2). Paul intended that his Epistles should be read in the churches, (Col. 4:16, 1 Thes. 5:27, II Thes. 2:15). Peter wrote that

“these things” might remain in the churches “after his departure”, (II Peter 1:15. 3:1-2). Peter classes Paul’s Epistles with “other Scriptures”, (II Peter 3:15-16). To what extent the Apostles may have realized that their writings would become a part of God’s written Word for the future ages we do not know. They wrote many letters, having in mind immediate needs.

Some eastern churches published a listing of 22 books for the New Testament. Reacting to this, in 367 AD, St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexander, in his thirty-ninth festal letter issued a list of the present 27 canonical books of the New Testament. The general epistles preceded the Pauline epistles in this listing. The Latin Church, through three provincial councils (the councils of Hippo in 393 AD and of Carthage in 397 AD and again in 419 AD, under the influence of Augustine, accepted or ratified the twenty-seven books now known as the New Testament. Jerome published the Latin vulgate of the Bible including these same 27 books. In 405 AD a decree of Pope Innocent 1 closed this canon. Every subsequent translation seeking approval of Ecclesiastical authority followed precedent and selected the same identical texts for translation. On April 8, 1546, Pope Paul III convened the Council of Trent to consider what, if any, moral and administrative reforms needed to be made within the Roman Catholic Church. The vote of the council was *24 to 15 with 16 abstentions*, and a decree (*De Canonicis Scripturis*) was issued in which, for the first time in the history of the Church, the question of the contents of the Bible was made an absolute article of faith and confirmed by anathema. The translation of this decree follows:

“The holy ecumenical and general Council of Trent, ... following the example of the orthodox Fathers receives and venerates all the books of the Old and New Testament...and also the traditions pertaining to faith and conduct...with an equal sense of devotion and reverence (*pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*)...If, however, anyone does not receive these books in their entirety, with all their parts (*cum omnibus suis partibus*), as they are accustomed to be read in the Catholic Church and are contained in the ancient Latin Vulgate edition as sacred and canonical, and knowingly and deliberately rejects the aforesaid traditions, let him be Anathema.”

So, the Council of Trent declared that the canonical books are divinely inspired. The selection of the books to be included *was essentially the work of St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexander. Ecclesiastical bodies ratified his findings rather than compare them with any findings of their own.* So, in essence, we have one man deciding which books he felt should be canon, and an ecclesiastical body ratifying his selection.

### New Testament translations

Many translations came into being in the years to come. Listed below are some initial ones related to the English language:

Wycliff’s – 1382 AD This was the first English Bible translated from the Latin vulgate. Wycliff was excommunicated, his bones burned and cast into the river.

Tyndale’s Bible – 1525 AD Translated from the original Greek and Hebrew. He was burned at the stake Oct. 6, 1536

Coverdale’s Bible – 1535 AD

Geneva Bible – 1560 AD

King James Version – 1611 AD Ordered by King James for the sake of uniform service in Presbyterian Scotland and Episcopal England by 54 appointed men.

This was a revision of version based on Tyndale’s Bible. It has been estimated that ninety percent of the King James Version was taken from Tyndale.

### Other Translations:

Since 1611 many translations have been made. Continuing Bible translations are inevitable because of word meanings that change. The discovery of older manuscripts, new knowledge about the Biblical languages, and the changing nature of English speech has contributed to this. In 1947 – 1979 the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea in Israel. These writings are estimated to have been hid in 66 AD. These writings contain some books were not considered as the selection was made of canonized books. Also, in 1945 the Nag Hammadi library (popularly known as The Gnostic Gospels) and are supposed to have been authored around 80 AD. Additionally, the Gospel of the Holy Twelve was found hidden in a monastery in Tibet and is estimated to have been written as early as 90 AD. Person who treasured these documents well knew that the penalty for possessing or reading them was death and elected to store them in places far remote from their dwelling. At the time the Roman Catholic Church made determinations regarding the authenticity of scripture, it did so without knowledge of these works. Present day readers are left with the task of determining for themselves as to their validity.

Twentieth-Century translators have access to half a dozen rather complete manuscripts far older than any known to the King James translator:

1. Codex Vaticanus in the Vatican Library
2. Codex Sinaiticus in the British Museum
3. Codex Alexandrinus in the British Museum
4. Codex Ephraemi in the Bibliotheque Nationale
5. Codex Bezae at Cambridge
6. Codex Washingtoniensis in the Freer Gallery of the Smithsonian Institute

### Terms

Codex – a handwritten book with pages (in contrast to the earlier roll or scroll)

Italics – in the Bible *indicate that the word is lacking in the original text and filled in to complete the sense of a sentence as estimated by the translator.*

Chapters and verses – were not in the original Bible text. They were added by Cardinal Caro, 1236 AD and Robert Stevens 1551 AD

### Scriptures inspired by God

According to the King James Version of the Bible, II Timothy 3:16 reads, “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” The word *is* is italicized in this version for it is not found in the original Greek text. Paul in this statement refers to the scripture he had referenced in the preceding two verses. He had written, “But continue thou in the things which thou has learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned; and from a child thou has known the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Obviously Paul was including some New Testament writings along with ancient writings if these writings were to make Timothy *wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ*. Paul and Timothy both know which writings in particular were being referenced. Timothy was more than a casual acquaintance. Timothy and Timotheus are one and the same person when referenced in these texts: Acts 16:6,17:14-15,8:5,19:22,20:4, Romans 16:21, 1 co. 4:17, 16:10, 2 co. 1:19, Philippians 1:1,2:19, Col. 1:1, 1 Tim. 1:1, 2:18, 3:2, 6:20, 2 Tim. 1:1-2, Philemon 1, and Hebrews 13:23.

Paul was writing to a known student who would know exactly what he implied when he referred to 'Holy Scripture'. The word scripture is simply a word meaning writing or document. Tax records, government decrees, heathen writings etc. are all 'scripture' in the pure sense that they are writings and documents. Paul, however, had reference to 'Holy Scripture' as understood by himself and Timothy. *Little did Paul know that in years to come men would yank his sentence out of context and use it to dignify **all** writings grouped together by ecclestical authorities as 'holy scripture'. That, however, is exactly what happened.*

II Timothy 3:14-17, when translated directly from the Greek points out 6 things which Holy Scripture does:

- 1.....which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus
  - 2.....helpful for teaching, learning or instruction
  - 3.....helpful for proof and conviction
  - 4.....helpful for 'a straightening up again', correction, and rectification
  - 5.....helpful for tutoring, discipline, and nurture
- He concludes with the purpose of it all:
- 6.....that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

To Paul, the above benefits were to be gained from studying the 'Holy Scripture' he referenced. The writer of Hebrews gives lengthy discourse in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter concerning Melchizedec. Surely they had source documents which have been lost. We do not have the Book of Jasher, or Jehu. The Bible included only those books regarded as canon.

A study of Jesus clarifies once and for all what God is like. A study of Jesus' life reveals not only his nature but the nature of the Father as well. Jesus was and is a revelation of God. He is source substance and all else is 'derived' substance. Holy men of God may write when they are inspired by God, but it never is as pure as the pure light who is the 'light of the world.' Having an instruction manual to an automobile does not compare with hands on experience with the car that you own. Reading *about* Jesus through the recorded writings of men as they struggle helps, but studying Jesus himself, and reaching the point where you SEE him is second to none for "**If you have seen me, ye have seen the Father.**" Student, this brief paper has been intended as only a primer to aid you in your struggles to know God and benefit from the writings of those preceding you who have written of their personal religious experiences.

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