

## I. What is the Canon of Scripture?

- a. The study of the canon is the most foundational discipline of all theological disciplines – you cannot truly settle hermeneutical, theological, and ministry practice issues without first settling this question:  
  
“What writings are inspired & authoritative vs. merely edifying or even spurious or heterodox?”
- b. Protestant canon –
  - i. OT – (39) books
  - ii. NT – (27) books
  - iii. Total - (66) books
- c. Apocrypha (“hidden”) – Roman Catholics call these *deuterocanonical*
  - i. Books considered to be part of the OT by Roman Catholics (among others) but are not considered by Protestant Christians to be inspired and authoritative
  - ii. Tobit, Judith, 1&2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus/Sirach, Baruch (+more...)
  - iii. Can potentially be helpful for historical insight or devotional reading but should not be considered authoritative Scripture

Some popular song texts have come from apocrypha (“It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” and “Now Thank We All Our God”) but so also have heterodox doctrines – for example: purgatory

More about the nature of the canon when we discuss the NT canon below.

## II. Formation of the Old Testament Canon

- a. OT books were written between 1400 BC and 430 BC

- b. OT canon (i.e. Jewish Scriptures) were well settled before the time of Jesus.
  - i. Intertestamental literature often claims lack of prophetic authority in the works themselves and a disappearing of the prophetic office in the land.
  - ii. (Josephus) – first-century AD non-Christian Jewish historian – affirmed same canon of OT Scriptures that we use today
  - iii. Organization by Jews was slightly different
    - 1. Law / Torah
    - 2. Prophets
    - 3. Writings / Psalms
    - 4. Hand-written scrolls vs. today's books
    - 5. 22 or 24 books, but the same content as our 39 books, only in different groupings
  - iv. Jesus and the NT authors quote authoritatively from all the major sections of the Jewish scripture and nearly all of today's individual books of OT scripture:
    - 1. "It has been written..."
    - 2. "Scripture says..." BUT they do not do this of any apocryphal books

### **III. Formation of the New Testament Canon**

- a. Three-stage development of NT canon (Michael Kruger):
  - i. Ontological canon – an authoritative collection of authoritative books in the mind of God.  
NT authors knew they were writing Scripture
    - 1. Gal 1:1; 1 Cor 14:37-38; 2 Peter 3:16;
    - 2. Gospels –
      - a. Mark – “the Gospel of Jesus Christ”
      - b. Matthew – genealogies → NT is in continuity with OT
      - c. Luke – 1:1-4 – eyewitnesses of the risen Lord Jesus

- d. John – the disciple who has testified about the risen Lord
  3. Very early Church Fathers make this distinction between apostles and not, apostolic writings and not (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons)
  4. Example document: *The Shepherd of Hermas* (2<sup>nd</sup>-c. book)
    - a. Rejected as Scripture, but considered highly edifying
    - b. Not apostolic, written after the period of the apostles
    - c. Less than one century after the last NT book was written, Christians already had a clear idea of how to recognize a canonical book
- ii. Functional canon – a collection of authoritative books
1. Nearly immediately, Christians recognized all of the following as authoritative:
    - a. The 4 Gospels; Acts; Letters of Paul; 1 John
    - b. Perhaps even Revelation and 1 Peter
  2. The rest were eventually traced back to the apostolic eyewitnesses
  3. Three criteria:
    - a. Apostolic – written or closely tied to an apostle
    - b. Catholic – widely, if not universally, recognized by the churches
    - c. Orthodox – not contradicting any recognized book or doctrine
- iii. Exclusive canon – an authoritative collection of authoritative books in the understanding of the church
1. Canon lists were all about recognizing the canon, not creating one

2. First canonical NT list exactly matching our 27-book NT is by Athanasius in his Easter letter of AD 367

b. Chronology

- i. The NT books were written during the period AD 45-100
- ii. They were collected and read in the churches AD 100-200
- iii. They were carefully examined and compared with spurious writings AD 200-300
- iv. Complete agreement was obtained AD 300-400

1. First canonical list exactly matching our 27-book NT is by Athanasius in his Easter letter of AD 367

IV. Connect back to Tree Diagram

- a. Foundation for all the rest (as said at beginning)
  - i. The entire rest of the tree depends upon decisions made in this one root of the trunk
- b. Tremendously helpful in questions that come up in evangelistic and apologetic situations, both for professing Christians (discipleship) and toward the world.

Further Reading:

Plummer, Robert L. *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*

Kruger, Michael J. *The Question of Canon*

Jones, Timothy Paul. *How We Got the Bible*