

CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

How Do We Know that
the Books in the Bible
Are the Right Ones?

CANONIZATION (PART 2)



SERIES OVERVIEW

- **INSPIRATION:** PART 1. What Does the Bible Mean When It Says It Is Inspired by God? PART 2. How Do We Know that the Bible Is Really Inspired by God?
- **CANONIZATION:** PART 1. What Books Belong in the Bible, and Who Decides? PART 2. How Do We Know that the Books in the Bible Are the Right Ones?
- **TRANSMISSION:** PART 1. If the Original Writings Are Gone, Do We Really Have the Bible? PART 2. What Is Textual Criticism, and Why Does It Matter?

GOD AND SCRIPTURE

- **ATTRIBUTES:** A proper understanding of the nature/character of God (e.g., omnipotent, immutable, gracious) establishes our confidence in the canon of Scripture (2 Pet 1:2–4).
- **PROMISES:** God has specifically promised to preserve and protect his word so that it will never be irrevocably corrupted (Isa 40:8; 1 Pet 1:22–25; Matt 24:35).
- **RESULTS:** The providence of God has produced a collection of writings that have stood the test of time and the attacks of critics and that we can test for ourselves (John 10:35b).

CONFIRMING THE CANON

- **ATTITUDES:** Though God does not expect us to accept the so-called canon thoughtlessly, how we approach the testing of Scripture determines the results (1 Cor 2:12–16).
- **BLUNDERS:** We do not discover the canon of Scripture by simply looking at the age, language, theology, value, or acceptance of a given book (e.g., Num 21:14; 2 Thess 2:2).
- **PROCEDURES:** A writing is Scripture and thus canonical if it is inspired, which requires that it be apostolic/prophetic, truthful, and transformative (2 Pet 1:16–21; Heb 4:12).

How do we know that the books in the Old Testament are the right ones?

The simplest answer for Christians is that **Jesus** accepted the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. Though some (e.g., Sadducees) seemingly accepted a “canon within the canon,” essentially all **Jews** at the time of Christ accepted Genesis through Malachi as inspired and thus canonical.

(As an aside, though the Sadducees prioritized the Law, rejected oral tradition, and allegorized the resurrection, they accepted the canon of the Old Testament. See, for example, their appeal to Mic 5:2 in Matt 2:4–6.)

The only books that later Jews questioned were **Esther, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon,** and **Ezekiel** because these books appeared to be **unspiritual, illogical, skeptical, sensual,** or **heretical**. The so-called Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were never accepted by orthodox Jews, Jesus, or the church.

How do we know that the books *not* in the Old Testament are the wrong ones?

The **Apocrypha** (“hidden”) were accepted by some, though not all, Jews and “Christians.” “**Augustine** is the single significant voice of antiquity that recognized the Apocrypha” (Geisler and Nix, 268). It was not (officially) accepted by the **Syrian Church** until the 4th century AD, the **Roman Church** until the 16th century, or the **Greek Church** until the 17th century. The Apocrypha should not be added to the Bible because parts are **heretical** or **fanciful** and all are **postbiblical** and **non-prophetic**. (They are, however, historically valuable; cf. 2 Macc 7, 12, and Heb 11.)

No one considered the **Pseudepigrapha** (“spurious or pseudonymous writings”) canonical. Though some people—even NT writers (2 Tim 3:8; Jude 14–15; cf. Acts 17:28; 1 Cor 15:33; Titus 1:12)—employed the Pseudepigrapha, they did not accept them as inspired. These books are historically valuable, but we should not add them to the Bible.

How do we know that the books in the New Testament are the right ones?

The **first recipients** of the writings of the New Testament accepted them immediately. (The extant manuscripts testify to early acceptance.) **Most Christians** recognized most of the canon of the New Testament in the 2nd century AD (= Muratorian Fragment, c. AD 170), and **all** by the end of the 4th century (= Councils of Hippo and Carthage, AD 393 and 397).

Some later Christians questioned the canonicity of the following books: **Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation**. The disputes concerned **authorship** (= Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Revelation), **accuracy** (= James, Jude, Revelation), and **applicability** (= 2 and 3 John). Eventually, however, the church recognized their inspiration.

(If someone questions the trustworthiness of the New Testament canon, he or she needs only to test the inspiration of each book.)

How do we know that the books *not* in the New Testament are the wrong ones?

The “Christian” **Apocrypha** and **Pseudepigrapha** are often difficult to separate and are far more numerous than those “Jewish” ones.

Regardless, most of these “Christian” writings were only upheld by heretical individuals or groups. They were never seriously considered.

The **Apocrypha** (“hidden”) are the best contenders for canonicity (e.g., **Epistle of Barnabas**, **First and Second Clement**, **Shepherd of Hermas**, **Didache**, **Apocalypse of Peter**), but they ultimately fail to pass the canon tests (= apostolicity, orthodoxy, catholicity). (Just read them and see!)

No one considered the **Pseudepigrapha** (“spurious or pseudonymous writings”) canonical. Paul apparently dealt with such writings in his own time (2 Thess 2:1–2). The Pseudepigrapha should not be added to the Bible. (Remember the test case of the Gospel of Thomas!)

How do we know that books *not* in the Bible (e.g., Quran, Book of Mormon) are the wrong ones?

Numerous writings that claim to be inspired by “God” have been written since the first century AD. Why do we not add these works to the canon of Scripture? First and foremost, they were written **outside the timeframe** of true prophecy by false teachers (1 Cor 13:8–12; 1 John 4:1–6).

These later writings (e.g., Quran, Book of Mormon) are **heretical**. They do not conform to and often contradict canonical Scripture (e.g., Jesus in the Quran or the Book of Mormon). We (Christians) cannot accept heretical persons, let alone add their documents to holy writ (2 John 9–11).

Since only heretical persons and groups use extrabiblical writings, these documents enjoy **limited acceptance**. Only the followers of false prophets (e.g., Muhammad, Joseph Smith) accept these writings. Disciples of Christ around the world rightly reject them.

IMPLICATIONS?

- **COMPLETE:** The canon is complete because it is based on the promise(s) of God, not the (fallible) activity of man, and because its writings prove to be Scripture.
- **VALUABLE:** Though certain passages are more directly applicable to us than others, every book in the Bible is spiritually beneficial and needed (2 Tim 3:16–17).
- **AUTHORITATIVE:** The Bible—all of it—is authoritative (at least in principle), and we must not ignore or dismiss any of the sacred writings (vv. 14–17; 1 Tim 1:8–11; Rom 15:4).