

Book of Books: The O.T. Canon – Week 2

INTRO

Series on: Who wrote the bible? How was it put together? Why these books and not others? How was it preserved over the millennia? Can we trust it?

God gives many analogies of His word which unpack its incalculable value to us. It is:

- **Law, Seed, Mirror, Water, Anchor, Fire, Sword, Bread, Lamp, Hammer, Milk, Gold, Honey, Rain & Snow**

It has two purposes:

1) To glorify God; 2) For us to know Him and that knowledge leading us to salvation.

The word of God is 66 books written by 40+ authors, writing in three different languages, most of whom never met, from different countries, and composed in different historical settings from 1440BC to AD100. Despite the differences of personalities, languages, locations, and time periods, they attest to the same God of the same character with the same purpose. God speaks through these authors and gives them distinct puzzle pieces which profoundly and miraculously fit together. This puzzle is completed by the One it prophesied, Jesus, who completes the picture of God's self-revelation to us. ([Col. 1](#))

HOOK

Grandfather (Arlie "Tex" Lane) was a Marine in WWII. He never spoke of any of his experiences, and wouldn't answer questions, but my grandmother kept the yearbook style book the military had given him from it. It had his faded picture in it, and his tour's route was traced in highlighter. By the time I held it in my hands it was easily 50 years old and in great condition. With his and my grandmother's death, several moves, and 25 more years, it has been lost to our family. Documents seem to have a way of slipping through the cracks of time.

- Our Bible is a miracle. It has been preserved for 3,500 years, endured a national exile, and multiple persecutions where authorities have purposefully tried to destroy it.
- It's not Marine yearbook, the Bible is God's word to His people which brings salvation.

BOOK

1 Peter 1:20-21 - ... no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

LOOK

“Scripture” & “Authority” = The words of God for us to know Him and apply to life.

CANON: (Greek) – reed, stalk, stick, or cane.

A canon was when a reed was cut to a certain length and it became the standard for measuring an entire building project. It became the ruler, the measuring standard, or the “rod of measurement.”

When we speak of the Christian canon, we are referring to the list of books which orthodox Christianity recognizes as inspired scriptures, the very words of God to us by His prophets, His apostles, and Himself directly. The collection of these books is the ruler, the standard of our faith: the Christian canon.

ALL Christian faiths agree on the 27 books of the N.T. and the 39 of the O.T. However, the Roman Catholic Church adds on 12 more to the O.T, and Eastern Orthodox Church adds 3 more to those 12. (We will discuss those later.)

The next 3 weeks: “How did we get the Bible?”

- Short version: As the ink dried from John’s writing the book of Revelation, the heavens were parted and descending from the clouds with light and the sound of angel’s voices, came a finished leather-bound King James bible. The end.
- Medium version: A council of power-hungry priests, theologians and politicians laid out hundreds of equally valid and credible books. They, then, picked the ones they liked and would give them power and threw out the rest.
 - Both are wrong. The process of canonization was slow, organic, and handled with great scrutiny. The Church didn’t assign authority on certain books. **It recognized the authority which was already on them and God’s voice in them.** They were acknowledging which books were indeed in and out of the canon; which God had purposed to be His word.
- Now... the accurate version.

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The Hebrew/Jewish Bible (our O.T.) is broken up into three sections (TaNaKH):

1. The Torah (law) = Genesis-Deuteronomy
2. The Nebiim (prophets) = Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, & minor prophets.
3. The Khetuvim (writings) = Ruth, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles.
 - a. The New Testament refers to these as “the law and the prophets.”

The O.T. was written mainly in Hebrew with some portions in Aramaic. Because the printing press wouldn't be invented until AD1455 (3,000 years after the first words of the Bible were written), it was copied by hand by Jewish scribes. (A scribe was a Jewish copy machine who also acted as a lawyer.) These scribes followed strict rules and developed intricate methods of counting words and letters to make sure every copy was accurate. It was chiseled on stone, scratched into clay, and written on leather.

Who started the bible? Who wrote the first words?

Exodus 31:18 - *When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant law, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.*

Exodus 32:15-16 - *Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. 16 The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.*

- God did in the 10 commandments (decatalogue) on two stone tablets.
- This was the basis for the Law and Covenant between God and His people.
- They encompassed how they were to relate to God, to each other, and to society. Further, they were the only written ancient law that was concerned with the heart: #10.

Moses spent 40 days on the mountain receiving “the Law” from God concerning worship and lifestyles. At Sinai, God gave them a culture. This, Moses wrote down. It was probably edited after his death, but it was in no way open to change.

Deuteronomy 31:24-26 - *After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, 25 he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord: 26 "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you.*

God's words needed to be written. Sometimes it needed to be sent to another place and delivered to someone, but most of all, God instructed these writings to be guarded and preserved from one generation to another so they could be passed down and continually obeyed.

Deuteronomy 6:1-3 - *These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, 2 so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. 3 Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.*

The Israelites recognized these first 5 books as authoritative and divine immediately. Already by the lifetime of Joshua, it's being referred to as God's word. The prophets throughout Israel's history constantly attest to, rely on, and depend on it as authoritative. By the time of Jesus, every Jewish sect (though some theologically very different) recognize the first five books of the Bible as canon.

They were kept fresh in their memories by being read aloud to the people every seven years (**Deut.31:10-13**), read aloud at great national occasions (**Ex.24:7, 2 Kings 23:2, Neh.8:9-17**), and taught weekly at their Sabbath services.

These books were also preserved throughout the generations by being held in the tabernacle and then the temple (**Deut.31:24-26**). Rabbinical literature and the Jewish historian, Josephus, attest to the "laying up" of recognized scriptures in the temple continued until the destruction of the 2nd temple by the Romans in AD70.

1. This began a practice of adding to those preserved in the temple all inspired words of God. This was not handled arbitrarily, but with careful deliberate caution. To add to them was of national significance.
2. This tradition continued with the onset of prophetic activity beginning in Samuel's lifetime.

During Israel's (and later Judah's history), prophets spoke on behalf of God and wrote down their oracles to be read publicly and saved (Is. 30:8, Jer. 25:13, Ex.43:11, Hab.2:2, Dn. 7:1, 2 Chron. 21).

3. Phrases like, "thus says the LORD" were indicators that the words of this self-revealing God stood on His own divine authority.

Hezekiah, king of Judah in the 8th century B.C. is believed by historians to have begun to collect the prophetic books, and during the reign of king Josiah in the 6th century B.C. the book of Judges may have been compiled. During this time, royal historians were recording national events and the lives of the kings called: the Book of the Acts of Solomon, the Book of the Chronicles of Kings of Israel, and the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah.

Then after centuries of sin and prophets sent by God to confront their sin, God punished the Israelites with destruction and enslavement by Babylon (586BC). Their nation, their capital city, and worst of all, their temple was obliterated. This caused them to do two important things.

1. Ask, "Why did God do this? Why are we here?"
2. Strive hard to preserve their national and religious identity.

To answer those hard questions, writers finalized Joshua, Judges, and 1st and 2nd Samuel and pulled from those mentioned royal histories to write the books of 1st and 2nd Kings and 1st and 2nd Chronicles citing them as their sources. And to maintain their identity the law, their histories, and the prophetic writings were cherished and studied.

Then after 70 years in exile, Persia conquered Babylon and the Persian king, Cyrus, put out the Edict of Cyrus allowing the Jews to return home. The first wave of exiles made their exodus home under the leadership of Zerubbabel and rebuild the temple. Then 57 years later, a priest named Ezra, brings a second wave of people.

Ezra was a man who loved God's word and passionate about guiding the returnees to hold to the law their forefathers abandoned which caused them the punishment in Babylon. Ezra set reinstates temple worship and sets up the sacrificial system – found in the Pentateuch. He also got serious about collecting and arranging the Jewish scriptures.

During the life/work of Ezra, two prophets, Zechariah and Malachi are sent by God to give correction to the people and to look forward to a coming Messiah.

Then, something strange happens. No more prophets are sent by God. He is silent for 400 years.

Two things happen during this time.

1. Greece led by Alexander the Great takes over Persia (who is still the reigning power over Israel). He dies and divides up his conquered land between his generals.
2. With the lack of any prophetic word and new national oppression, the Jews place even higher appreciation on the scrolls they have.

A Greek (Seleucid) King, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, tried to force Hellenization on the Jews including sacrificing a pig to Zeus on the altar of YHWH. An older Jewish priest, Mattathias was present when they ordered one of the temple priests do it. He refused, and when another priest stepped up to follow through with it, Mattathias jumped forward and killed him. He fled into the hills around Jerusalem where he and his sons began a rebellion. His son, Judas/Judah had the nickname “the Hammer” (Maccabee) and their resistance was called the Maccabean revolt.

Antiochus hated the Jewish scriptures and sought to destroy them.

In 164BC, his army drove out the Seleucids from Jerusalem and set the Jews free for the first time since 586BC. They purified the temple and set up a dynasty to rule Israel called the Hasmonean dynasty where they functioned as kings and priests.

Judas knew the prophet work of God had ceased so after the war, he began a campaign of finding, collecting, and preserving the ancient books. It was Judas who most likely put together the collection of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. It would have been the very same list of books we have today.

No later than the 100’s, with Hellenization, this collection of writings, the Hebrew Bible, was translated into Greek by Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt. This translation is called the Septuagint (LXX) because of the legend that there were 70 (or 72) scholars who worked independently to translate it, and at the end of their work, the translations were exactly the same.

Jewish tradition holds that the last prophetic writings were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and nothing is to be added after them. Therefore, by the time of Jesus, all of our O.T. books were accepted and canonized even the longest disputed ones (Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs – I wonder why?).

Can we trust that we have the correct books in the Hebrew Bible which is our O.T.?

- Jesus, Himself, attests to the O.T. scriptures. It was His bible, per se. He often quoted it saying, “God says,” or “as the scriptures say,” or “it is written.”
 - **Luke 24:25-27** - *He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*
 - In fact, Jesus and the N.T. authors quote the O.T. approximately 300 times and reference it as having divine authorship. In the couple of times when they quote Greek authors, they never refer to them as scriptures.
- Also, Jesus and the religious leaders had many heated disputes. But there is no instance with Jesus or His apostles over which books were canonical. The matter was well settled in Jesus’ day, and the books the apostles considered as scripture to build Christian doctrine are the same we study in our Bibles today.

INTERTESTAMENTAL LITERATURE

Many other books, written in Greek, were written during the 400 year silence. These have always been disputed and assigned varying levels of recognition by different Jewish and Christian sects.

Pseudepigrapha – “false author”

They are more than 50 books written between 200BC and AD200 expanding on stories of characters from the O.T. Examples: 1 Enoch, Jubilees, Treatise of Shem. These writings are full of crazy stories, wacko theology, and all stamped with the name of a famous bible character to draw attention to them.

- E.g. 1 Enoch – Pretending to be written by Enoch who was alive before Noah and was even taken as scripture for a time by some churches. It describes fallen angels lusting after human women. These angels bring evil to the world in the form of magic, weapons, and sexy makeup. 2 Enoch goes into detail about levels of heaven.

Apocrypha – “things which are hidden/unclear” (relating to their authorship, historicity)

These books are made up of history, some inaccurate history, theology, some strange theology, and some legends AND they found their way into the Greek O.T.

These books are why our Bibles have 39 O.T. books, Roman Catholics have 12 more, and Eastern Orthodox have those 12 plus 3 more (one of them being 1 Enoch).

Some notable ones are:

- Judith – a woman who single-handedly saves her city from Greeks
- Additions to Esther
- Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus – similar to Proverbs
- Song of the Three Young Men – supposedly the prayer and hymn said by Shadrach, Meshach, and Benny in the fire in Daniel
- 1st and 2nd Maccabees – The history of the Maccabean rebellion and dynasty

During the Protestant Reformation in the 1500's, all the books which weren't originally written in Hebrew, but Greek were excluded from the O.T. This is why you'll find them in Catholic bibles but not ours.

Why were they taken out?

1. None of them were in the original Hebrew canon.
2. Philo, a Jewish philosopher whose life overlapped the apostles, refers to the three sections of Hebrew scripture and quotes extensively from the O.T. but never to any of the apocrypha whatsoever.
3. Josephus, the Jewish historian who was born right after Jesus' death, explains he is fully aware the apocrypha, but because of the failure of prophetic words, they have "not been deemed worthy of equal credit."
4. Of the sub-apostolic fathers like Melito, Origen, Epiphanius distinguish the apocrypha as separate from the other scriptures.
5. Irenaeus of Lyons omits the apocrypha from his list of scriptural books.
6. The further back in time you look, the less you find the apocrypha in bible lists.
 - a. Melito lists none.
7. When Jerome translated the Bible into Latin for the common people, he included them in his Vulgate, but prefaced them as not being true parts of the Bible.
8. Jesus quotes the O.T. many times. Never the apocrypha.
9. The N.T. writers seem to be aware of a couple apocrypha books but never asserts their authority.
 - a. In fact, the N.T. quotes the O.T. 300+ times, but never the apocrypha.
 - i. Exception: Jude references 1 Enoch, but doesn't call it scripture.

10. At the council of Trent, which was the Catholic Church's response to the Protestant Reformation, they asserted the apocrypha as scripture. But even there many Catholics argued against adding it.
11. **Major reason:** Within the apocrypha are found theologies which are nowhere else supported by the Bible, but actually oppose it.

Despite all of this, the Protestant church is not against them. In fact, there were sub-apostolic fathers that believed in the authority them.

- Martin Luthor (1534) "These are books that, though not esteemed like the Holy Scriptures, are still both useful and good to read."

With the reformation and the returning to the roots of what is and isn't divinely inspired, they are not canon. However, they are understood as having value in understanding the history between the Testaments, and world view of the 1st century period. They are "useful for edification but not for doctrine."

FURTHER INQUIRY

Where in the N.T. is the Apocrypha or the Pseudepigrapha referenced? What points are the authors making in using these stories?

RECAP

- God began the writing of the Bible, Himself.
- Moses wrote the Pentateuch and priests began to preserve words from God.
- Hezekiah and Josiah contributed to collecting the scrolls.
- Exile in Babylon was critical for writing what would become scripture.
- After being released by Persia, Ezra collected most of the books.
- Under Greek oppression, Judas Maccabee drove them out and gathered what would become the Hebrew Bible.
- It was then translated into Greek for the common person to read.

TOOK

Challenge 1: Have a bible study in the Old Testament each day this week.

Challenge 2: Write down a verse that sticks out to you. Consider how you can be obedient to it AND how you can bring it up in conversation (share it).