

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

How We Got the Bible – Canonicity
2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21

FOR REVIEW

Let's review just a little bit where we have been in our study "All About the Bible." This study is primarily concerned with how we got the Bible, is it reliable and how to get the most out of it. We began our study by look at what the Bible says about the itself. You know... the claims that the Bible makes about itself. Our two key text for what the Bible claims about itself and the key texts for our study are:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

"¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

2 Peter 1:19-21

"¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." – 2 Peter 1:19-21 (NIV)

Observation: Based on these two verses we must affirm that at some point our faith in the claims of the Bible must be relied upon for the ultimate acceptance and believe in the Bible as the Word of God. The Bible claim it and therefore we must choose to either believe it by faith and place the full force of our being on that claim or reject it. From this point the study of how we got the Bible and how it has been preserved by God for us becomes based solely on our understanding of what the Bible says about itself and the external evidences that point to and reinforce those claims. A major point to understand

*in a study like this is that it may not answer all your questions, may leave you feeling a bit vulnerable about the reliability of the Bible, and may leave you with more questions. That is why faith must be our beginning place in accepting the Bible, God's Word in what it claims for itself. **With that said there is more external evidence that points to the Bible's claims about itself, its reliability and trustworthiness and authenticity, and the fact that it is the Word of God as it claims... there is more evidence of these things than there is for any other piece of literature or sacred writing every produced by man.***

So up to this point in our study we have looked at God's revelation and inspiration, and we have examined how ancient man transmitted what God revealed and inspired him to write down for us. This study will take us a step further into our examination of how the Bible came to us by looking into the subject of "canonicity" or better, how the Bible came to be collected into the 66 books that define our Bible today. This study will help to perhaps answer some of our questions regarding the Bible like the following:

Questions Surrounding Canonicity:

- 1. How do we know that the 66 books we have in our Bible are reliable and truly the word of God?**
- 2. Could there any other books that we haven't discovered that should be included in the Bible?**
- 3. Why are there some ancient manuscripts, books and texts that are not included in our Bible, but are included in the Bibles of others Christian groups (i.e. the Apocrypha and Deuterocanonical and Pseudepigraphical books)?**

While this study may not fully develop the full answer to these questions, it may help you to begin to formulate how one may arrive at that answer. The study of "canonicity" and how we came to the canon of Scripture we now call our Bible is a fascinating study and one that will bolster and embolden the foundational faith of God's Word for all believers.

WHAT IS THE CANON OF THE BIBLE AND HOW DID WE GET IT?

2 Important Definitions of the Word "Canon":

- 1. The word "canon" – "reed or measurement"** Our English word "canon" comes from the Greek word "kanon," meaning reed or measurement. The word "canon" comes from the rule of law that was used to determine if something (a book or writing in regard to the Scripture) measured up to a standard. **The very word for Scripture, "canon," is indicative of what we have in the 66 books of the Bible.*

These are the book that met the “measurement” for what qualified as Holy, inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God.

2. The word “canon” as it relates to the Bible - *“The ‘canon’ of Scripture is defined as the books of the Bible officially accepted as Holy Scripture.” It is important to note that the writings of Scripture were canonical at the moment they were written.* Scripture was Scripture when the pen touched the parchment. } This is very important because Christianity does not start by defining God, or Jesus Christ, or salvation. The basis of Christianity is found in the authority of Scripture. If we cannot identify what Scripture is, then we cannot properly distinguish any theological truth from error.

Those Who Played a Role in Defining the Canon:

1. **Original Authors** – Remember that the Bible was written by about forty authors over the course of 1,600 years, it was essential that a list be drawn up of the books which reflected the truth of God's message and were inspired by the Holy Spirit. *Observation: Why was it essential, do you think, that a list be drawn up which book were truly from God? So that we would have a standard, a measurement to know truth. At the very core... if we don't know which is from God and which is not we cannot know what to trust. Again, if we cannot identify what Scripture is, then we cannot properly distinguish any theological truth from error.*
2. **Trusted Religious Leaders** - Although each book was canon in God's eyes as it was written, the canon had to be identified by religious leaders as God did not give a list of books to include. Determining the canon was a process conducted first by Jewish rabbis and scholars and later by early Christians.
3. **God** - Ultimately, though, it was God who decided what books belonged in the biblical canon. Let me remind you of something I said earlier that is very important and fundamental... it is important to note that the writings of Scripture were canonical at the moment they were written. Scripture was Scripture when the pen touched the parchment. This is very important because Christianity does not start by defining God, or Jesus Christ, or salvation. The basis of Christianity is found in the authority of Scripture.

The Old Testament Canon... A Timeline:

1. **Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD** - The full canon of the Old Testament wasn't completed until after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but parts had been recognized far earlier.
2. **The Torah or Pentateuch** - The books of the law (also known as the Torah or Pentateuch—Genesis-Deuteronomy) were acknowledged as early as 2 Kings 22.

3. **Second Century BC** - The prophets were identified as Scripture by the end of the second century BC.
4. **Pharisees in Jamnia** - The Psalms were accepted, but the remaining books varied depending on Jewish sect. The rabbinical school of the Pharisees in Jamnia arrived at a final list of twenty-four books, which equate to the thirty-nine books of the Christian Old Testament, and all of the Psalms we have today in our Bible as canonical.
5. **Septuagint's Rejected Books** - Ten books interpreted in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) were rejected because of the strict guidelines for canon: books must have conformed to the Torah, and had to have been written in Palestine, in Hebrew, and not after the time of Ezra (about 400 BC).
6. **Catholic Bible's Rejected Books** - Although the Catholic Bible today includes the Apocrypha (which we will talk about later in this study), the vast majority of Hebrew scholars considered them to be “good historical and religious documents, but not on the same level as the inspired Hebrew Scriptures.”
7. **The Dead Sea Scrolls** - The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, have a few minor differences, but they are remarkably similar to the accepted Hebrew Scriptures we have today.

Primary Tests for Old Testament Canonicity: (not an list exhaustive of the standards used to determine canonicity, but perhaps the 4 most important criteria)

1. **Must conform to the Torah or Pentateuch** – The first five books of the Old Testament were one of the tests. A book or writing could not in any way or in any part be contradictory to the books of the law which were clearly from God. There were God's measure.
2. **Must have been written in Palestine** –
3. **Must be written originally in Hebrew** –
4. **Must be confirmed by God** - In part by the above

The New Testament Canon... A Timeline: The process for recognizing and collecting the books of the New Testament began in the first centuries of the Christian church. Very early on, some of the New Testament books were recognized as inspired.

1. **Paul** - Paul considered Luke's writings to be as authoritative as the Old Testament (1 Timothy 5:18; see also Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7).
2. **Peter** - Peter referred to Paul's writings as inspired Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16).
3. **Clement of Rome** - Clement of Rome mentioned at least eight New Testament books (A.D. 95).

4. **Ignatius of Antioch** - Ignatius of Antioch acknowledged about seven books (A.D. 115).
5. **Polycarp** - Polycarp, a disciple of John the apostle, acknowledged 15 books (A.D. 108).
6. **Irenaeus** - Later, Irenaeus mentioned 21 books (A.D. 185).
7. **Hippolytus (Hip-Poly-Tus)** - Hippolytus recognized 22 books (A.D. 170-235).
8. **The Muratorian Canon** - The first "canon" was the Muratorian Canon, compiled in A.D. 170, which included all of the New Testament books except Hebrews, James, and 3 John.
9. **The Council of Laodicea** - The Council of Laodicea (A.D. 363) concluded that only the Old Testament (along with the Apocrypha) and the 27 books of the New Testament were to be read in the churches.
10. **The Councils at Hippo and Carthage** - The Councils of Hippo (A.D. 393) and Carthage (A.D. 397) reaffirmed the same 27 books as authoritative and this became the official accepted "canon" of the New Testament church.

Tests for New Testament Canonicity: The principles used to determine whether a New Testament book was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit were fourfold.

1. **The Test of Authorship** - First, the author must be an apostle or have a close connection with an apostle.
2. **The Test of Acceptance and Use** - Second, the book must have been accepted by the body of Christ at large.
3. **The Test of Orthodoxy** - Third, the book had to contain consistency of doctrine and orthodox teaching.
4. **The Test of Divine Revelation** - Finally, the book had to bear evidence of high moral and spiritual values that would reflect a work of the Holy Spirit as the divine Author. Most importantly, however, it must be recognized that it was God, and God alone, who determined which books belonged in the Bible. God, via the inspiration of the Spirit, imparted to His followers what He had already decided. The human process of collecting the books of the Bible was flawed, but God, in His sovereignty, and despite the limitations of sinful man, brought the early church to the recognition of the books He had inspired, and those books are recognized today as the canon of Scripture.

THE PRIMARY AND ESSENTIAL TESTS FOR FULL CANONICITY

The early church councils applied several basic standards in recognizing whether a book was inspired.

5 Tests for Canonicity:

- (1) Is it **authoritative** - *"Thus saith the Lord"?*

- (2) Is it **prophetic** - “*a man of God*” (2 Peter 1:20)? A book in the Bible must have the authority of a spiritual leader of Israel (O.T. – prophet, king, judge, scribe) or an apostle of the church (N.T. – It must be based on the testimony of an original apostle.)
- (3) Is it **authentic** - consistent with other revelation of truth
- (4) Is it **dynamic** – demonstrating God’s life-changing power (Hebrew 4:12)
- (5) Is it **received** - accepted and used by believers (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

(Norman L. Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction To The Bible*. pp. 137-144)

A basic tenet (doctrine) of orthodox Christianity is that the canon of Scripture is closed... that is, that the 66 books of the Bible are the Word of God with no more to be added, it is the complete work of God to us, and there is nothing to add. This is affirmed by all of the most reputable and trustworthy Biblical masters and theologians. Dr. John MacArthur asks the question and then answers it... *“Is the canon of Scripture closed? 1. Genesis and Revelation, by their contents, are the perfectly matched bookends of Scripture. 2. Just as there was prophetic silence after Malachi, there has been prophetic silence since John delivered the Book of Revelation. 3. There have not been any authorized apostles or prophets, in the biblical sense, to write God’s inspired Word. 4. Clear biblical exhortations to not tamper with Scripture (Rev. 22:18-19). 5. The early church, those closest to the time of the apostles, believed that Revelation concluded God’s inspired writings.”*

MacArthur’s Proofs of a Closed Canon:

1. **Genesis and Revelation, by their contents, are the perfectly matched bookends of Scripture** – Genesis begins with the creation, Revelation ends with a new heaven and new earth and man’s redemption complete... it is a fully complete book
2. **Just as there was prophetic silence after Malachi, there has been prophetic silence since John delivered the Book of Revelation**
3. **There have not been any authorized apostles or prophets, in the biblical sense, to write God’s inspired Word**
4. **Clear biblical exhortation to not tamper with the Scripture (Rev. 22:18-19)**
5. **The early church, those closest to the time of the apostles, believe that Revelation concluded God’s inspired writings**

What does a closed canon of Scripture signify?

A Definition of a Closed Canon = *A closed canon of Scripture refers to the collection of authoritative biblical writings that is complete, with no further additions accepted as equal in authority to these recognized books*

In other words, it is the final list of books regarded as inspired and binding, beyond which no new revelation or text is to be added. This certainty about which books belong is traced to the early recognition of authoritative writings within the believing community, culminating in the confirmed acceptance of the Old and New Testament texts as we have them today.

Scriptural Foundations

The concept of a closed canon is often linked to statements within the Bible itself.

Internal Biblical Evidence for a Closed Canon:

- (1) **Jude exhorts believers to “*contend earnestly for the faith once for all entrusted to the saints*” (Jude 3), indicating that the essential content of faith has been definitively delivered (*in recognized Scripture, none being added*)**
- (2) **Revelation issues a sober warning, “*I testify to everyone who hears the words of prophecy in this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book*” (Revelation 22:18-19) While this warning bears immediate context for the specific prophecy of Revelation, it has been historically applied to guard against adding any “new” or contradictory revelation to the recognized body of Scripture**

WHAT ARE THE CATHOLIC APOCRYPHA/DEUTEROCANONICAL BOOKS?

A Definition of the Word “Apocrypha”: “*The word apocrypha means ‘hidden writing.’”*

A Definition of the Word “Deuterocanonical”: “*The word deuterocanonical means “second or other canon.”*”

What is the Apocrypha... Some Important Facts and Data: The Apocrypha (also called the Deuterocanonical books) are included in Roman Catholic Bibles and are used by some other traditions within Christianity. What are these additional writings? What is their origin? The following will give you a brief understanding of how they came about and why they are not accepted as a part of “canonical” Scripture by most of Christianity.

1. **400 Intertestamental Years** - The books found in the Apocrypha were primarily written during the four-hundred-year period between the completion of the Old Testament writings and the beginning of the New Testament's events (they also include claimed additions to the Old Testament books of Esther and Daniel).

2. **Apocryphal Books** - These books include..
 - **1 Esdras**
 - **2 Esdras**
 - **Tobit**
 - **Judith**
 - **Wisdom of Solomon**
 - **Ecclesiasticus**
 - **Baruch**
 - **The Letter of Jeremiah**
 - **Prayer of Manasseh**
 - **1 Maccabees**
 - **2 Maccabees**
3. **Early Judaism Reaction** - Within early Judaism, the writings of the Apocrypha were treated with respect, but were not accepted as sacred/holy books of the Hebrew Bible.
4. **Early Christian Reaction** - The early Christian church debated the status of the Apocryphal writings, but few early Christians believed they belonged in the canon of Scripture...generally these book were not accepted as canonical scripture
5. **New Testament Non-Support** - The New Testament quotes passages from the Old Testament hundreds of times, but nowhere quotes any of the Apocrypha's books. Jude, the half-brother of Jesus does quote from the Book of Enoch which is "pseudepigraphal" but not in the apocrypha
6. **Historical Errors and Contradictions** - Further, there are many proven historical errors and contradictions in the Apocrypha... which proves it not divine
7. **Biblical Contradictions** - *The Apocryphal books also teach some practices that are inconsistent with Scripture's teachings... remember the Bible does not contradict itself, the fact that the Apocrypha does contradict significant portions of the Bible proves it is not divinely inspired and should not be considered canonical*
8. **The Protestant Reformation** - While many Catholics accepted the Apocrypha earlier, the Roman Catholic Church officially added the Apocrypha to their Bible at the Council of Trent in the mid 1500's A.D., primarily in response to the Protestant Reformation. Why? Reactionary and it supported their extrabiblical practices (praying for the dead, petitioning saints, venerating/deifying saits)
9. **Apocrypha Support for Catholic Practices** - Part of the reason for this is that the Apocrypha supports some of the traditions the Roman Catholic Church practices that are not taught in the Bible. For example, the Roman Catholic practices of praying for the dead, petitioning "saints" in heaven with their prayers,

worshiping angels, and "alms giving" to atone for sins (paying indulgences) all find their support in the Apocrypha, not the Bible.

- 10. Apocrypha Benefit** - Some of the Apocrypha include important and helpful information, but due to their historical and theological errors, the books must be viewed as fallible historical and religious documents, not as the inspired, authoritative Word of God.

IMPORTANT CONCLUDING STATEMENT ON CANONICITY

3 Important Concluding Faith Presuppositions on the Bible:

- 1. It is important to note that the writings of Scripture were canonical at the moment they were written** - Scripture was Scripture when the pen touched the parchment. This is very important because Christianity does not start by defining God, or Jesus Christ, or salvation.
- 2. The basis of Christianity is found in the authority of Scripture** - If we cannot identify what Scripture is, then we cannot properly distinguish any theological truth from error.
- 3. (*Most importantly, however, it must be recognized that*) It was God, and God alone, who determined which books belonged in the Bible** - God, via the inspiration of the Spirit, imparted to His followers what He had already decided. The human process of collecting the books of the Bible was flawed, but God, in His sovereignty, and despite the limitations of sinful man, brought the early church to the recognition of the books He had inspired, and those books are recognized today as the canon of Scripture.