

Lesson 4: The Canonicity and Structure of the Old Testament

1. What is Canonicity?

- **Canon** comes from the Greek *kanon*, meaning “ruler” or “measuring rod.”
- **Canonization** = Recognition of writings as inspired by God.

2. Myths vs. History

Did Constantine and the council of Nicaea in 325 AD decide the books we have in the Bible?

The False Story: At the Council of Nicaea, Emperor Constantine and the bishops decided which books would be included in the Bible.

The Truth About Nicaea

The **Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325)** was convened by Emperor Constantine mainly to settle a theological dispute about the nature of Christ—specifically the **Arian controversy** (whether Jesus was fully divine or a created being).

What *The Da Vinci Code* Claims

Myth: Constantine “created” Christianity as we know it

- The book suggests that before Constantine, Christians saw Jesus as a mortal prophet, not divine.
- Supposedly, Constantine pushed for Jesus’ divinity to solidify his own political power.

Myth: The Council of Nicaea chose the New Testament books

- Brown implies that at Nicaea (A.D. 325), Constantine and the bishops voted on which gospels and writings to include in the Bible.
- According to the story, dozens of alternative gospels existed (like the “Gospel of Mary Magdalene”) and were suppressed.

Myth: Constantine suppressed the “true” gospels

- The narrative claims Constantine ordered the destruction of other gospels that presented Jesus as a man rather than divine.

Myth: A “conspiracy” involving Mary Magdalene

Why These Claims Are False

- **Jesus’ divinity was believed long before Constantine**
- New Testament writings (Philippians 2:6–11; John 1:1–14; Colossians 1:15–20) already declare Christ’s deity in the first century.
- Early church fathers (Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus) affirmed this long before Constantine was even born.
- **Nicaea was about theology, not the canon**
- It produced the **Nicene Creed**, not a biblical canon list.

The canon was already decided

- The biblical writings were seen as inspired and from God immediately after writing.

Alternative gospels are much later and unreliable

3. Biblical Recognition of Scripture

Immediate recognition of Old Testament writings

Joshua Acknowledges Moses' Writings: Joshua 1:7–8

Daniel Recognizes Jeremiah's Writings: Daniel 9:2

Ezra and Nehemiah Appeal to the Law of Moses: Ezra 7:6 , Nehemiah 8:1

Zechariah Refers to the Former Prophets: Zechariah 1:4–6

Malachi Appeals to Moses and the Prophets: Malachi 4:4–5

4. Standards for Canonicity

Authority: Example: Isaiah 1:24 *"Therefore the LORD says, the Lord, the God of hosts,..."*

Authorship: Example: 2 Corinthians 12:12 *"Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds."*

Accuracy: Did it convey factual and doctrinal truthfulness?

Spiritual Authenticity: Did it teach enduring spiritual lessons?

Acceptance: Was it received by God's people as authoritative?

5. Jewish and Christian Recognition

Septuagint (LXX) The Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures recognized all canonical books.

New Testament Confirmation: 32 of the 39 Old Testament books are quoted in the New Testament.

Josephus (AD 100) acknowledged the Hebrew canon.

Church fathers (AD 200–300) listed and accepted the 39 books of the Old Testament.

6. Structure of the Old Testament

Threefold Division of the Hebrew Bible: Law, Prophets, and Writings (Luke 24:44).

The Law (Torah, 5 books) – Genesis to Deuteronomy

The Prophets (Nevi'im, 8 books) – Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings. Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, twelve minor prophets as one book

The Writings (Kethuvim, 11 books) – Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles

Fourfold Division of the English Bible

Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

Historical Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

Poetical Books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon

Prophetic Books: (Major Prophets) Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel **(12 Minor Prophets)** Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

7. Dates and Authors of the Old Testament

Genesis (1445-1405) Moses
Exodus (1445-1405) Moses
Leviticus (1445-1405) Moses
Numbers (1445-1405) Moses
Deuteronomy (1405) Moses
Joshua (1405-1385) Joshua
Judges (1380-1045) Samuel
Ruth (1000) Samuel
1 & 2 Samuel (1105-975) Samuel/Nathan/Gad
1 & 2 Kings (975-560) Maybe Jeremiah
1 & 2 Chronicles (1010-538) Ezra
Ezra (538-457) Ezra
Nehemiah (444-425) Ezra
Esther (483-473) Mordecai
Job (lived c. 2,000) Author unknown
Psalms (1450-444) Mostly David
Proverbs (950) Solomon 1-29, Agur 30, Lemuel 31
Ecclesiastes (935) Solomon late in his life.
Song of Solomon (960) Solomon early in his life.
Isaiah (740-680)
Jeremiah (627-586)
Lamentations of Jeremiah (586-580)
Ezekiel (592-570)
Daniel (605-536)
Hosea (755-710)
Joel (835)
Amos (760-753)
Obadiah (840)
Jonah (760)
Micah (735-710)
Nahum (661-612)
Habakkuk (607)
Zephaniah (630)
Haggai (520)
Zechariah (520-518)
Malachi (432-425)

Flow of Biblical History

Genesis (1445-1405) - **Job** (c. 2,000)
Exodus (1445-1405) - **Leviticus** (1445-1405)
Numbers (1445-1405)
Deuteronomy (1405)
Joshua (1405-1385)
Judges (1380-1045) - **Ruth** (1000)
1 & 2 Samuel (1105-975) - **Psalms**
Song of Solomon
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
1 & 2 Kings (975-560) Continues 2 Samuel
1 & 2 Chronicles (1010-538) Continues with Ezra
Ezra (538-457) **Esther** (483-473)
Nehemiah (444-425)

The Prophets

Obadiah (840) Edom
Joel (835) Judah
Amos (760-753) Israel
Jonah (760) Nineveh
Hosea (755-710) Israel
Isaiah (740-680) Judah
Micah (735-710) Judah
Nahum (661-612) Nineveh
Zephaniah (630) Judah
Jeremiah (627-586) Judah
Habakkuk (607) Judah
Daniel (605-536) Exiled in Babylon
Ezekiel (592-570) Exiled in Babylon
Lamentations of Jeremiah (586-580) Judah
Haggai (520) Post-exilic
Zechariah (520-518) Post-exilic
Malachi (432-425) Post-exilic

8. Distinguishing Canon from Apocrypha & Pseudepigrapha

Old Testament Apocrypha

- “Apocrypha” = hidden or concealed books.
- Not part of the Hebrew canon.
- Hidden or concealed books. Books not on the front shelf, but not thrown away as frauds.
- The writer of first Maccabees does not consider to be a prophet from God... he does claim that the Jews were without a prophet and looking for a prophet
- Jerome (translator of the Latin Vulgate, c. 400 AD) was cautious about them, distinguishing them from canonical Scripture, though he still translated them.

- In response, the Council of Trent (1546), during the Counter-Reformation, officially declared the apocryphal books as part of the inspired canon for the Roman Catholic Church.
- The Roman Catholic Church wanted to affirm the authority of their church tradition against the reformers affirmation of *sola scriptura*.
- These books supported certain Catholic doctrines that Protestants rejected (e.g., prayers for the dead in 2 Maccabees 12:45–46, almsgiving and salvation in Tobit 12:9).
- Early protestant Bibles contained the Apocrypha books but kept them separate.

Old Testament Apocrypha

Tobit (c. 200—150 BC) (included in Catholic Bible)

Judith (c. 150 BC) (included in Catholic Bible)

The Additions to the Book of Esther (140-130 BC) (included in Catholic Bible)

The Wisdom of Solomon (c. 30 BC) (included in Catholic Bible)

Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach (c. 180 BC) (included in Catholic Bible)

Baruch (c. 150-50 BC) (included in Catholic Bible)

Additions to Daniel - The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Children (2nd—1st century BC) (included in Catholic Bible at the end of Daniel 3)

Additions to Daniel - Susanna (Daniel 13, 2nd—1st century BC) (included in Catholic Bible)

Additions to Daniel - Bel and the Dragon (Daniel 14, c. 100 BC) (included in Catholic Bible)

The First Book of the Maccabees (c. 110 BC) (included in Catholic Bible)

The Second Book of the Maccabees (c. 110-70 BC) (included in Catholic Bible)

The First Book of Esdras (150—100 BC) (Not in Catholic Bible)

The Second Book of Esdras (c. AD 100) (Not in Catholic Bible)

The Letter of Jeremiah (c. 300-100 BC) (Not in Catholic Bible)

The Prayer of Manasseh (2nd or 1st century BC) (Not in Catholic Bible)

Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

- “Pseudo” = false; “Grapha” = writings.
- These works falsely claimed prophetic authority or divine revelation.
- Pseudepigraphal works were not recognized as inspired and often contained speculative or fantastical elements.
- Legendary = Expanded stories of biblical heroes (imaginative history).
- Apocalyptic = Visions of the future, final judgment, and God’s kingdom.
- Didactic = Moral, wisdom, and theological instruction for daily life.

The Book of Jubilee (Legendary)

The Letter of Aristeas (Legendary)

The Book of Adam and Eve (Legendary)

The Martyrdom of Isaiah (Legendary)

1 Enoch (Apocalyptic)

The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Apocalyptic)

The Sibylline Oracle (Apocalyptic)

The Assumption of Moses (Apocalyptic)

2 Enoch (Apocalyptic)

2 Baruch (Apocalyptic)

3 Baruch (Apocalyptic)

3 Maccabees (Didactical)

4 Maccabees (Didactical)

Pirke Aboth (Didactical)

The Story of Ahikar (Didactical)

The Psalms of Solomon (Poetical)

Psalms 151 (Poetical)

The Fragment of a Zadokite Work (Historical)

1. Be Grateful for God’s Preservation of Scripture

2. Be Discerning Toward Other Religious Writings

3. See the Unity of God’s Story

4. Value the Whole Counsel of God