

The Book of Books

by William Evans

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THE CANON OF THE BIBLE

In classical Greek the word "canon" signifies properly, "a straight rod," or "a carpenter's rule." In the early ages of the Christian religion it was used with considerable indefiniteness of meaning, though generally denoting a standard of opinion and practice. Later it came to be used as a testing rule in art, logic, grammar, and ethics. Still later the sacred writings received the name of the "Canon of the Scriptures." When, therefore, we use the term we may mean one of two things, or, indeed, both:

1. The Canon of Truth--referring to the restriction of the number of books that compose the sacred volume. As such it was first used in the year A.D. 367.
2. The Rule of Faith and Life--referring to the application of the sacred Scriptures as a rule of our lives. In this sense it is used in Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:16.

The sense in which we use the word in this chapter is that those books are *canonical* which Christians have regarded as authentic, genuine, and of divine authority and inspiration. These books are to be found in the Bible; in the Authorized Version of 1611, the Revised Version of 1881 and 1885, and in the American Revised Version of 1901.

By *uncanonical* books we mean those that are not included in the canon, such as the Apocrypha, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas.

1. Why was a Canon of the Bible necessary?

So long as the living voice of prophets and apostles was to be heard, there was no pressing need of a canon of Scripture. Under the inspiration of God they knew what was inspired, and what was not. But as soon as these men were dead--and with them inspiration ceased--it became necessary that their writings be gathered together to know what were their messages to the churches, and to preserve those writings from corruption.

Another reason why a canon was necessary was to preclude the possibility of additions to the number of inspired works. Already numerous writings were extant purporting to be inspired. Hence the question arose, Which of these are really inspired? What is the extent of inspired literature?

Still another and potent reason for the formation of the canon lay in the fact that the Emperor Diocletian issued in A.D. 302 an edict that all the sacred books should be destroyed by fire. Hence the question arose as to which books rightly deserved the name of inspired and sacred.

2. How was the Canon of the Bible formed?

a. The formation of the Old Testament Canon.

The formation of the Old Testament canon was gradual, and was composed of the writings which spread over many centuries.

Moses commanded that the books of the law be placed in the ark. This--with the addition of the book of Joshua--was done, and the sacred books were kept there during the wilderness journey, and also were in the ark during its permanent residence in Jerusalem. (Deuteronomy 31:9,26, cf. 2 Kings 22:8; Joshua 24:26; 1 Samuel 10:25.)

Then were gathered and placed in the temple the historical and prophetic books from Joshua to David's time. On the construction of the temple Solomon deposited in it the earlier books (2 Kings 22:8, Isaiah 34:16), and enriched the collection with inspired writings from his own pen, and also some prophetic writings. So we find Daniel (9:2, R.V.) referring to "the books," Isaiah to "the book of the Lord" (29:18, 34:16).

After Solomon's day a succession of prophets arose, Jonah, Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, and Habakkuk. These all flourished before the destruction of the temple, and enlarged the collection of existing sacred books by valuable additions.

After the Babylonian capture, when the temple was rebuilt and worship re-established, then doubtless were added the writings of Haggai and Zechariah.

About fifty years after the temple was rebuilt Ezra made a collection of the sacred writings (Neh. 8:2,3,14). To this collection were added the writings of Nehemiah, Malachi, and Ezra. It is a fact of history that Nehemiah gathered the "Acts of the Kings and the Prophets, and those of David," when founding a library for the second temple, 432 B.C. (See 2 Maccabees 2:13).

The canon of the Old Testament in the form we now have it, was the work of Ezra and the Great Synagogue. This fact is borne witness to in the most ancient Jewish writings. The Great Synagogue was composed of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. There is no doubt but that such a collection of books existed in the time of our Lord and the apostles (Luke 24:27,44).

b. The New Testament Canon

The New Testament canon was gradually added to that of the Old Testament. But it was some considerable time after our Lord's ascension before any of the books contained in it were actually written.

The first and most important work of the apostles was to deliver a *personal testimony* to the chief facts of the Gospel history (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:21,22). Their teaching was at first oral, and it was no part of their intention to create a permanent literature. A cycle of selected representative facts sufficed to form the groundwork of their oral Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-10).

But in the course of time many endeavored to commit to writing this oral Gospel (Luke 1:1-4). So long as the apostles were still living, the necessity for *written* records of the words and actions of our Lord was not so pressing. But when the time came for their removal from this world, it became extremely important the authoritative records should be put forth. Thus the *Gospels*

came into existence, two by apostles themselves, and two by friends and close companions of the apostles.

But already had arisen another kind of composition. Founders of churches, often unable to visit them personally, desired to communicate with their converts for purposes of counsel, reproof, and instruction. Thus arose the *Epistles*, which were put forth from time to time to meet special needs and emergencies.

The persecution of Diocletian (302 A.D.) brought to the front the question of the sacred literature of the church. The persecutors demanded that the Scriptures should be given up. This the Christians refused to do. Hence the question became urgent--What books are apostolic? The answer lies in our New Testament. There were at that time many false and spurious gospels and epistles. Careful, prayerful, and deliberate examination, however, proved which were genuine and which were false. The genuine were received by the church as the inspired writings of the apostles and others whose names the books bear. Thus arose the New Testament canon.

3. The books called "Homologoumena" and "Antilegomena."

In the study of canonicity a word or two must be said regarding these terms, and what is meant by them.

At the time of the formation of the New Testament canon twenty out of the twenty-seven books were readily and universally accepted as genuine, and therefore called "Homologoumena" (*i.e.* acknowledged). These twenty books were the four Gospels, the Acts, the epistles of Paul (except that to the Hebrews), and the first epistles of John and Peter. The other seven books--Hebrews, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude, James, Revelation--were disputed for a time by particular churches, and were therefore styled "Antilegomena" (or disputed).

The question at issue with regard to the books called "Antilegomena," was not so much that of the canonicity of the writings, as whether they were really written by the men who were called their authors. Hebrews bore no name of its author, and differed in style from the acknowledged Pauline epistles; 2 Peter differed in style from 1 Peter; James and Jude styled themselves "servants," and not "apostles"; the writer of 2 and 3 John called himself an "elder" or "presbyter," and not an "apostle"; Jude recorded apocryphal stories. For these reasons these books were not at once allowed their place in the canon. After a deliberate examination, however, they were at last received as genuine, the very delay proving the close scrutiny which their claims had undergone. At the beginning of the fourth century they were received by most of the churches, and at the end of that century they were received by all.

4. The Apocryphal Books.

These books derive their name from a Greek word, *apokruphos*, which means "*hidden*." They are so called because they are,--(1) hidden; (2) of unknown authority; (3) spurious. They were not recognized as inspired books by the Jews, who regarded them, however as having high authority, and held them in high esteem as being a valuable history of their nation. Although they were carefully distinguished from the canonical Scriptures, their use was not only allowed, but many of them are quoted in Talmudical writings. They were given a place by themselves in the sacred volume, but with the distinct statement that they were not to be regarded as of equal authority

with the books of the canon, their position being between the Old and New Testaments. We find them in some Bibles to-day--especially in Roman Catholic Bibles, since they are regarded by the roman church as inspired books.

The Apocrypha contains fourteen books, namely, 1 and 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 and 2 Maccabees. it is true that by some of the fathers of the Christian church a few of these books have been quoted as canonical, but they were not looked on in this light; nor were their titles included in any list of canonical writings during the first four centuries after the birth of our Lord. It was not, indeed, until the Council of Trent, in 1545, that they were definitely declared to be an integral portion of Holy Scripture as acknowledged by the Romish church. "Philo," says Angus, "never quotes them as he does the sacred Scriptures; and Josephus expressly excludes them. The Jewish church never received them as part of the canon, and they are never quoted either by our Lord or by His apostles; a fact the more striking as St. Paul twice quotes heathen poets. It is remarkable, too, that the last inspired prophet closes his predictions by recommending to his countrymen the books of Moses, and intimates that no other messenger is to be expected by them till the coming of the second Elijah (Mal. 4:4-6) * * * Internal evidence, moreover, is against their inspiration. Divine authority is claimed by none of the writers, and by some it is virtually disowned (2 Mac. 2:23; 15:38). The books contain statements at variance with history (Baruch 1:2, compared with Jer. 43:6,7), self-contradictory, and opposed to the doctrines and precepts of Scripture."

For what, then, can the Apocryphal books be esteemed useful? In the Church of England some parts of them are read "for example of life and instruction of manners, but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine." By no Protestant church are these writings held to be the rule of faith, and contrasted with the canonical books, they are utterly without authority. From a historical point of view they are of value in showing the condition of the Jewish people, and relating certain events that intervene between the closing of the Old Testament and the opening of the Christian era.

These facts sufficiently indicate the course of the argument by which the canonicity of the sacred Scriptures is proved. Let it be proven that these books were written by the men whose names they bear, and that these men wrote under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, and the canonicity of the Bible is a settled fact. We have, therefore, a right to believe that we have in our Bible a rule of faith and life--yea, the supreme and ultimate rule--by which we may govern our lives in order that they may be in accordance with the revealed will of God.

Getting Acquainted with the Bible

by Martin Hegland

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ITS ORIGIN

An abundance of evidence indicates that the various books of the Old Testament were written at different times throughout a period of about a thousand years prior to 400 B.C. in the case of the New Testament the books were written from about 50 A.D. to 100 A.D.

The writers of the books of the Bible were, of course, human beings. But it has always been the historic Christian belief that they wrote under an influence of the Holy Spirit which has been called "Inspiration."

This fact of inspiration makes the Bible qualitatively different from all other books in the world. It is different not merely in degree but in kind. It stands in a class by itself, unique and unparalleled. It is in very truth the Word of God.

HOW THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE WERE SELECTED

There were many other books in Bible lands than those we find in our present Bible. This was true both in the Old and the New Testament times. How did it come about that just the books that we have were included in the Bible and not others?

The answer in brief is that the selection was made by the spiritual consciousness of godly people. In order to appreciate what this statement means, let us note the activity of the Holy Spirit in the affairs of men. Both Scripture and experience make it abundantly clear that in the lives that are surrendered to God there is definite light and guidance that come from the Holy Spirit. Men become wondrously wise spiritually when they permit Him to instruct them. Jesus spoke of this to His disciples when He assured them of the Spirit's help whenever they came into a difficult situation: "The Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what ye ought to say" (Luke 12:12). And on another occasion he told them that the Holy Spirit "shall guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

Many of us have been repeatedly amazed at the spiritual understanding and insight of people who may have had but a meager general education, but who have been in attendance in the school of the Holy Spirit.

This divinely guided consciousness of godly people in Bible times enabled them to judge what was spiritually true and what was false in the books that circulated among them and to detect the evidences of inspiration. There were, to be sure, certain specific standards set up as time went on, such as authorship, time of writing, language used, and the like. But the main fact to bear in mind is that as a result of the operation of the spiritual judgments of godly people there emerged out of the mass of writings certain books which by common agreement were regarded as divinely inspired. These books we call the Canon or the Canonical Books. "Canon" is a Greek word which means a rule or measuring line. A Canonical book, therefore, is one that conforms to the "Canon," that is, passes the test.

There is much evidence to indicate that the Canon of the Old Testament was fixed by the about the year 400 B.C. largely as a result of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah and a council of Jews known as the Great Synagogue, which met after the return from the Babylonian captivity. Long before that time, however, many of the books we now have in the Old Testament had been agreed upon as inspired.

In the case of the New Testament the fixing of the Canon was done mainly at the council at Carthage in 387 A.D., although the evidence points to the selection of the books as early as about the year 100 A.D.

Certain books known as Apocryphal Books were by some regarded as on a par with the Canonical books, but they were not admitted to the Canon by those who were in the best position to pass on their merits.

HOW THE BOOKS WERE TRANSMITTED

There are no original manuscripts of any of the Bible books known to be in existence today. Perhaps God's wisdom is evident in this, for if any of them did exist, some people might be tempted to worship them as idols.

Humanly speaking, the absence of any originals or even of the earliest copies is explainable on the ground of the perishableness of the materials and the Jewish custom not to tolerate any soiled or worn-out copies of their Scriptures. These were either burned or buried.

Since there were no printing presses in Bible times, the various books had to be reproduced by hand. They were written on baked clay tablets, on parchment (sheepskin), on paper made of the papyrus reed, and later on vellum (calfskin). The copying was done with extreme and conscientious care.

In spite of the extreme care exercised in copying the Bible books, minor errors inevitably crept in through the course of the centuries. Hence there arose what are known as *variations* in the manuscripts. A great many of these have been listed, but scholars are of the opinion that not a single variation vitally affects any basic Christian truth.

In order to determine as nearly as possible what the original text was, a vast amount of scholarship has been expended in the study of old manuscripts, early translations, quotations from and references to the Bible in other ancient writings.

As a result of able, extensive, and painstaking textual scholarship it may be confidently affirmed that we possess today the Bible books essentially as they came from the inspired writers.

*“In studying elementary law I found the old authors frequently quoting the **Scriptures** . . . as **authority** for many of the great principles of common law. This excited my curiosity so much that I went and purchased a Bible, the first I had ever owned.”*

- Charles G. Finney

The Authority of Scripture

by Leland M. Haines

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Christ and the Written Word

Today we know of no writings of Jesus. The only evidence there is that He ever wrote anything is found in the story in John 8:1-11, where he wrote a few words on the ground with His finger. Since this is true, how can His Word be identified with the Scriptures, and particularly with the twenty-seven-book-New-Testament canon? At first sight it might appear that to attempt to construct a relation between the historical events and the New Testament canon is an *a posteriori* matter. The first person to list the twenty-seven books now canonized into the New Testament was Athanasius (c. 293-373), a bishop of Alexandria. And it was not until the fifth century that disputes about what books compose the canon generally ceased. Thus it would appear that the New Testament canonization took place *after* the historical redemptive events and therefore should be judged as a matter of church history, not a part of the events. This is true. The formation of the canon as a closed collection of twenty-seven books belongs to church history. Yet there is another point to be considered; that is, what makes the twenty-seven New Testament books the Word of God revealed to man and thus the authority in religious areas? The answer to this lies in the historical events and in the attitude of the early church toward the twenty-seven books. Let us explore this further.

Christ and the Apostles

Jesus Christ established the means by which His Word would be communicated to distant areas and in future times. he called the apostles to follow Him and "come away" from their other interests and learn from Him. These apostles were commissioned to preach and were given "power against unclean spirits..., to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease, " or to share in some of the things Christ Himself did (Matt. 10, Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-16). Christ promised them help in doing this after he would leave the earth. He promised a "Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name; he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (John 14:26, ASV). This promise is most significant. It promised the apostles guidance in their teaching and writing, to enable them to recall and teach all things He had taught them. This promise was again made before His ascension (Acts 1:8).

The apostles knew of this "power of attorney" to represent Christ and of the Holy Spirit's guidance in carrying out the task. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13). To the Corinthians he wrote that, "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God... And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:12-13, RSV). Since he received it from Christ, he could tell his readers to "take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37, also 7:10, ASV), or that "if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him; that he may be

ashamed: (2 Thess. 3:14). Paul also gave many other indications that he received his message from Christ (Gal. 1:12, Eph. 3:3, 1 Cor. 15:8, Acts 9:3-6), and that "it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). The writer of Hebrews also knew of the same Holy Spirit guidance of the apostles; "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation" which, having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will" (Heb. 2:3-4, ASV). John also knew of the same Holy Spirit guidance; he said, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John; who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1-2, ASV; 1:10-11, 19; 2:1ff; 4:2; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5). These Scriptures show that they apostles knew of the guidance that enabled them to write with Christ's authority. This was the method Christ established to communicate His Word to distant areas and to future times.

The Apostles and Oral Tradition

There are basically two different forms of communication, oral and written. The apostles used both in exercising their "power of attorney" to present Christ's Word. The oral form is by far the earliest form used and dates back to their first commission to "preach" (Matt. 10, Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-16). Apostolic preaching was for many years the only form used and held a place of high importance throughout the Apostolic era. Since this such an important form of communication, authorized by Christ for use by the apostles, we should understand it and be acquainted with the New Testament concept of it.

In the New Testament there are many references to this oral form. Luke wrote that his writings "were delivered . . . unto us (Luke and his contemporaries) which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (Luke 1:1-4). Jude also wrote that when he was eager 'to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Paul wrote, "stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (2 Thess. 2:15).

The Apostles and the Written Word

As time passed, the apostles increasingly put their communications into a written form. This can be concluded from the Scriptures cited in the last section, in which there is evidence of an increase in the use writing as the church spread. This was an expected and natural development. As the apostles opened work in more distant areas, they could keep in contact with churches by writing. Also it was inevitable that the apostles would die one by one. These two factors made the certainty of the apostles' oral traditions doubtful, thus placing greater importance on the written word. The written word quickly received a place of high significance. It was placed on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul's letters were read in church gatherings on the same level as Old Testament Scriptures (1 Thess. 5:27, Col. 4:16). Peter classed Paul's letter

with the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:15). John presupposed that his Book of the Revelation would be read as other Scriptures (Rev. 1:3).

It is clear from the above that the written word was given great significance, and as time passed it was given greater priority over the oral form of transmission. Actually the written word was a fixation of the oral form.

The New Testament Canon

Thus far we have established a relationship between the apostles' written word and Christ's historical redemptive events. The question now arising is, "How did the apostles' writings come together to form the New Testament canon--the collection of books which are received as genuine and inspired Holy Scripture?" The answer to this question is simple. The Christians and the church simply acknowledged the apostles' authority and accepted their writings, and writings of those intimately associated with them (as Mark and Luke), as part of the Holy Scripture. The church did not put together a canon that made books authoritative because they were included in it. The church only acknowledged what was given by the apostles, and included books in the canon because of this apostolical authority. They never regarded these books as anything else than canonical.

The actual canonization process took a long time. At first each of the apostle/s writings were acknowledged individually as authoritative. There was no canon of them that gave them authority because they were in it. But as time passed the need for a canon increased. False teachers arose and questioned the authority of certain of the writings that did not agree with their ideas. This forced the Christian brotherhood to gather together the individual apostle/s writings and assemble them into a canon. The church gathered together the writings that were accepted as the apostles' from the very beginning. This was no real problem for the church since she as a whole generally acknowledged the same writings. The writings that were questioned were small in number and then generally questioned only in late times by obviously false teachers and in small local areas.

Today we accept the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as authoritative and can do so without the slightest doubt. We depend on the early Christians' decisions that each of the twenty-seven books has apostolic authorship. We do this since there were in a much better position to judge. The reason for this lies in the concept of apostolicity, which limits it to a certain place and time. Those at the correct place and time, the recipients of each writing, are in the best position to say where the writings came from. Thus we accept their decision and can do so with confidence since the Holy Spirit was at work guiding the decision.

In summary, the New Testament is our authority in religious matters because it is tied to the historical redemptive events. Christ established the means by which it was written. He called apostles to give His Word and gave the Holy Spirit as a guide. The early Christians accepted their word as Christ's Word because of this call. The early church gathered together the apostles' writings, and by acknowledging their authority from Christ, completed the last step in the recording of the final revelation of God to man, the New Testament.

Present-Day Scriptures

It is clear that Christ and the Apostles treated Scripture as authoritative and as constituting truth. The question that now needs answering is, "Are the Scriptures we possess today worthy to be treated as Christ treated them?" We know that through the historical redemptive events Scripture was "breathed of God." This applies to the originals and not to copies of them. The original was made by men moved by the Holy Spirit. The copies were made by ordinary men. But does this fact mean a great loss to us? Are our present-day copies so poor that they are not trustworthy? When one realizes that God revealed His plan of redemption to men through historical events, and that we know about these events only through Scripture, one will also realize that these Scriptures must be trustworthy. Otherwise we would not know of His plan of redemption. It is beyond one's imagination that an infallible and loving God would let His plan of redemption be lost through untrustworthy copies of the Scriptures. Also, when one realizes that God prevented errors from entering the originals by guiding the writers by the Holy Spirit, one will realize that God would also have prevented significant errors from entering through copying.

One's confidence in our Scriptures is also supported by the attitude of Christ and the Apostles toward them. They did not hesitate to trust the Old Testament Scriptures. These too were not originals. If they had faith in the adequacy of their copies and never questioned them, we should have even more faith in our New Testament copies as being trustworthy.

Many of the copies we possess are bound to contain errors due to the numerous copyings and recopyings they have gone through. Although the copying process did introduce a few errors, it also increased the means for finding errors. By careful study and comparison of the many old manuscripts, it is possible to obtain a sound proximity of the originals. The errors that were introduced here and there in some of the copies are found by comparing the many manuscripts, making it possible to approximate the original. This approximation of the original can be considered as inerrant and infallible; that is, it can be held as a reliable authority (never deceiving or misleading) and is free from error (always giving the thought of the original). This does not necessarily mean that we have a slavish verbatim copy of the original down to every small word. There might be trifling variations in wording. But these are so minor that there is no doubt about the authors' thoughts not being known to us, and in most cases there is little doubt about now knowing the words they used to communicate the thoughts.

It is not within the realm of this paper to discuss the alleged discrepancies in Scripture. But some comments will be made. First, it should be said that many of the alleged discrepancies are the result of an eager search for them and from a conviction that they exist. They are not necessarily the result of an honest and scientific inquiry. Too often the desire to find discrepancies has resulted in passages being cited as discrepancies when they could be harmonized. Scientific methods do not treat a difficulty as an example of a discrepancy immediately, without seriously studying first to see if it can be reasonably and naturally explained. This does not mean that all apparent discrepancies can be harmonized. But this is not serious. In all probability, if more was known about the events surrounding such difficulties, we could readily understand them. Our difficulties are often the result of a lack of knowledge. Actually it is difficult to prove a discrepancy. Because if any reasonable explanation can be found, a discrepancy can not necessarily be claimed.

Questions have been raised about the above view. Some say it should be admitted that discrepancies exist. But before this is admitted, one should examine the implications of such a move. The implication would be that God has presented a faulty revelation of His plan of salvation, but how could an all-knowing God "breathe" words that contain errors or faulty information? Man could do it, but not God. Also, if God allowed errors to arise in Scripture, can we trust any part of it? Logic would say that if errors exist in minor points, the major points could not be trusted. In light of these considerations one may well take the view point that there are no errors in our Scriptures. This can be done honestly. As said before, if alleged errors are closely examined, most can be explained. The few which cannot in all probability could, if all the details surrounding the events were known. It is honest to admit we lack understanding rather than hastily to proclaim that errors exist.

God's Word Written

by J. C. Wenger

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We may begin this discussion by reminding ourselves that it is true, both that the Bible *contains* God's Word, and also, because of its Holy Spirit inspiration, that it *is* God's Word. And since the entire corpus of Scripture may be recognized as God's Word, there is an ultimate unity to the Book which is dependent upon God Himself. In other words, *the canons of the Old and New Testament Scriptures are a divine intention*. It is agreed on all hands--by both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars--that when Christ and the apostles refer to the Scriptures they mean the twenty-four books of the Jewish canon, our thirty-nine books. And there is no dispute within Catholic or Protestant circles on the twenty-seven New Testament books. The authority of these New Testament books--just like the twenty-four of the Old--does not rest on ecclesiastical decree or pronouncement. They are in the canon of the church because they were inspired; they are not inspired because of any conciliar action. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament have an authority which the church recognized as *the voice of God*. This voice was heard basically in *apostolic* books, either written or dictated by apostles, or resting on their witness. (Thus Mark wrote down the preaching of Peter, while Paul was Luke's spiritual father.) *The ancient Christian Church had a lively tradition as to which books could be depended on to present apostolic truth*. (A sort of skeleton canon emerged first, evidently within the second century, while a number of the smaller books were added to the canon later. As early as A.D. 367 Athanasius listed our twenty-seven New Testament books and designated them as canonical.)

Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible

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But what evidence do we have of how the New Testament was formulated? We have sufficient to be able to construct a picture of the position at the close of the 2nd century. By this time our four Gospels, and no others, were in official use. Irenaeus, an early-church father who had contacts with both eastern and western churches, leaves us in no doubt about the 'fourfold' Gospels. Tertullian and other church fathers of the same time confirm this. Much spurious literature circulated (some of it the work of heretics) and this included 'Gospels'. But there is no evidence that any Gospel other than Matthew, Mark, Luke and John was received as Scripture within the orthodox church. By the end of the 2nd century the four Gospels and Acts were indisputably 'accepted' writings. There is also no doubt that the thirteen epistles of Paul were by this time accepted on the same level as the Gospels.

There is less evidence about the remaining books apart from 1 Peter and 1 John. Indeed the history of the canon in the 3rd and 4th centuries revolves around the position of these remaining books. The book of Revelation was certainly used in the 2nd century, but it is not until the 3rd century that evidence for its use becomes widespread. The Epistle to the Hebrews was known and used at an early date (it is quoted by Clement of Rome, in about AD 95), but there was later more reluctance to receive it in the west than in the east. Origen did not believe it was written by Paul, but he did not reject it as an apostolic writing. It was not until the 4th century that it was generally received in the western church. Many churches regarded it as Paul's, but some church fathers (Augustine among them) adopted the same view as Origen. In modern times this view has been almost universally accepted.

The 'general' epistles--2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James and Jude--encountered resistance in some of the churches, but no reason is given. It would seem to have been doubt about the suitability of their contents, rather than doubt about their origin. The choice of 'approved' books was largely influenced by their suitability for public reading in church, and it is easy to see why these short letters were not much used for this purpose.

So far nothing has been said about church councils. The reason is that no church council made any pronouncement about the canon until longer after it had been established and was in use in the individual churches. The books listed by the Council of Laodicea (AD 363) and the similar list agreed at the council at Carthage (AD 397) are identical with our New Testament, except that the former omitted the book of Revelation. It is clear that the New Testament canon was not the result of ecclesiastical pronouncements, but grew in accordance with the needs of the church. The major factor governing selection was 'apostolicity'--the conviction that the books represented the position of the apostolic age.

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Early Christians and the Old Testament

Christ's example. Jesus frequently quoted from the Old Testament as the Word of God, even to the detail of every "jot or...tittle," every letter or stroke (Matt. 5:18). Jesus never disagreed with any part of the Holy Scripture, although He did take issue with some men's incorrect interpretations of it and additions to it. He always treated the Scripture word for word, never doubting, for example, that there was truly an Adam and an Eve or that God had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone.

The first Christians followed Christ's example and used the Old Testament with reverence. The multiplying Christian churches continued to read and study the Scriptures just as the Jews in the synagogues did. The earliest Christians, of course, were Jews who had accepted Jesus' claim to be the Savior of whom the Old Testament spoke.

Need for a new witness. By itself, however, the Old Testament said only that the Savior *would* come, not that He *had* come. The world needed a permanent, completely trustworthy testament (witness) to the actual events of the birth, life, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, especially as the eyewitnesses passed from the scene.

Writing the Books of the New Testament

Date and author. By about A.D. 100, all 27 books of the New Testament had been written, thus meeting the need for a permanent record of the gospel. Either Apostles or men who had an extremely close relationship to an Apostle wrote the books of the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fills all believers, but the Apostles received unique power to carry out their assignment from Jesus. The Holy Spirit taught them all things, and caused them to remember all that Jesus had taught them (John 16:12-15). Thus, books that measured up as works of the Apostles were regarded as the very Word of God, for they established a permanent connection between Christians of all ages and the Apostles, setting a standard for Christian belief and practice. Many writings of men who lived during the time of the Apostles contain references or quotations from books of the New Testament.

The language used. The original books of the New Testament were most likely written in Greek. The New Testament employed *koine*, the most common form of the Greek language. Koine was spoken as a second language throughout most of the Roman Empire. Translations into other languages also appeared, but because so many people in the first century A.D. understood Greek, the New Testament books in their original language immediately enjoyed a vast circulation.

By the end of the second century, and possibly by A.D. 125 or even earlier, most Christians had accepted the books of the New Testament as the Word of God.

The New Testament as the Foundation for Christianity

With the New Testament, Christians had a sure and lasting link to Christ through the Apostles, a definite and solid basis for their beliefs and way of life. They had the written Word of God for order and direction in living and worshiping together. With the New Testament joined to the Old, Christians had the Bible, a book written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit in every word they wrote. Through the ages, true Christians have shared the conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is the rule of faith and practice for all believers.

What are the 66 books of the Bible?

Old Testament		New Testament	
Genesis	Ecclesiastes	Matthew	1 Peter
Exodus	Song of Solomon	Mark	2 Peter
Leviticus	Isaiah	Luke	1 John
Numbers	Jeremiah	John	2 John
Deuteronomy	Lamentations	Acts	3 John
Joshua	Ezekiel	Romans	Jude
Judges	Daniel	1 Corinthians	Revelation
Ruth	Hosea	2 Corinthians	
1 Samuel	Joel	Galatians	
2 Samuel	Amos	Ephesians	
1 Kings	Obadiah	Philippians	
2 Kings	Jonah	Colossians	
1 Chronicles	Micah	1 Thessalonians	
2 Chronicles	Nahum	2 Thessalonians	
Ezra	Habakkuk	1 Timothy	
Nehemiah	Zephaniah	2 Timothy	
Esther	Haggai	Titus	
Job	Zechariah	Philemon	
Psalms	Malachi	Hebrews	
Proverbs		James	

When was the Bible written?

The books of the Old Testament, which span from the creation of the universe to about 400BC, was written over the course of many hundreds of years. Much of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), if in fact written by Moses, can be dated around the latter half of the fifteenth century BC. The last book of the Old Testament, the minor prophet Malachi, is dated in the late fifth century BC, along with Ezra and Nehemiah.

The 27 books of the New Testament were written in a much shorter span of time. The earliest is probably the letter to the Galatians, written by Paul in the late 40s or early 50s AD. The first gospel, most likely Mark, is dated in the 50s or early 60s AD (though some place it just before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD). The last book of the Bible, Revelation, was most likely written around 95AD.

Who wrote the Bible?

Many men (and women, perhaps?) wrote the various books of the Bible (66 in the Protestant canon) over the course of many hundreds of years. These people were leaders (Moses, Paul), prophets (Jeremiah, Isaiah, John), historians (the author(s) of Joshua, Judges, Kings, Chronicles), poets (David and other authors of the Psalms) and apostles (Matthew, Mark, John). The authorship of most books is known within a reasonable doubt, though the authorship of a few is unknown or in dispute.

While Paul has been traditionally held to be the author of the letter to the Hebrews, the consensus of scholars is now that he did not. It was likely written by another follower of Jesus' teaching - Barnabas or Apollos have been suggested, among others. The Mosaic authorship of most of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) is also widely disputed.

As for the four canonized gospels, their authorship is fairly well established and not often disputed. Two were written by direct apostles of Christ - Matthew (Levi) and John (son of Zebedee). Mark was probably written by Paul and Barnabas' traveling companion and Peter's friend. Luke was likely written by Paul's Gentile companion, the doctor (cf. Colossians 4:14).

The letters of Paul include Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon, though some are more disputed than others.

In what language was the Bible written?

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, while the New Testament was composed in the common ("Koine") Greek of the first century. Some portions of the Bible were written in Aramaic.

Does the Bible have any errors or mistakes?

"Inerrancy," the doctrine that the Bible is free of any error (at least in the original languages), is always an issue of dispute among Christians. I believe that it is not necessary to hold blindly to the fundamentalist doctrine of inerrancy, twisting and turning the possible interpretation of a verse to try and make it agree with another. Plenty of minor errors exist in the Bible, from the age of Saul when he became king of Israel (missing from the original Hebrew in 1 Samuel 13:1) to the order of Jesus' deeds (jumbled in the four gospels). Many so-called "contradictions" asserted by those who are unfamiliar with the Bible are simply taken out of context, but errors are there.

There is no reason to toil day and night in attempts to reconcile every contradiction in the 66 books of the Bible. It was written, edited and copied (and eventually translated) by fallible men and women. Just as God uses our imperfection to further His will, so does He use an imperfect collection of writings as His inspired word.

Even Jesus Christ took on the limits of human form to reconcile the world to God. This is the gospel message itself: that God lowered Himself to our level, and thereby made His plan for salvation complete (cf. Philippians 2:5-11). In the same way, the written testimony of that gospel need not be textually perfect.

So-called "gospel harmonies," then (which collect all four gospels into one and attempt to resolve the conflicts between them), are contrary to each of the four gospels alone. These efforts produce a book that no one in the New Testament era wrote, and which no one in the New Testament era read. Each book has its own theological agenda, which is terribly confused by attempts to "correct" God's Word.

How were the books of the Bible chosen (canonized)?

The books of our New Testament, as well as a few that weren't included in the canon, were circulated between Christian churches for the first few centuries of Christianity. Many came to be regarded as authoritative, as 'scripture' on the same level as Jewish scripture (our Old Testament). Irenaeus listed the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) as scripture early in the second century. St. Athanasius was the first to list our 27 New Testament books together, in his Paschal letter of 367 AD.

Though it should be remembered that the books of the New Testament were widely considered "scripture" for hundreds of years before the canon was determined, "official" canonization did not occur until the latter part of the fourth century AD. Specific books were chosen and others were discarded for the Christian scriptures at the Council of Carthage (~397 AD). (The Council of Laodicea had also met regarding the issue of canonization around 363 AD - it's list of 26 New Testament books excluded Revelation.) The Council likely had a strict set of criteria that a gospel, letter or other book had to meet before it could be considered for canonization. A book had to have:

- 1) **Apostolic authority** - To be included in the canon of the New Testament, a book had to have been either written or sponsored by one of the apostles. Luke, for example, was not one of the twelve, but a companion of Paul (considered an apostle on par with the twelve, of course) who researched the life of Jesus. Mark, similarly, was a student of Peter - so that the gospel that bears his name is often referred to as Peter's account.
- 2) **Orthodoxy** - A book must not teach something contrary to what the church had accepted as the teachings of Christ. (A tenet of Gnosticism, for example, is that salvation requires "secret knowledge" ['Gnosticism' is derived from the Greek 'gnosis,' meaning knowledge]. This contradicts the orthodoxy of both Jesus and Paul, who taught salvation through the repentance of sins and faith in Christ. Gnostic texts, such as the Gospel of Thomas, would have been rejected for at least this reason.)
- 3) **Church circulation** - The book must have been in use by the the Christian churches scattered throughout Palestine, Asia Minor and the rest of the Roman world. If it hadn't been in circulation among Christians, the Council would obviously see no need to regard it as Christian scripture.

In addition to books which were eventually discarded from the canon, many books in our Bible today were in dispute: the Letter to the Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation were contested, but finally accepted.

As for the Christian Old Testament, the Church has traditionally used the Alexandrian list of books, which include the 18 books of the Apocrypha. At the time of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, reformers looked to the traditional (and shorter, as it does not include the Apocrypha) Jewish list as authoritative.

When was the Bible first translated into English?

William Tyndale made the first translation from the original languages in his 1526 New Testament. He had completed about half of his translation of the Old Testament when he was captured and imprisoned. He was tried for

heresy (his efforts to translate Scripture into a language other than Latin were not looked upon favorably by the Roman Catholic Church), and finally strangled and then burned at the stake on October 6, 1536.

Tyndale's English version was predated by John Wycliffe's, who translated the Bible from Jerome's Latin translation (the Vulgate) in the fourteenth century.

Don't different Christians have entirely different books in their Bibles?

The three main Christian groups - Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant - each have their own accepted canon of books of the Bible. Protestants regard the 39 traditional books of the Old Testament (excluding the Apocrypha) and 27 books of the New Testament (four gospel accounts, 21 letters, John's Revelation and the Acts of the Apostles) as authoritative.

Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox embrace the same 27 books of the New Testament, but also retain the Old Testament Apocrypha - a collection of writings composed mostly during the time between the Old and New Testaments (approximately 400BC to the first century AD, with the exception of 2 Esdras, which is dated near the end of the first century). In denying the inspiration of the Apocrypha, Protestant Reformers proclaimed a return to the original Hebrew collection of 39 books, while Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox reaffirmed the Alexandrian collection that includes the Apocrypha. Click [here](#) to read more about the Apocrypha.

What is the Septuagint (LXX)?

The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, produced in Alexandria, Egypt, around 250BC (at least the first five books, that is - the rest of the Old Testament and a few noncanonical books were completed some time before the first century AD). From the Latin for "70," the Septuagint is said to have been produced by 72 scholars in 72 days on the island of Pharos. Legend has it that these scholars were locked away in different rooms, and at the end of the 72nd day they had each produced an identical copy of the Torah (Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament). The Septuagint is abbreviated "LXX," the Roman numeral 70.

Many Jews lived outside of Palestine and no longer spoke Hebrew, so the Septuagint became the widely used Bible of choice. It also had profound influences on early Christianity, since many in the Greek-speaking first century Palestine (including the first Christians) read it as their Bible.

What is the Apocrypha? Why do only some Bibles contain it?

The "Apocrypha" (meaning "false," though that term doesn't do justice to the way many Christians perceive the books) is a collection of 18 books (some lists include 15 or 16, excluding 3 and 4 Maccabees) composed mostly during the intertestamental period (after the prophet Nehemiah in the fifth century BC and before the birth of Christ). They contain a variety of literature, from historical accounts of the Maccabean revolution under the leadership of Judas the Hammerer to fantastic tales of Old Testament heroes.

These books appear interspersed with the latter half of the Old Testament in many English translations - the New American Bible, and some editions of the King James and New Revised Standard, for example. While Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians regard the books as inspired, following the larger Alexandrian list of Old Testament books, Protestants do not. They side with the original Hebrew Bible, which limits the list to 39 books. While of great historical and literary value, the books are not deemed inspired by God and thus not on par with Scripture.

The books of the Apocrypha are: *First Esdras, Fourth Ezra, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, The Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Azariah, Daniel and Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, The Prayer of Manasseh, First Maccabees, Second Maccabees, Third Maccabees, Fourth Maccabees* and *Psalm 151*. They can be viewed online at Northwest Nazarene College's [Noncanonical Homepage](#).

Did Martin Luther and the Protestants throw out some books of the Bible at the Reformation?

Many point to Martin Luther's nailing of his *95 Theses* on the door of the church at Wittenburg as the start of the Protestant Reformation. Luther fiercely argued against the Catholic Church's practice of selling indulgences, as well as its teaching of earning salvation by good deeds. One of his fiercest opponents in the Church was John Eck, who met with Luther for a formal debate in Leipzig in July, 1519. Luther argued against the infallibility of the Pope and of Church tradition, claiming that truth came from scripture alone ("*sola scriptura*").

But during a debate over the issue of baptism for the dead, Eck brought up Christian scripture: 2 Maccabees 12:39-46, in which Judas Maccabeus makes atonement for his fallen comrades. Luther was forced to deny the scriptural authority of the book, and came to claim that all of the Apocrypha, though "useful and good to read," was not inspired scripture.

For this and other reasons, the Protestant reformers shook off the Church's tradition of accepting the 18 books of the Apocrypha as canonical. They preferred the shorter list of the 39 books in the Hebrew Bible, and limited their Old Testament to that. In one sense, then, these books were "removed" from the Christian Bible. And in another sense, Protestants simply returned to the Hebrew collection, arguing that these books never should have been included in the Christian Bible to start with.

When did the Catholic Church start reading the Bible in English in the mass?

The mass has been conducted in Latin for many hundreds of years, but the Liturgical Movement of the twentieth century has led to the Roman Catholic Church's allowing of bishops to perform the mass in the language of the local people. The official decree came at the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

Christianity history & the modern Bible? Who decided what went into it and what was left out and how it was translated?

Where did we get the modern Bible? Who decided what went into it and what was left out? Why aren't all the Jewish texts included in the Christian Bible? The history of the canonization of Scripture and its translation to English is a fascinating look at the formation of our modern Bible.

The Christian Bible is not really one book at all, but a collection of books written over thousands of years. Many different authors contributed to the Bible and the process of selecting what books went into it is called the canonization of Scripture.

Canon comes from a Greek word meaning measure or rod. The process of canonization involved deciding what books measured up to a set standard. Certain selection criteria were used, and the criteria are the canon, or measure.

Canonization didn't happen all at one time or by one committee. The acceptance of the Bible texts used by Christians started with the Old Testament. Our Old Testament comes from the Jewish canon of Scripture, which by the time of Jesus was trimmed down to three sections: The Torah, The Prophets and The Writings.

The Torah consists of the five Books of the Laws of Moses. These are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Tradition says that God gave Moses the information contained in these books on Mount Sinai.

The Prophets consists of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel (which are one book in the Jewish Scripture), 1&2 Kings (also one book in the Jewish Scripture), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Hosea through Malachi are called the Book of the Twelve and are combined into one scroll.

The Writings consist of 1&2 Chronicles (one book in the Jewish texts), Ezra and Nehemiah (one book in the Jewish text), Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Daniel.

Earlier canons included books that are now called the Deuterocanonical books. These were trimmed from the Jewish canon of Scripture during the time of Ezra (around 450 B.C.). These books are now part of the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles and are called the Apocrypha.

Since the books of The Torah, The Prophets and The Writings were canonized Jewish Scripture during the time of Jesus, these are the texts that have been used in the Christian Bible and make up the Old Testament.

