

How We Got Our English Bible

Session 4

The Development of the Old Testament Canon

Three Basic Steps in Canonization

1. **Inspiration** by God.
2. **Recognition** by Man.
3. **Collection and Preservation** by God's people.

Two Important Notes

1. There is a difference between canonical and noncanonical texts. Noncanonical texts may be important and even helpful, but they do not have binding authority on the believer.
2. There is a difference between the sections of the Old Testament (law, prophets, writing) and the stages of canonization. One does not necessarily infer the other.

The Two-Fold Canon of the Old Testament

There is evidence from the earliest times that the Old Testament was considered to be composed of the law and the prophets.

In the New Testament, the phrase "law and the prophets" refers to the entire Old Testament (Luke 24:27, Matthew 22:40, Acts 13:15, etc.).

The Development of the Old Testament Canon

1. There is evidence of a progressive collection of books which were considered to be scripture (Deuteronomy 31:24-26, 2 Kings 22:8, Joshua 24:26).
2. There is evidence of a prophetic continuity in the Old Testament. That is, each successive prophet linked his ministry and message to the prophets that went before him.
3. There is evidence that the Old Testament was completed with the last of the prophets. There are no spurious writings to be considered scripture after the last of the prophets, Malachi. That is, there is not a third division of the Old Testament, the "writings"¹ which were considered Scripture.
 - a. The Council of Jamnia (A.D. 90) did not recognize any scripture other than the law and the prophets.

¹ The idea here is that some would like to have a third section of the Old Testament, called the writings, which would consist of those books considered to be the writings in the TANAKH as well as the apocryphal and pseudigraphical writings of the inter-testamental times.

- b. The Book of Daniel is often listed by critics as belonging to the writings, but was considered to be prophetic by Josephus and others.
- c. The New Testament affirms all of the books of the Old Testament including those considered to be the “writings”.
- d. Psalms is considered to be part of the prophets by Christ (Luke 24:27, 44; John 10:34-35).
- e. According to Josephus and the Talmud, the last of the prophets was Malachi.

The Extent of the Old Testament Canon

The Books Accepted by All - *Homologoumena*

This comprises 34 of the 39 books of the Old Testament. Excluded are the Song of Solomon, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Ezekiel, and Proverbs.

The Books Rejected by All - *Pseudepigrapha*

The Pseudepigraph contains fanciful stories and legends which in some cases is harmless but in other cases contain theological and historical errors.

Literary Genre	Book
Legendary	The Book of Jubilees The Letter of Aristeas The Book of Adam and Eve The Martyrdom of Isaiah
Apocalyptic	1 Enoch The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs The Sibylline Oracle The Assumption of Moses 2 Enoch or the Book of the Secrets of Enoch 2 Baruch or the Syria Apocalypse of Baruch 3 Baruch or the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch
Didactical	3 Maccabees 4 Maccabees Pirke Aboth The Story of Ahikar
Poetical	The Psalms of Solomon Psalm 151
Historical	The Fragment of a Zadokite Work

The Books Disputed by Some - *Antilogoumena*

The Antilogoumena were disputed books, accepted by some as Scripture and rejected by others.

The **Song of Solomon** was considered to sensual.

Ecclesiastes was considered to skeptical about life.

Esther omits the name of God although God's providential care permeates the book.

Ezekiel appears to be anti-Mosaic in places.

Proverbs was thought to contain contradictions in itself, that is, some proverbs appear to contradict others.

The Books Accepted by Some - *Apocrypha*

The Apocrypha was accepted by some as being canonical and rejected by others. To this day, there are some in Christianity that treats these disputed books as Scripture and others that reject them totally.

Literary Genre	Book
Didactic	The Wisdom of Solomon Ecclesiasticus
Religious	Tobit
Romance	Judith
Historic	1 Esdras 1 Maccabees 2 Maccabees
Prophetic	Baruch Letter to Jeremiah 2 Esdras
Legendary	Additions to Esther Prayer of Azariah Susanna Bel and the Dragon Prayer of Manasseh

Arguments for the Apocrypha

1. New Testament allusions (Jude 14-15, 2 Timothy 3:8).
2. The earliest complete manuscripts of the Bible include them.
3. Early Christian art depicts some scenes from the apocrypha.
4. Some of the early church fathers accepted the apocrypha.
5. Augustine included them as canonical books.
6. The Council of Trent in 1546 proclaimed the apocrypha as canonical.
7. New Testament usages of the LXX (which included the apocrypha).

8. Non-Catholic denominations include the apocrypha as canonical scripture, e.g. Anglicans.
9. Some of the Apocrypha was found among the texts of the Dead Sea community at Qumran.

Arguments against the Apocrypha

1. The New Testament never cites an apocryphal book as Canonical.
2. The LXX may have contained the apocrypha, but that does not mean that it was considered canonical (since the LXX was commissioned not as a translation).
3. Although the apocrypha was contained in early translations of the Bible, that does not mean that it was considered canonical by the first-century Christians or by the entire church.
4. Art is a bad means of determining canonicity.
5. Many early church fathers did not accept the apocrypha.
6. Augustine wavered on the canonicity of the apocrypha and considered them at times to be deuterocanonical.
7. The Council of Trent was in response to the Protestant Reformation, and as such the apocrypha was declared canonical to support errant teachings of Catholicism.
8. The use of the apocrypha among non-Catholic churches is uneven.
9. Many non-canonical books were discovered among the remains of the Dead Sea community.

Summary Arguments Regarding the Apocrypha

1. The apocrypha was never accepted by the Jewish community.
2. The apocrypha was not accepted by Christ or the early church.
3. Most early church fathers rejected the apocrypha.
4. No church council accepted the apocrypha's canonicity until the fourth century.
5. Jerome rejected the apocrypha.
6. Many Roman Catholic scholars reject the apocrypha.
7. Many Protestant denominations reject the apocrypha.
8. The apocrypha does not claim inspiration.
9. The apocrypha lacks the authority of God.
10. The apocrypha contains historical errors.
11. The apocrypha repeats material elsewhere in canonical writings.
12. There is no prophecy in the apocrypha.

13. Nothing is added regarding Messianic truth from the apocrypha.
14. The apocrypha was not received as scripture by the vast majority of Jews and Christians.