

“Indeed it was only heretical parties, such as Marcionites, Valentinians, and Ebionites, who rejected three and preferred only one -- presupposing, in fact, that the four were accepted among the orthodox.” ~ HWGB, p. 64.

- Paul’s epistles were universally used, quoted and accepted.
- Hebrews was assumed the 14<sup>th</sup> epistle of Paul. But later doubts arose about its authorship and so its status was occasionally doubted.
- 1 Peter, and 1 John were strongly accepted, and James and other Catholic epistles were not as often used and some questions arose.
- Revelation was accepted widely early – and seen as by the pen of John. Later in some regions it was doubted, and authorship questions arose as well. But eventually it was again accepted by all.
- By AD 367, Athanasius listed all 27 books of the NT as those accepted by all. Origen (AD 250) gave a list of the same books in a series of homilies on Joshua.
- Early books that were read for edification, but not accepted as canonical (ultimately) were The Shepherd of Hermas, 1 Clement, Epistle of Barnabas and others. (The Ethiopic church holds the first 2 canonical).
- These books are still available to read, see *The Apostolic Fathers*.

### A Look Ahead at Next Week

- We will learn more about the content of the Apocrypha, and how it was viewed and appreciated by the Reformers and early Church Fathers.

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**Goal:** Grow in our understanding of the doctrine of Scripture, be equipped to answer objections, and to better learn how to read and understand the Bible.

**Sources:** Quotes indicated “SS” are from John D. Meade and Peter J. Gurry, *Scribes & Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible* (Crossway, 2022). Quotes indicated “HWGB” are from Gregory Lanier, *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to How We Got the Bible* (Christian Focus, 2018)

## Scripture: Theology, Text & Transmission

### Class 10: The Canon of Scripture

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#### Review

Last week we looked at how Scripture was copied and preserved in written copies down through the ages. This week we will look in more detail at how we can have confidence in the Canon of Scripture: *do we have the right collection of books in our Bible?*

#### Popular misconceptions:

- It is popularly supposed that the books of the New Testament were selected by Christian bishops at a council in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.
- Many are surprised that some Bibles contain 8+ more books in the OT than other Bibles (Roman Catholic, and Orthodox Bibles).
- Do you know when it was that most Protestant English Bibles fully excluded the Apocrypha even as an appendix? (Not till the 1800s.)

#### I. Canon in Scripture

- “Canon” refers to a “rule” or “standard,” applied to Scripture it means which books are to be included in the Bible.
- This is a recognition of what Christians have held as Bible – not a series of criteria applied to books to see if they fit – *proposed criteria have exceptions: OT – Hebrew original (Tobit); NT – apostolic (Barnabas)*.
- The Bible witnesses to the impulse to collect the books of Scripture.
  - The Law of Moses was in a book – Josh. 8:31, 2 Ki. 14:6 [1 Ki. 2:3]
  - Prophets gave God’s words & wrote – Zech. 7:12, 2 Chron. 32:32
  - Ezra 1:1 refers to Jeremiah’s prophecy (in a book – Dan. 9:2).
  - Isaiah and Jeremiah both overlap with 2 Kings, Chronicles interacts with Samuel/Kings; 1 Kings 4:32 acknowledges the Proverbs; 2 Sam. 22 and 1 Chron. 16 adapt several Psalms.
  - Such intertextual biblical citations and allusions affirm that the authors esteemed the books they are referencing as Scripture.
- We previously went into detail of how Paul quotes Luke and Peter refers to Paul’s letters as Scripture. What should not be missed is the NT consistent use (quotations and allusions) of the OT as Scripture.

- Bible authors are aware of other books (2 Chron. 12:15, Jude 9, 14), & not all Bible books are quoted, so this argument only goes so far.

## II. OT Canon

- Early rabbinic Jews recognized the cessation of prophecy by “the death of the last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.” (HWGB, p. 26)  
 “By the 400s BC, there was a clear 'inner-biblical' awareness of a collection of writings given by the Spirit of God, received as covenant Scripture for Israel and deposited in the temple. The shape/boundaries of these Scriptures may not yet have reached full recognition, but that does not undermine how God had, by definition, 'closed the canon' through the cessation of divinely-inspired scriptural writings.” ~ HWGB, p. 26

- Threefold OT Canon (modern Hebrew Bible [*Tanakh*] division below)

<b>T</b> – Torah (Law)	<b>N</b> – Nevi'im (Prophets)	<b>K</b> – Ketuvim (Writings)
5 books of Moses	4 former (Josh, Judg., Sam., Kings)	3 books (Psalms, Prov. Job)
	4 later (Isa., Jer., Ezek., “The 12” minor)	5 scrolls (Song of Sol., Ruth, Lamentations, Eccl., Esther)
<b>24</b> total books =	Our <b>39</b> books	3 others (Dan., Ezra-Neh., Chron.)

- Three-part canon known by Sirach (180 BC), DSS, Philo and Josephus. Also spoken of in Luke 24:44.
- Josephus (1<sup>st</sup> Cent. AD): “[The Jews have] only twenty-two books that possess the record of all time, rightly having been trusted.” (SS, p. 112)
  - Likely refers to same books above counted differently.
  - Also states books written after Artaxerxes are not trustworthy.
- Jewish apocalypse 4 Ezra (mid-1<sup>st</sup> Cent. AD) testifies to 24 books.
- Dead Sea Scrolls = 40% Scripture, 30% Apocrypha/Pseudepigrapha, 30% writings specific to that community
  - Copies of all OT books included except Esther
  - Commentary and quotations focus on OT books but 1 Enoch and Jubilees were popular (but no commentary for them)
- Philo (1<sup>st</sup> Cent. AD) quotes most OT books but not Apocryphal books.

- Universal acceptance of the OT core: Torah, and the Prophets, but some questions with the Writings: Later Rabbinic discussion debated whether books should stay in the canon: Ezekiel, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Esther.
- AD 200 Babylonian Talmud gave a list of the 24 canonical OT books.
  - Samaritan Pentateuch = only accepts Torah

## III. OT Apocrypha

- Christians largely accepted what they viewed as the Jewish canon but there was an early and widespread use/appreciation of the Apocrypha.
- Christian leaders were willing to go against Jewish usage in favor of Church usage – but this was more common later.
- Jerome helped clarify that some books were accepted to read (edify) but not to establish doctrine, other books were apocryphal (rejected due to false attribution), and yet further books were heretical.
- Through the middle ages, Jerome’s view held sway in the West – the Apocrypha were read for edification but not used for doctrine.
- The East kept a higher view of the Apocrypha, partly because it favored Greek and many of the Apocrypha were originally written and transmitted in Greek.
- Even Martin Luther’s Catholic opponents agreed on the status of the Apocrypha. This didn’t change until the Council of Trent which elevated the Apocrypha to a “deuterocanonical” status – second canon.

## IV. NT Canon

- There is no real debate among Christian churches on the limits of the NT canon. The major churches all accept 27 NT books.
- The core canon for the NT was the 4 Gospels and Paul’s epistles, with some questions about the Catholic epistles.
- Widespread quotes and usage in the Church Fathers for most of the books of the NT.
- Irenaeus (AD 202) wrote about the fitness of just 4 Gospels. Origen (AD 250) was aware of other Gospels but defended 4 and only 4 were to be accepted.

Origen said: “The Church has four Gospels. Heresy has many.” (SS, p. 161)