



RELEVANT

How To Study the Bible



**Lesson Five:
What is Biblical Canonization?**

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What is a Biblical Canon?

- ▶ An officially recognized set of sacred books a particular Jewish or Christian religious community regards as part of the Bible
- ▶ The root word "canon" occurs in 1 Kings 14:15 and Job 40:21.
 - ▶ Originally qāneh meant a "reed" or "stalk" of papyrus, oil-grass, or sweet cane.
 - ▶ Since reeds were used as measuring rods or ruling sticks for making straight lines, "canon" came to mean "measure" or "measuring reed"
 - ▶ Measuring rod, measuring stick, or test for straightness; measurement of length
- ▶ A standard frequently applied in the ancient church to the collection of texts that informed the beliefs and practices of the Christians who read them.

Biblical Definition of Canonization

- ▶ Biblical Canonization is the process by which the books of the Bible were discovered as authoritative.
- ▶ The people of God examined books to determine what books were "inspired" by God.
- ▶ Men did not canonize Scripture; men simply recognized the authority of the books that God inspired.
 - ▶ "A book is not inspired because man made it canonical, it is canonical because God inspired it." —Unknown
- ▶ Understand that the **books** were inspired, not the **men**.
 - ▶ **2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)** - *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.*
 - ▶ Inspired means God-breathed.

By Approximately AD 325, the New Testament Canon Was in Place.

- ▶ The first thing to understand was there were several bodies, councils, and individuals that created lists of the books that they thought should be authoritative.
- ▶ One of the first records was the Muratorian Canon, dated AD 170. It included all four Gospels, Acts, thirteen of Paul's letters, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.
- ▶ The second list was developed by the Roman Emperor Constantine's Nicean Council in AD 325.
 - ▶ The Council's purpose established the equality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity and asserted that only the Son became incarnate as Jesus Christ.
 - ▶ This Council decided 23 potential letters or Books were not authorized or within the boundaries of the biblical canon
- ▶ In AD 367 Athanasius wrote the earliest completed New Testament list in his 39th Festal Letter 2, 7-10.
 - ▶ Athanasius wrote, *"I also resolved to set forth in order the writings that are in the list and handed down and believed to be divine.... Those of the New Testament ... are ... four gospels [Matthew, Mark, Luke, John]. Then after these are Acts of the Apostles and the seven letters of the Apostles called the 'Catholic' letters (James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude]. In addition, there are fourteen letters of Paul the apostle [Romans, 1, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1, 2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, 1, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon]. Last, from John again comes the Revelation. These are springs of salvation let no one add to them or take away aught of them?"*
- ▶ By AD 397 the Council of Carthage in North Africa confirmed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament canon.
- ▶ This is the New Testament Canon that we read today.

What Three Criteria Were Used to Determine the Canon of Scripture for the Old Testament?

1. Authorship - Propheticity or prophetic authorship was the basis upon which the OT books were deemed canonical.

- ▶ There were two tests for discerning true from false prophets.
- ▶ Jewish prophets needed to have (1) correct doctrine and (2) accurate short-term predictions.
 - ▶ Moses, the first prophet, outlined these two crucial tests:
 - ▶ Deuteronomy 13:1-5 If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, 2 and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," 3 you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. 5 That prophet or dreamer must be put to death for inciting rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. That prophet or dreamer tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.
 - ▶ Deuteronomy 18:21-22 You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" 22 If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.

2. Audience - The books had to be the books that the Israelites read, studied, copied, and obeyed

3. Teaching - The teaching, themes, and message of each text had to be consistent with the covenant recorded in the other books that were recognized as "Word of the Lord."

What Three Elements for the New Testament Were Used to Determine That the Books in the Canon Deserved to Be There?

1. Church leaders often appealed to the agreement of the book with what they called "**the rule of faith.**" This meant that the teaching of the book followed the beliefs the church regarded as acceptable and correct.
2. The book had to demonstrate **apostolicity**. This criterion required authorship by an apostle or by the associate of an apostle (as in the instance of Mark and Luke).
3. The church applied the test of **universality**. This required that the book be accepted by a broad geographical segment of the church.

Moment of Reflection: How did this lesson impact you today?