

Canonicity

Determining the God-Inspired Books

Introduction:

1. If the Scriptures are inspired by God, then a significant question arises: Which books are inspired?
2. Which books are authoritative and which are copy cats writings
3. Inspiration indicates how the Bible received its authority, whereas canonization tells how the Bible received its acceptance.
4. In Bible days there was the threat of persecution. If one was going to die for the Scriptures, then one needed to be sure that he was dying for genuine Scripture.

I. What Does “Canon” Mean?

A. Original Meaning

1. A “kanon” was a rod, a ruler, a staff, a measuring rod
2. The canon was a standard for measurement
3. The meaning eventually changed to refer to a standard for anything

B. Theological Meaning

1. For our purposes, “canon” refers to authoritative Scripture
2. “When we speak of the canon of Scripture, the word ‘canon’ has a simple meaning. It means the list of books contained in Scripture, the list of books recognized as worthy to be included in the sacred writings acknowledged by the Church as documents of divine revelation.” F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, p.17

II. Determining the Canon of Scripture

A. Who or What Determines Canonicity?

1. God determines the canon
 - a) *A book that is not inspired is not part of the canon of Scripture*
 - b) *Every God-inspired book is to be part of the Bible*
 - c) *Canonicity is determined by inspiration*
2. Man discovers the canon
 - a) *God gives His Word authority*
 - b) *It is up to man to discover and recognize that authority*
 - c) *It was not the decision of the people that caused the canonicity, but the canonicity was the cause of their acceptance by the people*

B. False Views of Canonicity

1. Old age determines canonicity
 - a) *Canonicity is not determined by the age of a book*
 - b) *The “Book of Jasher” (Josh 10:13) is older than much of the Bible but it is non-canonical*
 - c) *“Book of the Wars of the Lord” (Num 21:14) is old, but not canonical*
 - d) *The books of the Jewish Apocrypha are older than the NT, but not inspired and non-canonical*
2. Hebrew language determines canonicity
 - a) *Some believed that the use of Hebrew was the Jewish test for canonicity*
 - b) *However Ecclesiasticus, Tobit, and 1Maccabees were rejected even though written in Hebrew*
3. Religious value determines canonicity
 - a) *Every book that is inspired is canonical and will have religious value*
 - b) *But not every book with religious value is inspired*

III. Development of the OT Canon

A. Canon of the Hebrew Bible

1. The canon of the Hebrew Bible corresponds to the OT that we have today in our Bibles
2. Jews divided their Bible into The Law, The Prophets and the Writings
 - a) *The Law – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*
 - b) *The Prophets – Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve*
 - c) *The Writings – Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles*

B. Factors Contributing to the Recognition of OT Books as Canonical

1. Tradition - Books had to come from Moses or some other acknowledged prophet
2. Spiritual authority – spiritual authority was recognized as the book was used in public or private reading and in exposition
3. Jesus and the apostles - Jesus and the apostles often referred to the Jewish Scriptures in the pages of the NT as having the authority of God
4. Malachi, the last OT book, was written around 430 BC and the OT canon was complete

C. The Apocrypha is Not Part of the OT Canon

- The Apocrypha consists of 14 books – 1, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, the rest of Esther, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Song of the Three Children, the Story of Susannah, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasses, and 1,2 Maccabees
 - There are many reasons for rejecting the Apocrypha as inspired
1. The Apocrypha was never accepted by the Jews into the Hebrew canon
 - a) *The Jews only recognized the 39 books of the OT that we have in our Bibles*
 - b) *No Jewish community inside or outside of Palestine accepted the Apocrypha*
 2. The NT writers never quote the Apocrypha as Scripture
 - a) *Jesus never quotes from the Apocrypha*
 - b) *The apostles refer to many OT events but never refer to or quote from the Apocrypha*
 - c) *Note – Jude’s reference to the book of Enoch (vs 14-15) is not Apocrypha since the book of Enoch is pseudepigrapha*
 3. Most of the OT Apocryphal books were written during Israel’s post-biblical period (430 bc)
 4. The Apocrypha includes many historical and geographical inaccuracies
 5. Some of the Apocryphal books teach unbiblical or heretical doctrines
 - a) *Prayers for the dead – 2Maccabees 12:45-46*
 - b) *Salvation by works – Tobit 12:9*
 6. The Apocryphal books do not claim divine authority

D. OT Pseudepigrapha

1. Books of Adam and Eve
2. The Apocalypse of Adam
3. The Book of Adam
4. The Second Treatise of the Great Seth
5. 1, 2 Enoch
6. Book of Melchizedek
7. Book of Abraham
8. The Testament of Abraham
9. The Revelation of Moses
10. The Book of Jubilees
11. Tales of the Patriarchs
12. The Ascension of Isaiah

IV. Development of the NT Canon

A. The Canon of the NT

1. Gospels
 - a) *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John*
 - b) *Other gospels included the gospels of Thomas, Peter, Nicodemus, Barnabas, Andrew, Philip, Matthias, Judas, and Joseph, Gospel of the Birth of Mary, The Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ, The Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Bartholomew, Mary*
 - c) *Photius listed over 280 spurious books in the 9th century*
 - d) *Some of these have purported childhood miracles of Jesus while in Egypt - Some mention a bodily assumption of Mary*
2. History - Acts
 - a) *The Acts of Paul, Peter, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Thaddeus, Pastor, The Revelation of Peter, Report of Pilate the Governor,*
 - b) *History of Joseph the Carpenter, Acts of Pontius Pilate*
3. Epistles
 - a) *Pauline Epistles – Romans, 1, 2Cor, Gal, Eph, Philippians, Colossians, 1, 2 Thessalonians, 1, 2 Timothy, Titus Philemon*
 - b) *General Epistles – Hebrews, James, 1, 2Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude*
 - c) *The Epistle of Barnabas, Epistle of the Apostles, Letter of Peter to Philip, Book of Thomas the Contender, The Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans, First, Second Epistles of Clement to the Corinthians, The Epistle of Barnabas, Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians, Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp*
 - d) *“The Story of Joseph of Arimathea” taught that Judas was the son of the brother of the high priest Caiaphas and that he was sent by Caiaphas to infiltrate the disciples and discover a way to destroy Jesus.*
 - e) *According to “The Acts of Pilate,” Judas went home after the betrayal and found his wife roasting a chicken. When he told her he was planning to kill himself because he was afraid Jesus would rise from the dead and take vengeance on him, she replied that Jesus would no more rise from the dead than the chicken she was cooking would jump out of the fire and crow—at which instant the chicken was said to have done just that.*
 - f) *An ancient manuscript called Coptic Narratives of the Ministry and Passion maintained that Judas's wife was exceedingly greedy and that he was nothing more than the pawn of a manipulative wife.*
4. Prophecy – Revelation
5. The OT was written over a period of a thousand years, but the entire NT was written in a 50 yr time period

B. Determining the NT Canon

1. Reasons for Determining the NT Canon
 - a) *Churches needed to know which books should be read and used to determine God's will for doctrine and living*
 - b) *Christianity was being attacked by many other religions and philosophies and Christians needed to know which books were inspired and could be used as a foundation for belief and practice*
 - c) *Certain heretics were coming up with their own canon containing their own books of the Bible and believers needed to know which books were genuine*
 - d) *Christians were suffering and dying for the faith and needed to know which books were canonical because they might be dying for them.*
2. Phases of NT collection
 - a) *First phase – 50-95ad – writing and spread of the NT books*
 - b) *2nd phase – 96-150 ad – growing recognition and collection into groups of the NT books*
 - (1) All of the gospels were known and recognized
 - (2) All of Paul's letters were known and recognized
 - (3) Some of the smaller books took longer to be accepted because of questions of authentic authorship
 - c) *3rd phase – 150-190ad – the idea of a canon takes shape and most books of the NT are clearly recognized*
 - (1) In 170 ad the Muratorian Canon contained all NT books except Hebrews, James, 1, 2 Peter
 - (2) 200 ad – Old Latin translation contained all NT books except Hebrews, James and 2 Peter
 - d) *4th phase – ends around 340 ad – the canon generally settled*
3. Criterion for determining the NT canon
 - a) *Only books that had been inspired by God were included in the NT canon*
 - b) *Only books written by apostles or close associates of the apostles were accepted*
 - c) *Only writings from the apostolic era were accepted*
 - d) *Only writings that had general Christian approval were accepted – books with local or regional recognition were not included in the canon*
4. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the church into all truth
Joh 16:13 *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*
 - a) *There is no reason to believe that the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures abdicated His office and took no further care of his work*
 - b) *He did not abandon the precious writings of Scripture to fate*