



Questions for God

Part 5 – Canonicity...How was the Bible Put Together?

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As we continue our study of Bibliology, we come to the question of Canonicity. How do we know the right books got into the Bible? How was it determined that they were inspired and from God? Who chose them? Why did they make the decision to include them in the Bible? The bigger question is: What qualifies as Scripture and what does not? Why does the Catholic Bible add the Apocryphal books? Were any of the 66 books we have today disputed along the way? Let's take a closer look.

I. What is Canonicity?

- A. Definition: from the Greek word “kanon” meaning a “reed / rod or pole” used to measure, a standard. It came to be used for a carpenter’s tool known as a straight edge. II Cor. 10:13-16; Gal. 6:16. It was used in by the ancient Greeks in describing the excellence of their classical writings.
- B. In relation to the Scriptures it refers the rule of faith, the standard for judgment, the basis for authority.
 1. It was the standard of basis for recognizing the inspired texts of God. **Canonicity is the process whereby men of God came to recognize which ancient writings were God’s written revelation to man.**
 2. It was used by early writers as a “list or catalogue” of books to be read in Christian assemblies.
- C. The formation of the canon was the historical process of the gradual recognition of the canonicity of our 66 books. **It was a natural process that achieved something very supernatural (Chafer).** There is a difference between the determination and recognition of canonicity! The process of canonization involves two parties:

1. **God determined canonicity by inspiration**. A canonical book is valuable and true because God inspired it. God uses an author to write the Scripture through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
 - Inspiration determines canonicity. A book was authoritative, because “God breathed it” and made it so! How a book received authority is determined by God. How men recognize that authority is another matter all together! (Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 133)
2. **Men discovered canonicity by recognition**. Men didn’t create the canon they recognized it! The **Church** (or the people of God) recognizes (or “canonizes”) the Scripture through the revelation of the Holy Spirit.
 - The real question is not where a book received its divine authority, for this can only come from God alone, but how did men recognize that authority? Since the Scriptures were “canonical” the moment they were written, we can only trace the history of their recognition!
 - **IMPORTANT:** The Church did not create the Canon or the Bible, but only recognized that which was already **Scripture**.
3. **Transition:** Since it was man’s job to evaluate and recognize what God had already deemed to be authoritative, what were the principles used in determining whether or not a book was canonical?
4. Illus: Money vs. counterfeit. The govt. prints money, it is the bank’s job to determine whether is genuine or counterfeit

D. False principles, though widely held!

1. The age of the manuscript determines canonicity

- There are plenty of ancient writings not included in the Bible.
 - On the contrary, there were also many books that were accepted as inspired as soon as they were written.
2. The **Hebrew language** determines canonicity.
 - The Bible was written in 3 languages.
 - There were other Hebrew writings at the time; what kept them from being included?
 3. **Agreement with the Torah**
 - The OT books which naturally would be in agreement with the Torah, but how did the Torah get its authority?
 - What about other devotional books that time period?
 4. The **intrinsic religious value** of a particular book
 - Again that doesn't explain how it received its value.
 - The Catholic Apocryphal books are included based on this premise.

II. Principles of OT Canonicity

(How was the Old Testament Canon formed? What were the determining factors?)

A. **Written by a prophet of God**

1. Why a prophet? He spoke for God!
2. “The word of God, inspired by the Spirit of God, for the people of God, by a man of God” (Geisler and Nix, p. 139)
3. Moses: The Pentateuch or Torah... first 5 books; also known as the Books of the Law.
 - Moses established criteria for tests for a true prophet of God (Deut. 13:1-5 and 18:20-22)
 - God would speak in and through him. Ex. “Thus saith the Lord”

B. **Was it authoritative?**

1. It was a necessary by-product of its prophetic authorship.
2. It must come from God, not the vain philosophy of human thinkers and intellectual writers
3. Some OT books were originally disputed because of this until later confirmation.

C. **Authenticity**

1. It had to agree with revelation already given by God.
2. Contradictions would cause serious doubt about its inclusion.
3. The apocryphal books were rejected because of false and heretical teaching.

D. **Dynamic Power**

1. Power of God must be evident through the writing. Its originality and spiritual implications were part of this evaluation.
2. Esther: was originally disputed because people didn't understand its meaning and for the fact that very name of God is not mentioned once in the entire book.

E. **Received, accepted and used by the people of God**

1. This included both the initial acceptance and ultimate acceptance by the Jewish nation.
2. This acceptance generally predicated on the first 4 principles, but not entirely.

F. Summary:

1. Most of the books were accepted fairly soon after their authorship. They were all completed and accepted by 400 BC.

2. Liberal critics try to argue for a later date, so that the amazing prophecies would be merely an “after the fact” recording of history rather than supernatural prophecy!
3. They were accepted as written and so consequently it was being expanded as God revealed His truth to man. There was no particular church council that confirmed this, but rather the Jewish nation came to recognize scripture as it was written by holy men of God (I Peter 1:21).

III. The confirmation of the Old Testament

- A. Old Testament Canon happened in three waves or stages. In the Hebrew Bible there are only 24 books (39 in the English Bible). We have a near-complete version of the Old Testament in circulation about 200 years before the birth of Christ.
 1. **Law** – 5 books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. In the Hebrew bible this is called the Torah. We know these books as the Pentateuch.
 2. **Prophets** – 8 books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (our minor prophets).
 3. **Writings** – 11 books: Psalms, Proverbs, Ruth, Job, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles.
- B. It is confirmed by Jesus Christ himself. Jesus accepted it as the Word of God and quoted it extensively. Luke 24:27-44; John 10:35; Matt. 5:18
- C. The New Testament and other extra Biblical (outside) sources confirm it. All but 5 OT books are quoted in the NT.
- D. Its acceptance in history. Justin Martyr, Origen and Tertullian all accepted our present OT. Melito (Bishop of Sardis) believed to have drawn up the oldest list of OT books that we can date in 70 AD. It included every book but Esther.

IV. Application:

- A. Scripture Memory: If the Bible is so valuable, should we spend more time memorizing it and mediating on it?
- B. The Bible gives us direction for our life!

For Further Reading:

- Bruce, F. F. *The New Testament Documents*, 5th edition, IVP, 1965.
- Friedman and Couch. *So That's How we Got the Bible*. Tyndale, 1973.
- Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Moody Press, 1968.
- Harris, R. Laird. *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*. Zondervan, 1957.

John Erwin ■ Senior Pastor ■ Moorpark Evangelical Free Church