

“The Canon of Scripture”
The Revelation of God - Week 5 - Summer 2019

- What Books Make Up the New Testament?

- How do we know all the books that are supposed to be there are there?
- Did any get left out?
- How did the early church make decisions like that?
- Also, what about the Apocrypha - a collection of books that are part of the Roman Catholic scriptures?
- And what about the Old Testament books for that matter?
- This process of determining what books are Scripture and which books are not is often described as canonization:
 - ▶ This is from the Gk. word *kanon* which means “measuring stick”...
 - ▶ From there comes our English word “canon”, used to refer to the official list of authoritative scripture books.

- Determining the Old Testament Books

- First, remember our important discussion of written forms of Divine Revelation:
 - ▶ From the earliest days of redemptive history, the Lord commanded that His spoken words also be preserved in written form.
 - ▶ We saw that this included the 10 commandments, the Book of the Law (Exodus, Leviticus), Moses’ sermons (Deuteronomy), the Prophets, etc.
 - ▶ And over Israel’s history, the list of books that were regarded as canon grew over time.
 - ▶ By Jesus’ day, it included the exact 39 books we have in our Old Testaments today.
- Yet how do we know those were the right books?
 - ▶ The simplest answer is that Jesus Himself regarded them as such.

- ▶ He would appeal generally to “the Scriptures” as having divine authority.
- ▶ He referred to them collectively as a divine witness to His person and work:

Luke 24:44 - Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

- ▶ Jesus regularly quoted specific passages from many Old Testament books throughout His ministry, treating them as authoritative.
- ▶ Given our Lord’s own witness to His own Word, we can be confident that our Old Testaments are complete.

- **The Apocrypha**

- The Apocrypha is the formal title given to a list of books that appear in Roman Catholic Bibles but were rejected following the Protestant Reformation.
- The books of the Apocrypha are Jewish writings that originated during the inter-testamental period (between Malachi and Matthew).
- They slowly were granted scriptural authority by the medieval Roman Catholic church.
- Several key realities point *away* from their scriptural authority:
 - ▶ They were not received as Scripture by the Jews of Jesus’ day.
 - ▶ The Jewish historian Josephus, a contemporary of the Apostles, said the following:

“We [the Jews] are not like the Greeks, having a lot of books that do not agree and are contradicting. We have only twenty-two books, including all the past writings, as recognized correctly to be divine. After such a long time, no one has ever dared to add to, delete from, or alter them.”

 - ❖ The 22 books referred to are the same 39 books as our Old Testaments.
 - ❖ The Jews grouped portions of books together (like the minor prophets) because they thought the total had to equal the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

- Neither Jesus nor other New Testament authors refer to or quote books from the Apocrypha.
- We have every reason to not receive the Apocrypha as Scripture (while still valuing their historical contributions).

- **The books of the New Testament**

- Remember, it is in God's nature to preserve His redemptive actions in scriptural writings for future generations of His people.
 - ▶ The events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection are the most significant redemptive acts in human history.
 - ▶ We should expect that the Lord would give us Scripture to authoritatively attest to those events.

- Who would provide that authoritative and divine witness? The Apostles, through the Holy Spirit:

***John 14:26** - But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you [the Apostles] all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.*

***Acts 1:8** - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*

- ▶ It wasn't just the Apostles' verbal proclamations that were received as divinely inspired, but their *written* words as well.

***2 Peter 3:15–16** - ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶ 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.*

- ▶ Clearly then, we are on solid ground in assuming that an authoritative New Testament exists, now alongside an authoritative Old Testament!
- But which books make up that authoritative New Testament?
 - ▶ History tells us that the earliest Christians used the following three criteria in determining which books were New Testament Scripture:

- ❖ 1) It had to be directly connected to an Apostle (by authorship or association).
 - ❖ 2) It could not contradict the teaching of the Old Testament or Apostles.
 - ❖ 3) It had to be accepted by Christians throughout the known world (not just one group of Christians somewhere).
- ▶ By the end of the 1st century AD, most of what we know of as the New Testament was regarded as canon by the church around the world:
 - ❖ All 4 Gospels, Acts, the 13 letters of Paul, 1 Peter, 1 John
 - ❖ Some regions (temporarily) questioned the other books due to a doubt of the firm connection to an Apostle.
 - ▶ In 367, the Bishop Athanasius sent a letter to other church leaders listing all of the books of today's New Testament as Scripture (and today's books alone!).
 - ❖ This was not a power play or top-down thing, as if Athanasius had the authority to just declare it so.
 - ❖ Other Bishops could have easily contested it.
 - ❖ The amazing fact of history is that no one did.
 - ❖ His list was everyone else's.
 - ▶ What accounts for this other than the Holy Spirit's work in leading Christ's church to recognize the inspired New Testament Scripture?
 - ❖ As Jesus said...

***John 10:27** - My sheep hear My voice...*
- What about the supposed "lost New Testament books" that we hear about every once and again?
 - ▶ All of these books are to be dated way after the first century (thus after the age of the Apostles and a connection to them).
 - ▶ These books were never accepted as Scripture by any significant portion of the church.
 - ▶ In fact, they were routinely condemned as gnostic and heretical.

- Implications of a Trust Worthy Canon

- All of God's written Word is yours.
- As we saw last week, the completed Old and New Testament Scriptures are God's last divinely authoritative and inerrant communication to us until Christ's return.
- Let us show our gratitude by valuing them above all else!

Psalm 119:105 - Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.