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The Canonization of the Bible

What is Canonization and Why Does it Matter?

“Canonization” comes from the word “canon”. You may be thinking of a large weapon that fires cannonballs, but it has quite a different meaning in this context... and a different spelling (cannon). The canon is the authoritative list of books accepted as Holy Scripture. The word canon is derived from a Greek word meaning “rule” or “standard”. You can trace it back even farther to a Hebrew word “qaneh” meaning a reed or stalk (used as a standard of measure).

When we study canonization, we are examining the process by which a writing or book was determined to be divinely inspired (as defined in our last lesson) and therefore worthy of being included in the canon (collection of Holy Scriptures).

It may appear to be an easy process, but it was not without complexity and significant dispute throughout Jewish and Christian history. We know that there are other books referenced in Scripture that are no longer in existence today (i.e. The Book of Jasher – Joshua 10:13; The Chronicles of Nathan the Prophet and Gad the Seer – 1 Chronicles 29:29). We also find that some passages of Scripture are direct quotation of other pieces of religious literature. Consider the following example:

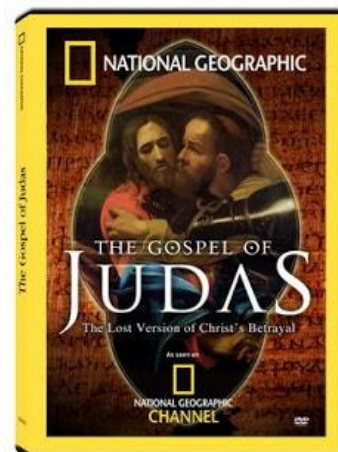
Jude 14–15 - *“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”*

Where did Jude get a quote from Enoch, the man who was translated by God (Genesis 4:24)? Consider the following quotation from the Book of Enoch, which is not included in Scripture.

Enoch 2:1 – “Behold, he comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon them, and destroy the wicked, and reprove all the carnal for everything which the sinful and ungodly have done, and committed against him.”

It is possible that Jude quoted from the Book of Enoch in writing this letter included in Scripture.

Recall what Luke wrote, *“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;”* (Luke 1:1-3) It is commonly believed that John was written after Luke, therefore it is hard to believe that Luke refers to the gospels of Matthew and Mark as “many.” Other accounts of the life of Jesus were recorded. Even today it is not uncommon to hear about “lost gospels.”



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The argument over canon is not even settled in modern-day “Christianity.”¹ The Catholic Church includes several books in its Bible, known as the Apocrypha, which are foreign to most other Christians. The Catholic canon is larger than canon embraced by most Christian denominations.

There also remains argument over when and if the canon is closed. For example, Mormons claim that the canon was not closed in the first century with the completion of the Book of Revelation. They believe that in addition to the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrines and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price are equally authoritative. Thus, the Mormon canon is significantly larger than the Christian canon.

All of these facts raise important questions. Why were some books included in canon and others rejected? What was the standard by which they determined which books should be kept and which ones rejected? When did the canon close and how do we know? Where did the concept of canon come from? All these subjects and more will be covered in this lesson.

The Origin of Canon and the Canonization of the Old Testament

The concept of canon is closely married to that of inspiration is as old as scripture itself. The Lord told Moses,

“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”

Deuteronomy 4:2

This commandment would be impossible to obey unless there is a defined body of writings recognized as divine and protected from embellishment or diminishment. As the Jews preserved the books God provided to them, they continued to recognize their divine authority in times of spiritual awakening (2 Kings 23:3).

Jewish historian Josephus states:

but now, as to our forefathers, that they took no less care about writing such records (for I will not say they took greater care than the others I spoke of), and that they committed that matter to their high priests and to the prophets, and that these records have been written all along down to our own times with the utmost accuracy; nay, if it be not too bold for me to say it, our history will be so written hereafter;—I shall endeavor briefly to inform you.²

While the collection of Old Testament Scriptures went by many names, it appears to have been defined and identifiable. When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, he was instructed by God to keep it inside the Ark of the Covenant, a sacred place (Exodus 25:16). When Moses completed the writing of

¹ I use the term “Christianity” very broadly in this context to include all modern mainstream denominations.

² Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson. (Josephus), Flavius Josephus against Apion, 1:29

the Law (perhaps the first four books of the Bible or portions thereof), he instructed the Israelites to keep it beside the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). These writings were also sacred and were to be preserved without addition or subtraction (Deuteronomy 4:2).

These practices were the beginning of the concept of canon: an authoritative collection of God's Word which was distinguished from all other writings. It also appears that when a new work was written, it was recognized as authoritative relatively quickly. We read in 1 Samuel 10:25 that Samuel recorded the ordinances of the kingdom in a book and "placed it before the Lord", presumably next to the Ark of the Covenant.

This isn't to say that there was never any controversy over canon in Old Testament times. While we do not know of specific examples, we do know that the messages of some prophets were not recognized by all the people as divine and were challenged by false prophets (2 Chronicles 18:4-27). Jeremiah is one such example. He was routinely rejected by the leadership of Judah, yet during the period of Judah's exile in Babylon, his writings were recognized as divinely inspired and were read and embraced by the Jews (Daniel 9:2).

From the inclusion of the 10 Commandments in the ark of God to the writing of the book of Jeremiah referenced by Daniel (Daniel 9:2), it didn't take long for Israel to adopt a new book into the fold of Old Testament canon. God had His hand upon this process.

The books that were later placed into the Old Testament canon were of a self-authenticating nature and did not derive their authority from a person or an ecclesiastical decree. This point is crucial: the books did not receive their authority because they were placed into the canon; they were recognized by the nation of Israel as having divine authority and were therefore included in the canon.³

This statement makes sense scripturally. Remember, we did not choose God; He chose us (John 15:16). Similarly, defining canon has never been about a choice made by man, but about recognizing what God has already done.

We do not have a record of how the Jews went about the process of discerning the inspired writings from other good works that were nonetheless uninspired (such as the Book of Jasher). The writings of the Jewish historian Josephus do provide us with some insight into the likely thought process.

and this is justly, or rather necessarily done, because every one is not permitted of his own accord to be a writer, **nor is there any disagreement in what is written**; they being **only prophets that have written the original and earliest accounts** of things as **they learned them of God himself by inspiration**; and others have written what hath happened in their own times, and that in a very distinct manner also.⁴

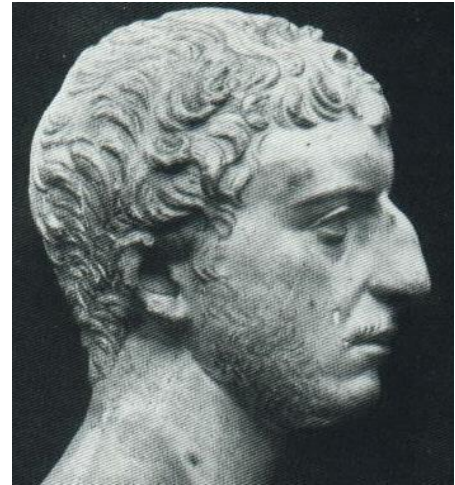
³ Wegner, Paul D. (1999). *The Journey from Texts to Translations, The Origin and Development of the Bible*,. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. (JTT) p99.

⁴ *Josephus, Flavius Josephus against Apion, 1:37*

... and how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation, is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, **to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them**, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them.⁵

From this record, some have come up with the following criteria used by the Jews in recognizing canon:

1. There is no contradiction in the written word
2. It was written by a prophet or one with divine authority
3. It originated through the inspiration of God
4. The Jews recognized and accepted it as divine material.⁶



Flavius Josephus

It is interesting to note that the Jews not only recognized when God was speaking, they also recognized it when He stopped. Numerous Jewish sources agree about the closing of the Old Testament canon.⁷

Evidence suggests that following the destruction of the temple there was a new emphasis on the collection and study of Scripture, as J.A. Sanders asserts: "It was because of the cataclysmic event of the destruction of the first temple that what we now know as the Law and the Prophets first came to be collected and galvanized into the shape they now have." Jewish traditions claimed that prophecy had ceased about 400 B.C. in Israel: "With the death of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi the latter prophets, the Holy Spirit ceased out of Israel. Despite this, they were made to hear through a bath kol"...

The phrase bath kol is literally translated as daughter of a voice (i.e., its sound or perhaps its echo), connoting something that was not as reliable as the voice of the prophets themselves. After direct revelation from God had ceased, the Jewish people were directed to listen to the words of the wise men – those who had been trained in the words of God."⁸

No wonder the Jews had such wonder and amazement when they heard the words of John the Baptist and then Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 7:28-29). Those with eyes to see knew the Lord was speaking directly to them again... what a blessing!

The final and best stamp on the accuracy of the Old Testament canon is Jesus Christ Himself. He makes two specific statements demonstrating that He considered the Old Testament canon to be both authoritative and closed. The first is found in Luke 24 and was already discussed in some detail in our first lesson on the Structure and Organization of the Bible.

⁵ *Josephus*, Flavius Josephus against Apion, 1:42

⁶ This list was found in *JTT*, p115.

⁷ Remember, to the Jews, the Old Testament is not just a portion of the Bible, it is the entirety of the Bible.

⁸ *JTT*, p103-104.

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And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."

Luke 24:44

Recall that Jesus defines a three-fold organization of Scripture: the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. This is consistent with the collection of scriptures recognized as holy by the Jews in Jesus' day.

Law (Torah)

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Deuteronomy

Prophets (Nebi im)

The Former Prophets

Joshua
Judges
Samuel
Kings

The Latter Prophets

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
The Book of the Twelve

Writings (Kethubim)

Poetic Books

Psalms
Proverbs
Job

Five Scrolls

Song of Solomon
Ruth
Lamentations
Ecclesiastes
Esther

Historical Books

Daniel
Ezra-Nehemiah
Chronicles

By referencing these collections without adding exception, He was embracing the Old Testament canon of His day. Another significant proof is found in the 23rd chapter of Matthew.

Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Matthew 23:34-35

We read about Abel's death in Genesis 4:8 and Zacharias' death in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. Looking at the chart above, we recognize that Genesis as the first book of the Old Testament canon, while Chronicles is the last.⁹ Jesus' reference to Abel and Zacharias spans the entirety of the Old Testament canon, giving authority not only to the books included in canon but the completion of the canon in the book of Chronicles. Jesus also quotes from many books of the Old Testament during His ministry. These authoritative statements along with the absence of quotations from other apocryphal literature, provides the strongest defense to the composition and completion of the Old Testament canon.

⁹ Recall that the Jewish canon is the same as the Christian but is organized differently.

The Canonization of the New Testament

As we just demonstrated, the first century Christians already had the Old Testament Canon as an example to build upon. The concept of divine writings that must be recognized, distinguished and protected was clearly established. Obviously the writings we recognize as the New Testament Canon were not recognized as divine by Jewish authorities, so we must turn our gaze upon early Christians to see how they recognized and collected the New Testament Canon. Because this process is not quite as ancient as the collection of the Old Testament, we do know a bit more about it. Above all, we trust that God shepherded this process and has protected His Word for us today, just as He provided it to those in the past.

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament works were written by various authors over a span of time. The early Christians considered the recognition and protection of God's revelation as a solemn obligation.

In our study extending to A.D. 150, the church did not realize and protect its unity and continuity by agreement on a common creed. Nor did it do so by appeal to an unbroken line of episcopal control of its worship, life, and teaching. It was by continual attention to the apostolic witness that the church kept alive to what it was and what its task and privileges were. At first that witness was orally known and could be attested by those who had heard apostles or their personal assistants. As time went on, more emphasis inevitably was placed on the apostolic writings that continued that witness.¹⁰

The concept of a New Testament Canon is scriptural. Ephesians 2:20 is arguably the most significant passage addressing the concept of New Testament Canon.

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

Ephesians 2:20

This statement is a reflection of the New Testament Canon. Note that the church isn't the foundation of truth, but the structure built upon the truth. The following table contrasts true and false views of the church's role in recognizing canon.

The Incorrect View	The Correct View
The Church is Determiner of Canon	The Church is Discoverer of Canon
The Church is Mother of Canon	The Church is Child of Canon
The Church is Magistrate of Canon	The Church is Minister of Canon
The Church is Regulator of Canon	The Church is Recognizer of Canon
The Church is Judge of Canon	The Church is Witness of Canon
The Church is Master of Canon	The Church is Servant of Canon ¹¹

¹⁰ Quotation of Floyd Filson, former New Testament professor at McCormick Theological Seminary in *JTT*, p 129.

¹¹ Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded., p. 222). Chicago: Moody Press.

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Like the Old Testament, the rules of recognizing canon cited by Josephus could be repeated and adapted for the New Testament.

1. There is no contradiction in the written word
2. It was written by a prophet or one with divine authority (an apostles)
3. It originated through the inspiration of God
4. The Jews Churches recognized and accepted it as divine material.

Apostles had specific qualifications (Acts 1:20-22), credentials (2 Cor. 12:12), and enablement (John 14:26) to provide this foundation. The teaching of the apostles was the nourishment of the early church (Acts 2:42). Prophets were also enabled by God to fulfill their ministry (Acts 11:27-28) and provide authoritative words to the early churches (1 Thess. 5:19-22). It is my belief that all the writings of the New Testament were produced by either apostles or prophets.

It is generally believed the New Testament was written between 48 and 100 AD, and the earliest books were the epistles (letters) of the Apostle Paul.¹² New Testament churches immediately copied, distributed, and likely kept copies of New Testament books (see Colossians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:27, and Revelation 1:11). Public reading of Scripture became a significant part of corporate worship (1 Timothy 4:13).

Many of the New Testament writings gave internal evidence to their authority and cited and supported the authority of one another. For example, Paul clearly recognized some of his own writings as authoritative as well as the sayings of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:1, 2 Thess. 3:6-15, 1 Cor. 7:10-12). Paul quotes from either Matthew or Luke in his first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:18, Matt. 10:10, Luke 10:7). Peter recognizes Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:16), and Jude quotes from Peter's writings as apostolic and authoritative (Jude 17-18, 2 Peter 3:3).

As the apostles and early eyewitnesses of Christ died, it became necessary for the churches to recognize what was authoritative so that it could be protected against heresies within the churches (Acts 20:29-31). Persecution also may have played a role in pushing the Christians to determine what was authoritative. Regarding persecution occurring in 303 AD, Eusebius writes:

It was the nineteenth year of the reign of Diocletian, and the month Dystrus, or March, as the Romans would call it, in which, as the festival of the Savior's passion was coming on, an imperial letter was everywhere promulgated, ordering the razing of the churches to the ground and the destruction by fire of the Scriptures...¹³

If they knew what was truly from God, they knew what was worth sacrificing and dying for. I don't believe it is a coincidence that not long after that time period, clear lists of New Testament Canon began to appear in historical church records.

¹² *JTT*, p133.

¹³ *JTT*, p133.

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- Clement of Rome (60-100) – Elder/Pastor at Rome; may have been referenced in Philippians 4:3
- Ignatius (around 100) – Pastor in Antioch
- Polycarp (70-160) – Pastor of Smyrna and later martyred for his faith. Said to be a disciple of John the Apostle.
- Justin Martyr (100-165) – Born in Israel as a Gentile, became a traveling preacher who was ultimately martyred for his faith.
- Marcion (140) – A heretic who rejected the Old Testament and chose only 11 New Testament books as canon.

Tertullian said of him, “one man perverts the Scriptures with his hand, another their meaning by his exposition. For although Valentinus seems to use the entire volume, he has none the less laid violent hands on the truth only with a more cunning mind and skill than Marcion. Marcion expressly and openly used the knife, not the pen, since he made such an excision of the Scriptures as suited his own subject-matter.”¹⁴

- Irenaeus (150-202) - Pastor in Lyon, France, raised in Asia Minor and discipled by Polycarp.
- Muratorian Canon (190) – Discovered in a library in Milan. It was a listing of books considered to be canon among the majority of churches at that time.
- Clement of Alexandria (155-220) – A Christian scholar and commentary writer, writing commentaries on all the canonical Scriptures and even some books that are disputed.
- Tertullian (160-220) – A theologian from Carthage
- Hippolytus (170-235) – Taught by Irenaeus.

From this time onward, Christians became concerned about clearly identifying canon. Specific lists were compiled by different individuals.

- Origen (185-254) – Traveled widely and acquainted himself with the biblical material used at each location. He compiled a list of New Testament books accepted universally by Christians.
- Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340) – A scholar and historian who inherited Origen’s library.
- Athanasius (296-373) – Pastor in Alexandria, Egypt. He enumerated the list of canon in an Easter letter to his church.

At this point, representatives of churches or councils established by hierarchical denominations gathered to settle the issue of canonicity.

- Synod of Laodicea (363) – Forbade the reading of non-canonical books. All except Revelation were clearly accepted.
- Council of Hippo (393) – Recognized the current list of 27 New Testament books as canon.
- Synod of Carthage (397) – Recognized the current list of 27 New Testament books as canon.
- Council of Carthage (419) – Recognized the current list of 27 New Testament books as canon.

¹⁴ JTT, p139.

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Why Were Some Books Rejected?

Let's begin by defining a couple important words, apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. "Apocrypha" is a Greek word meaning hidden or concealed. Some people in antiquity used this word to refer to special or hidden knowledge available to a few but not to all. They applied this concept to the apocryphal writings, claiming they were special knowledge available to the spiritually elite, but not to the masses. Eventually (or perhaps immediately), people began to realize that these books were not hidden or special knowledge, but were either frauds or not inspired like the rest of the Old Testament scriptures. Thus, the term "apocrypha" took on a more negative connotation and was used to represent a specific collection of books that were claimed by some to be part of Old Testament canon.

"Pseudepigrapha" is also a Greek word derived from the word "pseudo", which means false, and "epigraph", which means inscription. Pseudepigraphal writings are "false inscriptions", largely referring to the belief that they are frauds... not really written by the people whose names are on the cover. There are both Old Testament and New Testament pseudepigraphal writings. We will discuss some of each.

The Apocrypha

The Apocrypha generally refers to a collection of fifteen books, given different titles and organization by Catholics and Evangelicals. The table to the right provides a brief comparison.¹⁵ The type of literature of each book is indicated in the Evangelical Titles column: Historical (H); Wisdom Literature (W); Religious Instruction (R); and Apocalyptic (A).

The degree to which Christians have accepted the Apocrypha has varied over the years. Many ancient Christian scholars such as Origen, Athanasius, and Jerome argued against its canonicity. However, it was included in Jerome's translation of the scriptures

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The Apocryphal book of 2 Esdras (Ezra), chapter 14 claims that Ezra was commanded to take scribes into the wilderness and transcribe the books of the Old Testament and an additional 70 books. The books of the Old Testament were to be shared with all people but the 70 books were to be saved for the "wise among your people". This could be where the idea of apocryphal (or hidden) writings originated.

Evangelical Titles	Catholic Titles
The Wisdom of Solomon (W)	The Book of Wisdom
Ecclesiasticus (W)	Ecclesiasticus
Tobit (R)	Tobias
Judith (R)	Judith
1 Esdras (H)	3 Esdras
1 Maccabees (H)	1 Maccabees
2 Maccabees (H)	2 Maccabees
Baruch (W)	Baruch 1-5
The Letter of Jeremiah (W)	Baruch 6
2 Esdras (A)	4 Esdras
Additions to Esther (R)	Esther 10:4-16:24
The Prayer of Azariah (W)	Daniel 3:24-90
Susanna (R)	Daniel 13
Bel and the Dragon (R)	Daniel 14
The Prayer of Manasseh (W)	Prayer of Manasseh

¹⁵ This table was adapted from *JTT*, p118-119.

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into Latin (the Latin Vulgate) and therefore many considered the Apocrypha to be part of Holy Scriptures for the 1,000 years when the Latin Vulgate was the primary Bible version available. The Catholic Church concluded that the Apocrypha was part of the canon of scriptures at the Council of Trent in 1546, largely for theological reasons. There are texts in the Apocrypha that support the idea of purgatory and praying for the dead. Of course we know that these concepts are without support in any part of the Old or New Testament.

The reason the Apocrypha is rejected by Evangelical Christians is that it doesn't pass the test articulated by Josephus:

1. There is no contradiction in the written word
2. It was written by a prophet or one with divine authority
3. It originated through the inspiration of God
4. The Jews recognized and accepted it as divine material.¹⁶

Several of the writings of the Apocrypha contain contradictions. The types of contradictions include chronological errors, geographical errors, simple mistakes, and theological errors. For the sake of time, we will focus on some significant theological errors. Consider the following passages from the Apocrypha. What is wrong?

- 2 Esdras 6:55 – “All this I have spoken before thee, O Lord, because thou hast said that it was for us that thou didst create this world.” Compare with Revelation 4:11.
- Sirach 3:14-15 – “For the relieving of thy father shall not be forgotten: and instead of sins it shall be added to build thee up. In the day of thine affliction it shall be remembered; thy sins also shall melt away, as the ice in the fair warm weather.” Compare with Isaiah 64:6 and Eph. 2:8-9.
- 2 Maccabees 12:40-45 – “Now under the coats of every one that was slain they found things consecrated to the idols of the Jamnites, which is forbidden the Jews by the law. Then every man saw that this was the cause wherefore they were slain. All men therefore praising the Lord, the righteous Judge, who had opened the things that were hid, betook themselves unto prayer, and besought him that the sin committed might wholly be put out of remembrance. Besides, that noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, forso much as they saw before their eyes the things that came to pass for the sins of those that were slain. And when he had made a gathering throughout the company to the sum of two thousand drachms of silver, he sent it to Jerusalem to offer a sin offering, doing therein very well and honestly, in that he was mindful of the resurrection: for if he had not hoped that they that were slain should have risen again, it had been superfluous and vain to pray for the dead. And also in that he perceived that there was great favor laid up for those that died godly, it was an holy and good thought. Whereupon he made a reconciliation for the dead, that they might be delivered from sin.” Compare with Luke 16:25-26

¹⁶ This list was found in *JTT*, p115.

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Regarding the authorship, some of the books of the Apocrypha claim to be authored by known prophets of God, but they cannot be affirmatively dated to the time period in which they claim to have been written. All of the books of the Apocrypha appear to have been written after the close of the Old Testament canon, during the 400 years of silence before the preaching of John the Baptist. In fact, 1 and 2 Maccabees record the history of that time period.

The lack of theological consistency and the presence of irrefutable errors are incompatible with the divine inspiration of the Apocryphal books. Finally, although the Jews did retain copies of the books for their historical value, there is no evidence that the Jews recognized these books as part of their canon of scripture.¹⁷

What should I think of the Apocrypha? First of all, don't give it the same weight as Holy Scriptures. Take a minute to look back to the chart on page 10. Notice that I included the type of literature each book represents. I think this can be a useful guide if you choose to read the Apocrypha. Books that are historical in nature can be read like you would read any uninspired historical book... it may be true but it also may contain inaccuracies. The wisdom literature might have some interesting insight. The religious instruction would only be interesting in helping you understand what others believed and practice. The apocryphal book of 2 Esdras would fall into the category of mystical fiction and shouldn't be regarded. Above all, make sure that you know the truth (God's Word) before you spend time with resources that are at best questionable.

Old Testament Period Pseudepigrapha

There are several Old Testament period pseudepigraphal works that exist. Some of their titles include: 1-3 Enoch, Sibylline Oracles, Treatise of Shem, Apocryphon of Ezekiel, Apocalypse of Zephaniah, 4 Ezra, Greek Apocalypse of Ezra, Vision of Ezra, 2-3 Baruch, Apocalypse of Abraham, Testament of the 12 Patriarchs, and the Testament of Job. All of these works are believed to have been written between 100 B.C. and 600 A.D. It doesn't take a scholar to figure out that the supposed authors lived a long time before these works were ever recorded. That makes the works pseudepigraphal.

Although we could take time to discuss each one, there is one that stands out among the others: 1 Enoch. We already established that it appears that Jude 14-15 is a quotation of 1 Enoch 2:1. Scholars tend to believe that 1 Enoch was written somewhere between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. Although it is likely that Jude quoted from 1 Enoch, it is also possible that 1 Enoch was written



Aramaic fragments of 1 Enoch

¹⁷ "There is good evidence that none of the apocryphal or pseudepigraphal works were included in the Old Testament Hebrew canon used by Jews and early Christians." *JTT*, 117

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after Jude's epistle in order to "fill in the gap" by those who wondered where he got the quotation.

What if Jude quoted from 1 Enoch? What should we think about it? Bible Scholar Paul Wegner proposes three possible options:

1. "he may simply refer to the book as a piece of literature with which his readers would have been familiar"
2. "the writer may be accommodating himself to his audience's high view of 1 Enoch, whereas he himself does not endorse this view; or"
3. "1 Enoch draws upon an authentic tradition that derives from the historical Enoch, and Jude endorses the authority of those sayings but not all of 1 Enoch."¹⁸

I tend to believe the third view is the most likely and persuasive. We know that many truths were handed down orally from generation to generation before the Holy Scriptures were recorded. There were approximately 2,500 years of human history before Moses penned the book of Genesis. Because I believe in the inspiration of the Bible, I believe that Jude accurately quoted Enoch. However, that does not mean the entirety of the writings entitled 1 Enoch is inspired or accurate.

New Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

The Apostle John ends his gospel with some very provocative words:

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."

John 21:25

A statement like this almost creates a market for additional revelation. What else did Jesus say and do and how can I get my hands on it? What was Jesus like as a boy? Beyond the questions about Jesus, there are countless other questions that could be asked. How did the Apostles finish out their ministries? What did the women who were with Jesus have to say about Him? All of these questions are intriguing and unfortunately there were many people who were willing to indulge them with answers.

In this section we discuss New Testament apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings. I am using both titles because the books that fall into this discussion can be legitimate books or letters written by men of God. While they are not inspired canon, they can still be considered useful writings and would fall under the category of apocryphal writings (i.e. Didache, The First Letter of Clement, and the Shepherd of Hermas). Some may have thoughts they should be included in New Testament canon, but Christians by and large recognized them as writings rather than Holy Scripture.

New Testament pseudepigrapha also exist: books that falsely claim to be written by apostles or even Jesus Himself. It isn't difficult to find a television program exploring a "lost gospel" and conjuring up a

¹⁸ JTT, p122.

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The Canonization of the Bible

description of Christ that is far afield of what we know from Holy Scripture. Bible Scholar Paul Wegner included a list of New Testament apocryphal/pseudepigraphal writings that includes:¹⁹

- Gospel Accounts – 27
- Treatises – 6
- Apocalypses – 15
- Acts (of various apostles) – 10
- Epistles – 4
- Church Materials (Sermons, Songs, and Prayers) - 11

It is not our intention to discuss these in any depth, but rather to state that they are not included in canon because they do not meet the tests for canonicity previously discussed. They contain contradictions (of various types), were not written by one with divine authority, did not originate through the inspiration of God, and were not recognized and accepted as divine material.

Some of these works do contain what is commonly called “agrapha” (unwritten) words of Jesus Christ not found in the four gospels of Holy Scripture. It is important to note that apocryphal works are not the only books that contain agrapha. You can find some within other New Testament books: i.e. Acts 20:35, 1 Corinthians 7:10, 9:14, 11:24-25, etc...

There are several statements attributed to Jesus within the apocryphal books, most of which are likely frauds and some of which could be true or somewhat true representations of what Jesus said and did during His life and ministry. A couple of examples are included below. Consider the arguments in favor of and against these accounts.

- Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Paragraph 2 – “This child Jesus, when five years old, was playing in the ford of a mountain stream; and He collected the flowing waters into pools, and made them clear immediately, and by a word alone He made them obey Him. And having made some soft clay, He fashioned out of it twelve sparrows. And it was the Sabbath when He did these things. And there were also many other children playing with Him. And a certain Jew, seeing what Jesus was doing, playing on the Sabbath, went off immediately, and said to his father Joseph: Behold, thy son is at the stream, and has taken clay, and made of it twelve birds, and has profaned the Sabbath. And Joseph, coming to the place and seeing, cried out to Him, saying: Wherefore doest thou on the Sabbath what it is not lawful to do? And Jesus clapped His hands, and cried out to the sparrows, and said to them: Off you go! And the sparrows flew, and went off crying. And the Jews seeing this were amazed, and went away and reported to their chief men what they had seen Jesus doing.”
- Excerpt from The Gospel According to the Hebrews – “The second of the rich men (it saith) said unto him: Master, what good thing can I do and live? He said unto him: O man, fulfil (do) the law and the prophets. He answered him: I have kept them. He said unto him: Go, sell all that thou

¹⁹ *JTT*, 159.

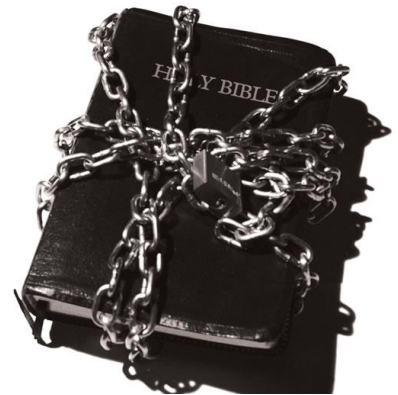
ownest, and distribute it unto the poor, and come, follow me. But the rich man began to scratch his head, and it pleased him not. And the Lord said unto him: How sayest thou: I have kept the law and the prophets? For it is written in the law: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, and lo, many of thy brethren, sons of Abraham, are clad in filth, dying for hunger, and thine house is full of many good things, and nought at all goeth out of it unto them.” (an addendum to what we read in Luke 18:18-22)

What do I do with the New Testament apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings? First, recognize that they do not meet the test for canon. Their obvious value is to get a sense of what some people believed at the time in which they were written. However, they are not a source of truth but opinion and could do more harm than good if they divert your attention from what we know is true.

Is Canon Closed?

While some would seek to add new revelation to that found in the Old and New Testament, the Scriptures provide strong evidence that they are complete as written and we should not expect additional books to be added to the canon. Here are six reasons supporting the closure of canon.

1. Ephesians 2:20 states that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone. We have already established that this passage is a reflection of the New Testament scriptures. With the death of the apostles and early church prophets, canon closed. The Apostle John was believed to be the last one living and his Revelation completed the canon of Scripture. The foundation has been laid and we are now soundly building upon it if we pay heed to their words (1 Cor. 3:11).
2. Hebrews 1:1-2 is clear that Jesus Christ is the final revelation of God. The gospels provide us the revelation of Christ and the apostles and prophets simply provide us application and insight into the teachings of Christ’s personal ministry. Christ is revealed and His return is promised. No further insight is necessary.
3. Early church leaders recognized the closure of canon. As we already established, church leaders in the generation following the apostles were not providing new revelation but were reading and quoting from the words of the first generation apostles and prophets, recognizing them as Holy Scripture. A completed and defined canon was recognized relatively quickly by individuals, churches, and ultimately by Christians worldwide.
4. Would another book meet the criteria at this point? We defined four criteria that helped the early churches recognize the canonicity of a book. Could we find a new (or lost) work without contradictions, clearly written by someone with divine authority, originating through the inspiration of God, and recognized universally by churches to be divine?



5. The New Testament makes bold statements about the completeness of revelation. 2 Peter 1:3 claims that God has given us all things necessary for life and godliness. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 proclaims scripture to be sufficient to make us adequate for every good work. If we do not have sufficient revelation, these passages are not true. God's revealed truth has been sufficient by the power of the Holy Spirit to enable men, women, and children to come to a saving knowledge of Christ and to mature them in holiness to the point of laying down their lives for His sake. What do we need that we do not have?
6. Revelation, likely the last book of the New Testament written, contains some stern warnings within its last chapter about the dangers of adding to or deleting content from the words of the prophecy of this book. (See Rev. 22:18-19) The placement of Revelation at the conclusion of the canon of Scriptures was certainly known by God when He inspired John to write these words. As we discovered, the principle of canonicity is scriptural. God's words to men are to be guarded and maintained; we must not add or subtract a thing from them. I believe the placement of this warning at the conclusion of the last book of the Holy Scriptures is not a coincidence, but a seal of completion and a warning against tampering with God's revelation.
7. Consider the finality of revelation we have in the Holy Scriptures. The Old Testament ended with the expectation of Messiah's coming. That event inaugurated new revelation: the New Testament. The same is true of the New Testament. It ends with the words, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus". We don't live in expectation of new written revelation but in the appearance of our Lord and Savior. We are not waiting for the last chapter; it has already been written. We are waiting for our faith in the words of prophecy to end in the sight of Jesus Christ. When Christ returns, we will not need written revelation. We will see Him just as He is, because we will be like Him.