

Lesson 1

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

1. Canon means a rule, a measuring line, a standard or a MODEL.
2. The church did not CREATE the canon, it merely RECOGNIZED it.
3. As it relates to Scripture, the word canon means an OFFICIALLY ACCEPTED list of books.

BASIC SCRIPTURES INCLUDE

Luke 24:27 & 44; Matt. 23:35; II Tim. 3:16; II Peter 1:21; Heb. 1:1-3 with additional Scripture including: Matt. 21:42, John 5:39, Acts 17:2, 11; Rom. 1:2, I Cor. 15:3&4; Gal. 3:8, I Tim. 5:18; and II Peter 3:16 (to name only a few)

4. The nucleus of this truth is 2 TIMOTHY 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:19-21.
5. A prophet is one who speaks for God. There are two types of prophets in Scripture:
A FORE TELLER and a FORTH TELLER.
6. The Old Testament claims to be THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD.

Several Old Testament Scriptures to consider, out of hundreds, include: all of Genesis, Chapter 1; Leviticus 1:1, Numbers 36:13, Deuteronomy 4:2 and Joshua 24:26

7. CHRIST testified to the reliability of the Old Testament Scripture by quoting from it on numerous occasions, as well as alluding to it. See Matthew 4:1-11, Matthew 12:38, Matthew 13:14 and in each of the other Gospels.
8. JEWISH TRADITION ascribes the Old Testament canon to EZRA. Ezra 7:10, 11, 13, & 21.
9. The Jewish people were scattered around the world when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 70 AD.
10. At that juncture in history the Jews confirmed the accepted canon of the Old Testament which was divided into three groups of books: THE LAW, THE PROPHETS and THE WRITINGS.

Special Notation

The purpose of confirming the Old Testament books was to accept a single authoritative book to keep them together even though they were scattered around the world.

11. HISTORY confirms the Old Testament.

Josephus, the most famous Jewish historian (he lived in the 1st Century AD), had this to say about the books of the canon: *“For we (the Jews) do not have an innumerable multitude among us, disagreeing with and contradicting one another as the Greeks have, but only 22 books which contain the records of past times; which are justly believed to be divine no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them.”*

12. No book was admitted to the Jewish canon which was not in existence at the time of EZRA and NEHEMIAH.
13. The Jewish canon included 22 books but the Old Testament, as we have it, includes 39 books. Why the variance?

The books named by Josephus in the original Jewish canon included: 5 books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy; thirteen prophetic books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, Esther, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, the Minor Prophets, and Job. The Jewish canon is completed with Four Hymns to God: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

14. The 39 books of the Old Testament we have today are merely divided differently as follows: The Minor Prophets are 12 books, not one; Samuel, Kings and Chronicles are two books each, not one; Ezra and Nehemiah are two books, not one, Judges and Ruth are separate books, as are Jeremiah and Lamentations.
15. Today we divide the books of the Old Testament into five different divisions. The books of the LAW, Genesis to Deuteronomy; the books of HISTORY, Joshua to Esther; the books of POETRY, Job to Song of Solomon; the MAJOR Prophets, Isaiah to Daniel; and the MINOR Prophets, Hosea to Malachi.
16. TWENTY-SEVEN books make up the New Testament canon.
17. The New Testament canon was confirmed by a FOURTH CENTURY council but long before councils ever convened, local church elders were constantly collecting, evaluating and deciding which of the many writings carried the authority of the APOSTLES.
18. A Key passage to consider regarding New Testament acceptance is HEBREWS 1:1 & 2.
19. The books of the New Testament, which have been included in the canon, were all written by an APOSTLE or the companion to an APOSTLE.
20. Jesus promised the apostles that the HOLY SPIRIT would reveal to them what they could

not understand while He was still on earth.

SEE: John 16:12-15; Matthew 10:17-20, and John 14:25 & 26

21. The APOSTLES spoke and wrote with DIVINE authority.

SEE: 1 Corinthians 2:9-13; Galatians 1:11 & 12, and Ephesians 2:19-20.

22. Some of the books which were written and are a part of the canon were written by companions or secretaries such as MARK in 1 Peter 5:13 and LUKE in Romans 16:22.

23. All New Testament books had APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY.

Special Notation

The churches exchanged letters and copied them. They sent them to other churches but only letters written by the apostles or their companions were accepted as part of the CANON.

24. The Council of Carthage, in 397 AD, said “Nothing shall be read in the churches except the RECOGNIZED CANON. They then named the 27 books of the New Testament.

(Reminder from page one: The councils did not create the canon, they only confirmed it.)

25. The guideline of the council was simple: “A New Testament book must be written by an APOSTLE or the COMPANION of an APOSTLE” if it is a part of the canon.

26. The content of the canon was determined by general usage, not by authoritarian PRONOUNCEMENT.

27. The gospel records, which contained the reports of the works of Christ, gained credibility over the First Century as EYEWITNESSES could orally VERIFY the words which were written.

28. The books of the “Apocrypha” were never given canon status outside of the Catholic Church and they did not even accept them until 1546 AD.

CONCLUSION

The Bible is the inspired Word of God, written by men of God, preserved by the Spirit of God, and has been accepted, through the ages, by the people of God.

Discussion Question: Why is it important to know that we have the ENTIRE WORD OF GOD?

Five principles for inclusion in the canon:

1. Is it authoritative? Did it come from the hand of God? (Does this book come with a divine “thus saith the Lord”?)
2. Is it prophetic? Was it written by a man of God?
3. Is it authentic? (The fathers had a policy: “If in doubt, throw it out.” This enhanced the “validity of their discernment of canonical books.”)
4. Is it dynamic? Did it come with the life-transforming power of God?
5. Was it received, collected, read and used? Was it accepted by the people of God?