

## BIBLIOLOGY (57)

A good example is Ken Taylor's "Living Bible", which was completed in 1971. Drs. Geisler & Nix say: "For the most part, it (Living Bible) is a simplified, easy-to-follow rendering in effective and idiomatic, present-day English. At times imaginative details are provided that have no textual basis, and at other times it does less than justice to what the original says. On other occasions, Taylor departs from his initial purpose when he assumes the role of a commentator and interprets or reinterprets passages in ways that may not be true to the intent of the original. Taylors 'The Living Bible' meets a genuine communication need because this paraphrase, like Norlie's translation, was extremely popular with young people and adults alike during the 1970's and since." (pp.589-590)

In all reality every one of these documents may be used to help us accurately understand God's Word and to enable us to dogmatically say that we have God's inspired Word in our hands and can truly know what it says.

One might ask, in view of all of this, "if it is only the original autographa that was inspired and since translations have been produced from copies of those original manuscripts, can we be certain that my English Bible is in fact the inspired word of God?"

We would certainly be willing to admit that there is no one translation that does not have a few weaknesses. One reason for this is because a translation is an attempt to give the clear meaning of one language in another language. Obviously, such an undertaking will have a few weaknesses, if for no other reason than a translation cannot use the same words, it must use different words in a different language. In a perfect world, there would be one language and God's word would be in that language. However, since we live in a fallen world, since Babel, we have many different languages and copies of God's word must be translated into the common language.

In my study of the original languages, I have found a few weaknesses with **every** English translation on the market. I do not ever remember finding anything that was major. I have **never** run across anything which dramatically affects key truth. We must firmly adhere to the Sovereignty of God, which the Bible certainly teaches. It is no coincidence that God has blessed us in this country with several outstanding English translations: The King James Version; The New American Standard Version; The New International Version. All of these are excellent English translations. Each one has its strong points and weak points, but collectively speaking, we, who live in the United States, are without excuse for not clearly understanding and applying the Word of God. We truly have God's word in our own language as no other nation in the world. Because of the dedication of textual scholars who have poured themselves into the tedious task of manuscript examination and translation, we can safely say that when one holds one of these versions in our hands, we are in fact holding the precious, inspired Word of God in English.

**QUESTION #12** - How was it determined that a book was in fact an inspired book which belonged in God's word?

There is a word that is extremely important in answering this question, it is the word "canon."

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The Greek word "canon", literally transliterated "kanon" (kavw'v) is a word that means measuring rod. The words "the canon of Scripture" have come to mean the measurement which was used to determine which books belonged in the Bible.

The need for some measuring standard to determine which books truly belonged in the Bible surfaced primarily for three main reasons:

Reason #1 - Heresy - By A. D. 140, various heresies were spreading concerning a variety of doctrines and God's people were in need of knowing which books truly were God's word.

Reason #2 - Writings - Many religions and eastern churches were making claims that they had the "true" Bible. God's people were in need of knowing which books truly were God's Word.

Reason #3 - Persecution - By A. D. 303, Diocletian ordered all sacred books destroyed, and God's people were in desperate need of knowing which books needed to be preserved as the actual books of the Bible. One reason why it was important that they know this was because they had to literally determine which books were worth suffering for and dying for.

These were three main apparent reasons why God established a way of measuring and determining which books truly belonged in the Bible. These are the circumstances that became the impetus for "the canon of Scripture."

All of the Books of the Bible, as we know them from Genesis to Revelation, were canonized by the year A. D. 367. The man who was the first to name all 66 books as canonical was Athanasius. He first began using this term "canon" around A.D. 350 and declared the 66 Books to be canonical in A. D. 367. However, there is good evidence that the process of trying to determine which were the inspired books was well under way even before the end of the first century. When Jesus Christ was here, He promised that the Spirit of God would lead His disciples into all truth (John 16: 13).

God, by His Spirit, prompted His men to write His truth, and it is only logical that He would lead His men to recognize the truth He had them write. Naturally, the ability to recognize truth is the very issue of canonicity.

Before we examine the principles used for determining which books actually belonged in the Bible, certain key points need to be acknowledged:

(Point #1) - A book is canonical because it is inspired, not because it is discovered. Many different books and manuscripts are discovered, but only 66 are canonical because only 66 were actually inspired by God.

(Point #2) - Canonicity is determined by God, it is recognized by men. God inspired the book, then He made it authoritative to the point that His people recognized it. Canonicity is determined by God, it is simply recognized by men.

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J. I. Packer appropriately states: "The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by His work of creation, and similarly He gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up." (Packer, God Speaks to Man, p.81) Newton simply recognized the gravity God created, and men simply recognized the books God inspired.

Norman Geisler and William Nix (p. 222) give us six correct views of Canonization as opposed to six incorrect views:

- 1) The church is the discoverer of the Canon, God is the determiner of it.
- 2) The church is the child of the Canon, not the mother of it.
- 3) The church is the minister of the Canon, not the magistrate of it.
- 4) The church is the recognizer of the Canon, not the regulator of it.
- 5) The church is the witness of the Canon, not the judge of it.
- 6) The church is the servant of the Canon, not the master of it.

It is only logical to assume that if God went to the trouble to inspire His written word, He would also see to it that He directed His people to a true discovery of the writings He did actually inspire. After all, there were many false prophets on the scene (i.e. I John 4:1), and there were many different writings in existence long before the first century came to a close (i.e. I Cor. 5:9).

Some of those writings were false (II Thes. 2:2). God's people did need to have some standard by which they could discover which books truly belonged in Scripture and God saw to it that they did receive such a standard.

Generally speaking there were five basic canonical rules which were used to measure a book to determine whether or not it was an inspired book of God:

### **Canonical Rule #1** - Was the book Prophetic?

Was the book written by a man of God, such as a prophet or an apostle? As Geisler and Nix observed, this was the "most basic question asked about the book.." (p.223). Certainly we know from II Peter 1:21 that men were moved by God to write His inspired word. We also know that there were false prophets (II Peter 2:1) and false apostles (II Cor. 11:13) who were Satanically empowered for deceptive purposes. God knew some system was needed to establish that a particular man was in fact a true prophet or true apostle, so God used signs and miracles for this very purpose (Ex. 4:1-9, I Kings 18, Act 2:22, John 3:2, II Cor. 12:12, Heb. 2:4). Miracles helped to identify the true prophets and apostles of God. Once one had been identified as a true prophet, it was agreed that his written word could potentially be inspired by God.

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Certainly it was assumed that a true apostle or prophet could be recognized by his fruit (John 15:8). One with a life consistent with godliness and one producing godly fruit, who demonstrated the signs and power of a true prophet or an apostle, was one in a position to be used by God to write His word.

### **Canonical Rule #2** – Was the book Authoritative?

What this means is did the book clearly come from God or with such things as "The Lord has spoken" or "thus saith the Lord." For example, Romans is a book written by the Apostle Paul which is specifically written to unlock the doctrine of the gospel. In fact, in verse 1 of the book, Paul specifically says that he was an apostle set apart by God for this very purpose. In Galatians 1:11-12, he clearly emphasizes that this gospel was revealed to him by direct revelation of Jesus Christ. Clearly these books have an authoritative ring to them in that they claim to come directly God.

### **Canonical Rule #3** - Was the book Authentic?

What this means is did the book tell the truth about God, the world and men in the same authentic way that was known previous revelations. God is a God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb.6: 18). What this practically means concerning His word is that it must always tell the truth about Him, about the world, about His program, about humanity, about angels, about heaven and hell.

If a writing appeared which squared with other true information already available from God, it could be considered as canonical. If, however, the information did not square with known true information, the writing was rejected because it did not have an authentic ring to it.

It is for this very reason that the Apocrypha was rejected, which we will study. Drs. Geisler & Nix observe: "Much of the Apocrypha was rejected because it was not authentic." (p.227) It did not tell the truth about God and man.

There can be no doubt that carefully determining authenticity is very Biblical (I John 4:1-6). The fact that every book of the Bible was examined to see whether it squared with the rest of known Truth was a solid method of determining canonicity.

It needs to be pointed out that some books even in the Bible were questioned very seriously in light of this principle. For example, the book of Esther was not quickly accepted because it **never** once mentioned the name of God in any of its verses. However, upon careful analysis, Esther was finally deemed canonical because it did certainly testify of God's providential care over His nation Israel. The book of James was called by the famed Reformer Martin Luther, "a book of straw" which he thought did not belong in the Bible because it did not seem to square with the rest of the N.T. and seemed to present a "works" salvation which was contrary to Romans and Galatians. Luther did not spend much time with the book and apparently overlooked James 1:17-18.