

***Bibliology:
All About the
Word of God***

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What is the Canon?

Canon means *rule* or *norm*, which books are the normative books for Christian faith and practice.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God (God-breathed, *theopneustos*) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:20-21

²⁰But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2 Peter 3:16

¹⁶as also in all his (“our beloved brother Paul”) letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Eph. 2:20

²⁰having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone

What Provoked the Development of a Canon?

The *ecclesiastical* stimulus for a canonical list

- Which books should be read in the churches according to the practice indicated and the New Testament church by the apostles (1 Thess. 5:27)
- Which books should be translated into the foreign languages of the converted peoples

The *theological* stimulus for a canonical list

- Which books were to be used to teach doctrine with divine authority
- Multitude of apocryphal and heretical books claiming divine authority

The *political* stimulus for a canonical list

- Diocletian persecutions (ca. 302-305) “the destruction by fire of the Scriptures”
 - Caused a serious look at which canonical books should be preserved
- Constantine becomes emperor (306-337) and becomes a Christian
 - Orders Eusebius to prepare and distribute 50 copies of the Bibles

On Canonization

- “The last half of the first century saw the process of selecting, by
 - sorting (Lk. 1:1-4; I Thess. 2:13),
 - reading (I Thess. 5:27),
 - circulating (Col. 4:16),
 - collecting (2 Pet. 3:15-16), and
 - quoting (I Tim. 5:18) apostolic literature.
- All 27 books of the NT were written and copied and began to be distributed among the churches before the close of the first century.”
 - *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible*, Geisler & Nix, 2012, p.215.

On Canonization

➤ Sorting / Confirming authentic books

- **2 Thess. 2:1-2** ²that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or **a letter as if from us**, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.
- **3:17** ¹⁷I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.
- Sent by a personal envoy from the apostle
- **Why the need for authentication?**
 - Elymas the magician opposed Paul & company Acts 13:8
 - False prophets 2 Cor. 1: 4-15
 - Angel or man teaching other than what they already received Gal. 1:6-9
 - Hymenaeus & Alexander were blaspheming 1 Tim. 1:20
 - Hymenaeus & Philetus taught the resurrection had already come 2 Tim. 2:17
 - Jannes & Jambres opposed Moses 2 Tim. 3:8; Ex. 7:11
 - Alexander the coppersmith did much harm 2 Tim. 4:14

On Canonization

► Sorting / Confirming authentic books

Luke 1:2

²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us,

Acts 1:21-22

²¹“It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us--²²beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that he was taken up from us--one of these should become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

1 John 1:3 ³what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you...

Acts 2:42

⁴²And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

This primary source of apostolic authority was the canon by which the first church selected the writings through which they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship. Thus, the living “canon” of eyewitnesses became the criterion by which the earliest canonical writings were recognized, and God himself bore witness to the apostles (Heb. 2:3-4). This includes both apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20).

From God to Us, Geisler, 134

On Canonization

- ▶ Reading: I Thess. 5:27 “I adjure you by the Lord to *have this letter read* to all the brethren.”
 - ▶ Moses and Joshua: Ex. 24:7; Josh. 8:34-35
 - ▶ Josiah had the Bible read to the people: 2 Kings 23:2
 - ▶ Ezra and the Levites: Neh. 8:8
 - ▶ Paul commanded the Thessalonians :1 Thess. 5:27
 - ▶ Timothy was told to present Paul's message to the churches: 1 Tim. 4:13; 4:11
 - ▶ Paul to the Colossians: Col.4:16
 - ▶ John about the Book of Revelation: Rev. 1:3

On Canonization

➤ Circulating:

- Col. 4:16 “And when *this letter is read among you*, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming from* Laodicea.” (also Rev. 1:11; James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1)

➤ Collecting:

- 2 *Peter*. 3:15-16 “and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also *our beloved brother Paul*, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also *in all his letters*, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also *the rest of the Scriptures*, to their own destruction.”

➤ Quoting:

- 1 Tim. 5:18 “For the *Scripture* says, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” [Deut. 25:4; Lev. 19:13]
- Jude quotes Peter (Jude 17; cf. 2 Pet. 3:2)
- Paul cites Luke’s gospel as Scripture (1 Tim. 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7)

Thus, the process of canonization was from the very beginning.

Criteria for Canonization

- 1. **Was it written by a prophet of God?** Deut. 18:18 tells us that only a prophet of God will speak the Word of God. This is the way God reveals Himself (Heb. 1:1). 2 Peter 1:20-21 assures us that Scripture is only written by men of God.
- 2. **Was he confirmed by an act of God?** Heb. 2:3-4 gives us the idea that we should expect some miraculous confirmation of those who speak for God.
- 3. **Does it tell the truth about God?** Agreement with all earlier revelation is essential (Gal. 1:8). This dictum also rules out false prophecies made in the name of God (Deut. 18:22).
- 4. **Does it have the power of God?** Any writing that does not exhibit the transforming power of God in the lives of its readers is not from God (Heb. 4:12).

Criteria for Canonization

► 5. Was it accepted by the people of God?

Paul thanked the Thessalonians for receiving the apostles' message as the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). It is the norm that God's people, that is, the majority of them and not a simple faction, will initially receive God's Word as such.

Moses' scrolls were placed immediately into the ark of the covenant (Deut. 31:24-26) and Joshua's writings were added in the same fashion (Josh. 24:26), as were Samuel's (1 Sam. 10:25).

Jeremiah is known as the "plagiarizing prophet" because he quoted so many of the other prophets who had written only a few years before him, which shows that their writings had been readily accepted.

Daniel is seen studying the Book of Jeremiah within 50 years after it was written (Dan. 9:2)....

Criteria for Canonization

► 5. Was it accepted by the people of God?

...The New Testament also shows similar acceptance in that Peter calls Paul's writings Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16) and Paul quotes Luke alongside a passage from the Law (1 Tim. 5:18).

We also are aware that Paul's letters were circulated among the churches (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). This may be the beginning of the collection of books for the New Testament canon. Though some books were later disputed, their original acceptance speaks strongly in favor of their inclusion.

N. Geisler, *When Skeptics Ask*, p. 154.

► “You see, the canon is a list of authoritative books more than it is an authoritative list of books.”

-Bruce M. Metzger, Ph.D., quoted in *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel, 2016, p. 73.



How do we know the canon is closed?

How do we know we have all the books God intended us to have?

The answer to those questions is found in the following principles:

- (1) the authority of Christ,
- (2) the providence of God,
- (3) the testimony of history, and
- (4) the witness of the Spirit.

How do we know the canon is closed? (cont.)

(1) the authority of Christ

Jesus promised that the apostles would be led by the Holy Spirit “into all the truth” (John 16:13).

For every book of the NT was written either by an apostle or by a person under apostolic authority.

The early church was based on “the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20) and continued in the “apostles teaching” (Acts 2:42).

Even the apostle Paul had his message confirmed by the apostles lest he had “run in vain” (Gal. 2:2). So, every NT author was either an apostle or prophet whose revelation was under the watchful eye of an apostle and confirmed by an apostle.

How do we know the canon is closed? (cont.)

(2) the providence of God,

It is a principle and practice of divine providence that God completes what He begins (cf. Rom. 8:29-30; Phil. 1:6). In view of God's providence, then, we must conclude that He would not inspire any books that He did not preserve.

But the only record we have of the inspired writings of the apostles and prophets after Jesus is the NT. Therefore, we may conclude, based on the providence of God, that we have the completion of the revelation of God to His church in the New Testament.

How do we know the canon is closed? (cont.)

(3) the testimony of history

The earliest church fathers ***recognized*** the books in the NT, and subsequently the Christian church has acknowledged them to be the only inspired books we have from the hands of the apostles and their authorized agents.

We can conclude that since Jesus promised “all truth” for faith and practice to the apostles, and since the NT is the only record of apostolic truth, then the NT canon must be complete.

How do we know the canon is closed? (cont.)

(4) the witness of the Spirit

Of course, from a strictly evidential perspective, we cannot be absolutely certain of what books are in the canon and whether the canon is closed.

Historical evidence as such provides only probability, not certainty. Hence, many scholars have stressed the witness of the Holy Spirit as necessary for certitude on the matter of canonicity. Romans 8:16

So, there is such a thing as ***subjective certitude*** about the canon. However, it is important to note that this subjective testimony of the Spirit is ***in accord with the objective evidence***, not in isolation from it.

How do we know the canon is closed? (cont.)

(4) the witness of the Spirit

[For Muslims, Mormons, and others have a subjective certitude about opposing holy books that are not the Word of God.

What they lack, and ***the Bible does not***, is objective evidence that these books are the word of God.]

Second, it seems best to stress the communal nature of this witness of the Spirit that the Bible is the Word of God.

That is, God's witness is to the Church--God's people in general--and it is not simply up to each individual to determine whether the Bible is the Word of God.

From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible by Norman Geisler & William Nix, 2012, p158-161.

Dates of Authorship of the New Testament Books

- [James](#): AD 44-49
- [Galatians](#): AD 49-50
- [Mark](#): AD 50-60
- [Matthew](#): AD 50-60
- [1 Thessalonians](#): AD 51
- [2 Thessalonians](#): AD 51-52
- [1 Corinthians](#): AD 55
- [2 Corinthians](#): AD 55-56
- [Romans](#): AD 56
- [Luke](#): AD 60-61
- [Ephesians](#): AD 60-62
- [Philippians](#): AD 60-62
- [Philemon](#): AD 60-62
- [Colossians](#): AD 60-62
- [Acts](#): AD 62
- [1 Timothy](#): AD 62-64
- [Titus](#): AD 62-64
- [1 Peter](#): AD 64-65
- [2 Timothy](#): AD 66-67
- [2 Peter](#): AD 67-68
- [Hebrews](#): AD 67-69
- [Jude](#): AD 68-70
- [John](#): AD 80-90
- [1 John](#): AD 90-95
- [2 John](#): AD 90-95
- [3 John](#): AD 90-95
- [Revelation](#): AD 94-96

What about the apocrypha?

The Apocrypha is a set of books written between the 3rd century B. C. and the 1st century A.D. It consists of 14 books which are found in the several ancient copies of the LXX and reflect some of the Jewish tradition and history that came after the time of Malachi.

Most of the Apocrypha was accepted as Scripture by Augustine and the Syrian church in the 4th century and was later canonized by the Catholic Church. The apocryphal books are alluded to in the NT and by the early church fathers and have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran.

However, these books were never accepted by the Jews as scriptures and are not included in the Hebrew Bible. Though the NT may allude to them (Heb. 11: 35), none of the allusions are clearly called the Word of God (Paul quotes pagan poets also, but not as Scripture).

The Apocrypha was only accepted as officially canonical by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1546, only after the Protestants had definitely denied its canonicity.

When Skeptics Ask, p.155

What of the Gnostic Gospels?

The gnostic gospels and the writings related to them are part of the NT 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 gospel of Thomas. They were not written by the apostles, but by men in the 2nd 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 writings 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 the mainstream of Christianity

What about the Gnostic Gospels?

➤ *Gospel of Thomas*

- 114. Simon Peter said to them, "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life." Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven."

- Scholars Version translation of the Gospel of Thomas taken from *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version.* Copyright 1992, 1994 by Polebridge Press.

A Timeline of Canonical Recognition

A.D. 50 – 100: the process of selecting, sorting, reading, circulating, collecting, and quoting apostolic literature. All 27 books of the NT were written and copied and began to be distributed among the churches before the close of the first century.

A.D. 100 – 150: the apostolic writings became more generally known and more widely circulated. Almost every NT book was explicitly cited as Scripture.

Writings of the Church fathers were also widely read and circulated amongst the churches, and they quoted the NT as authoritative against heretical groups, dialogues with unbelievers, and exhortations against vice.

A Timeline of Canonical Recognition

A.D. 150 – 200: the NT books, as well as the OT books, were widely recognized as Scripture. A period of missionary activity provoking the translation of the Scriptures into other languages as the church spread beyond the Roman Empire. Commentaries began to appear.

A.D. 200 – 300: the NT books were collected into a single catalog of “recognized books” and separated from other types of Christian literature. There was a great surge of intellectual activity during this century producing a body of apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings. The rise of these diverse kinds of literature gave impetus to the sorting and sifting tests for all religious literature in the church. These tests and others led ultimately to the recognition of the NT canon.

A Timeline of Canonical Recognition

A.D. 300 dawning: NT canon was fully settled and acknowledged.

A.D. 325: The Council of Nicea

From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible, Geisler & Nix, 2012, p.215-216.

Human Aspects of Scripture

- 1. It is written in different human languages (e.g., Hebrew and Greek) that exhibit dated linguistic forms.
- 2. It was written by ~40 different human authors.
- 3. It reflects grammatical irregularities.
- 4. It displays different human literary styles.
- 5. It shows human interests (2 Tim. 4:13)
- 6. It utilizes human memory (1 Cor. 1:15-16; Luke 1:1-4)
- 7. It incorporates distinct human cultures (1 Thess. 5:26)
- 8. It speaks from a human observer's perspective (Josh. 10:12-13)
- 9. It reflects common human differences of perspective (differences in Gospel accounts).
- 10. It speaks of God from a human perspective (anthropomorphisms).