

## **Session 5: How do we know which books should be viewed as Scripture?**

### **Part 1: What is canonicity?**

- The canon of Scripture is the list of all the books that should be viewed as scripture, because they meet certain tests that should cause us to consider them to be fully authoritative. They are our rule of life.
  - **List of books:**
  - **Belong in the Bible:**
  - **Meet a certain test:**
  - **Should be considered fully authoritative:**

### **Part 2: Why is canonicity an important topic?**

- **Deuteronomy 12:32**
- **Deuteronomy 4:2**
- **Matthew 4:4**
- **Jeremiah 23:25-32**
- **Revelation 22:18-19**

### **Part 3: How do we approach the canonicity question?**

- **OT Key: Who is qualified to be a prophet?**
  - **Holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost: 2 Peter 1:20-21**
    - **Their message bore the full authority of God.**
    - **They predicted future events with 100% accuracy in order to validate the origin of their message.**
  - **Their lives were on the line: Deuteronomy 18:20-22**
    - **The message of a prophet or apostle could never contradict previous revelations.**
    - **The Word of the God and the Spirit of God cannot contradict one another.**
  - **Their claims were to be scrutinized:**
    - **2 Peter 2:2-6**
    - **Acts 20:27-32**
- **NT Key: Who is qualified to be an apostle?**
  - **Key Passage: Acts 1:1-4** "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that

they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me..."

- **They were eyewitnesses of Christ's earthly ministry**  
**1 Corinthians 15:7** "After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles..."
- **They received direct revelation from God** (verbal plenary inspiration).
- **They received a personal objective call to this office by Christ.**
- **They were eyewitnesses of the miraculous signs that demonstrated His person and the capstone of His ministry, the resurrection.**
- **They received instruction after the resurrection concerning the Kingdom.**
- **They were verified by the signs of an apostle**  
**2 Corinthians 12:12** "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds..."
- **Their apostolic ministry was predicted by Christ before He went to the cross:**
  - **John 14:26** "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you..."
  - **John 16:23** "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you..."

#### **Part 4: Why is an understanding of these two offices so important?**

- **Ephesians 2:19-20** "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone..."
- **Hebrews 1:1-2** "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds..."
- **2 Peter 1:16-21** " For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty...no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came

not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost..."

- **It shows that only certain kinds of men were qualified to write scripture. (Prophets and apostles)**
- **It shows us the limitation of this office to those who lived during the time of Christ.**
- **If this is the case, then no person living past the early parts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century could have been qualified to write scripture, essentially closing the canon in the same way the Old Testament canon was closed.**

#### **Part 5: What were the basic tests of canonicity?**

- **The test of authority:** Who wrote the book?
- **The test of internal evidence:** Does it claim to be scripture?
- **The test of God's people:** How did apostolic church view and use the book?

#### **Part 6: Some pertinent historical details:**

- **Old Testament books regularly refer to other Old Testament books as scripture:**
- **The Old Testament as a whole is referred to as scripture by Christ: Luke 24:27** "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself..."
- **The Old Testament is quoted as scripture regularly by Christ and the apostles:**
- **Christ and the Jews received the same Old Testament books as scripture:**
- **Jewish historians from the time of Christ recognized the canon of the Old Testament and spoke freely about it:**
- **Jewish tradition recognized no persons qualified to pen scriptures during the silent years between the Old and New Testament:**
- **The Dead Sea Scrolls point to the uniqueness of the Old Testament books that we view as scripture:**
- **During the Apostolic Period:** The writers of scripture, witnessed that their own writings were the word of God.
- **A.D. 70–170:** All the New Testament books were cited in other writings of the period from A.D. 70 to 170. Between them the church Fathers recognized as canonical all twenty-seven books, although not every Father included all twenty-seven.

- **The Council of Carthage:** (397). It is generally agreed that this church council fixed the limits of the New Testament canon as including the twenty-seven books as we have them today.
- **Luther on James:** Sometimes it is claimed that Martin Luther rejected the book of James as being non-canonical. That is not so.

### **Part 7: A Few Final Questions:**

- **What about other books?**
  - **Apocrypha:** Accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, but rejected by the Jews, never treated as scripture by Christ and the apostles, and rejected by the Reformers.
  - **Pseudepigrapha:** Never accepted as scripture by any mainstream group within the Christian church.
- **Why should we reject the apocryphal books as scripture?**
  - They do not claim for themselves the same kind of authority as the Old Testament writings.
  - They were not regarded as God's words by the Jewish people from whom they originated.
  - They were not considered to be Scripture by Jesus or the New Testament authors.
  - They contain teachings inconsistent with the rest of the Bible.
  - We must conclude that they are merely human words, not God-breathed words like the words of Scripture.
  - They do have value for historical and linguistic research, and they contain a number of helpful stories about the courage and faith of many Jews during the period after the Old Testament ends, but they have never been part of the Old Testament canon, and they should not be thought of as part of the Bible. Therefore, they have no binding authority for the thought or life of Christians today.
- **Concluding Thoughts:**
  - "We can rest our confidence...in the faithfulness of God...who would not lead all his people for nearly two thousand years to trust as his Word something that is not...God's faithfulness to his people convinces us that there is nothing missing from Scripture that God thinks we need to know for obeying him and trusting him fully. The canon of Scripture today is exactly what God wanted it to be, and it will stay that way until Christ returns..." Grudem