

Scripture :: The Canon of Scripture

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Introduction

This study is an excerpt of the book by Don Stewart entitled ***What Everyone Needs To Know About The Bible***, which is part of ***The Basic Bible Study Series*** published by Dart Press, Orange, California. Used by permission of the author.

Don Stewart has written over twenty books on the subject of evidences for the Christian faith. These include ***You Be the Judge***, ***Ten Reason to Trust the Bible***, ***The Coming Temple***, ***The Basic Bible Study Series***. In the last fifteen years he has spoken in over thirty countries proclaiming the message that the Christian faith is both reasonable and intelligent.

What is the Canon of Scripture?

One of the terms used in describing the books that belong in Scripture is the word canon. This comes from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning reed or measurement. A canonical book is one that measures up to the standard of Holy Scripture. Thus, the canon of Scripture refers to the books that are considered the authoritative Word of God.

Old Testament Canon

The idea of a finished Old Testament canon was spoken by both biblical and nonbiblical sources. Flavius Josephus, a Jewish writer of the first century, had this to say:

We have but twenty-two [books] containing the history of all time, books that are justly believed in; and of these, five are the books of Moses, which comprise the law and earliest traditions from the creation of mankind down to his death. From the death of Moses to the reign of Artaxerxes, King of Persia, the successor of Xerxes, the prophets who succeeded Moses wrote the history of the events that occurred in their own time, in thirteen books. The remaining four documents comprise hymns to God and practical precepts to men (William Whiston, trans., Flavius Josephus against Apion, Vol. 1, in **Josephus, Complete Works**, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1960, p. 8).

Biblical scholar Gleason Archer comments on the impact of the statement made by Josephus:

Note three important features of this statement: (1) Josephus includes the same three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures as does the MT [Massoretic text] (although restricting the third group to 'hymns' and *hokhmah*), and he limits the number of canonical books in these three divisions to twenty-two. (2) No more canonical writings have been composed since the reign of Artaxerxes, son of Xerxes (464-424 B.C.), that is, since the time of Malachi. (3) No additional material was ever included in the canonical twenty-two books during the centuries between (i.e., from 425 B.C. to A.D. 90). Rationalist higher critics emphatically deny the last two points, but they have to do with the witness of such an early author as Josephus and explain how the knowledge of the allegedly post-Malachi date of sizable portions, such as Daniel, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and many of the psalms, had been kept from this learned Jew in the first century A.D. It is true that Josephus also alludes to apocryphal material (as from 1 Esdras and 1 Maccabees); but in view of the statement quoted above, it is plain that he was using it merely a historical source, not as divinely inspired books (Gleason Archer Jr., **A Survey of Old Testament Introduction**, Revised Edition, Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, p. 71).

Josephus also declared:

And how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them or take anything from them, or to make any change in them-, but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willing to die for them. For it is no new thing for our captives, many of them in numbers, and frequently in time, to be seen to endure racks and deaths of all kinds upon the theatres, that they may not be obliged to say one word against our laws, and the records that contain them (Josephus, *Ibid.*, p. 609).

New Testament

The biblical evidence also testifies to a completed Old Testament. From the Gospels we see that Jesus spoke of Scripture as being complete. He said to the religious rulers:

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life ([John 5:39](#)).

These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me ([Luke 24:44](#)).

The law, the writings, and the prophets were the threefold division of Old Testament Scripture. Jesus testified to their authenticity.

New Testament Canon

Although the New Testament does not speak of a completed canon of Scripture, it does testify to writings already considered to be the Word of God. Peter recognized the writings of the Apostle Paul as Scripture. He cited Paul's letters, which some were twisting "as they do the rest of the Scriptures" ([2 Peter 3:15,16](#)).

When Paul wrote to Timothy he quoted a passage from Luke as Scripture.

For the Scripture says,

'You shall not muzzle an ox while It treads the grain,' and, 'the laborer is worthy of his wages' ([1 Timothy 5:18](#)).

The first verse quoted is from Deuteronomy, but the second is a quotation of one of our Lord's statements recorded by Luke: "The laborer is worthy of his wages" ([Luke 10:7](#)).

Formation

The formation of the New Testament canon began in the early part of the second century A.D. The earliest list was drawn up in Rome, in A.D. 140, by the heretic Marcion. Although his list was not authoritative, it did demonstrate that the idea of a New Testament canon was accepted at that time.

The concept we have today of a completed Bible was formulated early in the history of the church. By the end of the second century all but seven books (Hebrews, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude, James, and Revelation) were recognized as apostolic, and by the end of the fourth century all twenty-seven books in our present canon were recognized by all the churches of the West. After the Damasine Council of Rome in A.D. 332 and the third Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 the question of the Canon was closed in the West. By the year 500 the whole Greek-speaking church had also accepted all the books in our present New Testament.

Who Decided Which Books Should Be Placed in the Bible?

Many people wonder who decided which books should be placed in the Bible.

The simple answer is that God decided which books should be in the canon. He was the final determiner.

J. 1. Packer writes:

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 (J. 1. Packer, *God Speaks To Man*, p. 81).

Canonizing and Collecting

A distinction needs to be made between canonizing and collecting. No man or council can pronounce a work canonical or scriptural, yet man was responsible for collecting and preserving such works. F. F. Bruce writes:

One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon

because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa-at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397-but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of these communities (F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1960, p. 27).

Hence the books we have as Scripture were inspired by God and recognized such by man.

What Criteria Were Used in Determining Which Books Belong in the Bible?

The books admitted to the canon of Scripture were inspired by God. There were, however, many false books that claimed inspiration. How did the people judge between the true and the false? The Bible does not give any set of criteria that were used to determine which books were to be considered Scripture. We are not told how the determination was made. Though we do not know the exact criteria which were used, they may include the following:

Prophetic Authorship

For a book to be considered canonical, it must have been written by a prophet or apostle or by one who had a special relationship to such (Mark to Peter, Luke to Paul).

Only those who had witnessed the events or had recorded eyewitness testimony could have their writings considered as Holy Scripture.

Witness of the Spirit

The appeal to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit was also made to aid the people in understanding which books belonged in the canon and which did not. Clark Pinnock writes:

The Spirit did not reveal a list of inspired books, but left their recognition to a historical process in which He was active, God's people learned to distinguish wheat from chaff, and gold from gravel, as He worked in their hearts (Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973, p. 104).

Acceptance

The final test is the acceptance of the people of God. Jesus told His disciples:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things Which I said to you ([John 14:26](#)).

We have the promise of Jesus that His disciples would be given total recall by the Holy Spirit of the things He said and did. These same disciples either wrote the New Testament books or had input into which works were accepted as Scripture. Any book that claimed canonical status, yet diverted from the truth of the life of Christ, would have been rejected by Jesus' own disciples who were, eyewitnesses to the New Testament events. Thus the acceptance of God's people is an important criterion for book to be considered canonical.

How Do We Know the Correct Books Are in the Bible?

The Bible, as we have it today, consists of sixty-six books. The fact that these books belong as Holy Scripture is confirmed by the testimony of Jesus Christ.

First, with regard to the Old Testament we have the testimony of Jesus to the existing books. He confirmed the accepted three-fold division of our canonical books.

These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me ([Luke 24:44](#)).

The Promise of Jesus

As far as the New Testament is concerned, we have the promise of Jesus.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you ([John 14:26](#)).

Though we do not have His guarantee after the fact, we have this promise that a New Testament would be given. Thus, we have Jesus "pre-authenticating" the New Testament.

Nature of God

Another reason we can be assured the correct books in the Bible is the nature of God. It has been estimated there are a quintillion stars in the universe and the Bible says God calls them by their names. If God is able to do this, He certainly is able to preserve intact His Word for the benefit of mankind.

Conclusion

Since we have the testimony of Jesus that God preserved the Old Testament for His people, we can also be assured that God took the same care in preserving the New Testament books. When the evidence is examined, we find it consistent and credible.

Do Jews and Christians Use the Same Old Testament?

The Old Testament consists of thirty-nine books according to the Protestant reckoning but only twenty-four according to the Jewish reckoning. The books are the same; the difference is in the way they are divided.

Protestant Bible

The division of the Protestants' Bible is as follows: seventeen historical books: Genesis-Esther: five poetical books Job-Song of Solomon: seventeen prophetic books: Isaiah-Malachi.

Hebrew Division

The Hebrew Bible numbers these as twenty-four: The Torah or law contains five books, Genesis-Deuteronomy; The Prophets contain eight books, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets are grouped into one book; The Writings or *Kethubim* contain eleven books, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

The Hebrew Bible combined 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. The twelve minor prophets were combined into one book. Josephus numbered the books as twenty-two by attaching Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah.

Thus, the books are identical. The only difference is in the way they are divided.

What Effect Did the Council of Nicea Have on Determining What Books Belonged in the Bible?

There have been accusations that the council of Nicea had a tremendous effect on both choosing what books should be in the Bible and changing some of the doctrines that the church held before that time.

The council of Nicea met in A.D. 323 to discuss how Jesus Christ was related to God. There were some in the church, led by Arius of Alexandria, who denied that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh, the Second Person of the Trinity. In order to answer these issues, the church had to make a pronouncement about which books authoritative doctrine could be based on.

The council of Nicea did not meet to discuss which books belonged in the New Testament canon. It only recognized the books that the church had from the beginning considered to be the Word of God.

Already Composed

The books that were recognized as Scripture had already been composed at the time. All the books contained in the New Testament were composed before the end of the first century. Some fifty existing papyrus manuscripts written before A.D. 325 contain parts of every book of the New Testament except 1 Timothy.

There is no truth to the argument, so often brought up, that some of these books were not in existence until the council of Nicea. The argument, therefore, that certain doctrines were invented at this time has no basis in fact.

Should Other Early Writings Be Included in the Bible?

There are some very early works in the history of the church that add to our information about Jesus. These books written between A.D. 80 and A.D. 180, were composed by "apostolic fathers." Although they were not inspired, as the New Testament books are, they do provide us with some confirming information regarding the New Testament events. Some of the most notable examples include:

Letter of Clement

In A.D. 95 Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the Corinthian church. This is an extremely important work because Clement was the leading elder of the church of Rome. He wrote his letter to the Corinthians to end a dispute between the laity and the elders.

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius of Antioch wrote seven letters in A.D. 115 on his way to being thrown to the lions. He made the distinction between his writings and that of the apostles.

I do not enjoin you as Peter and Paul did. They were apostles, I am a convict; they were free, but I am a slave to this very hour (Ignatius, **Letter to the Romans**, 4.3).

Quadratus

Quadratus was one of the earliest defenders of the Christian faith. He wrote to the Emperor Hadrian about A.D. 125. The work has been lost except for a brief statement in the writing of the church historian Eusebius.

The deeds of our Saviour were always before you, for they were true miracles; those who were healed, those who were raised from the dead, who were seen, not only when healed and when raised, but were always present. They remained living a long time, not only whilst our Lord was on earth, but likewise when he left the earth. So that some of them have also lived to our own times.

Quadratus gives another account of the miracles of Jesus and testifies as the Apostle Paul does that many who participated in the miraculous events surrounding the life of Christ lived long after Jesus ascended into heaven.

The Epistle of Barnabas

The Epistle of Barnabas, not the Barnabas of the New Testament, was written between A.D. 130 and 138. It was written to show that Jesus is a fulfillment of the Old Testament law.

Though these books were written at an early date, they have never been seriously considered as Holy Scripture. They do not claim biblical authority, some actually disclaim it. In addition, none of them were written by apostles or members of the apostolic company. But they are helpful in shedding light on the New Testament.

Why Was the Authority of Certain Old Testament Books Questioned?

At certain times some of the biblical books had their authority questioned. These include:

Esther

The problem with the Book of Esther is that the name of God is not found in the book. The hand of God, however, is certainly evident in the story as He protected the Jews from total annihilation. The mere absence of God's name is not sufficient reason to deny its status, especially when His providential hand is so evident.

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes was sometimes objected to because of its skeptical tone. The writer of the book exclaims, "Vanity of vanity, all is vanity" ([Ecclesiastes 1:2](#)). The problem here is a matter of understanding the author's intent. Solomon, the writer of the book, is demonstrating that no one can experience ultimate satisfaction in this world. He shows that all people need God.

Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon was sometimes criticized as being too sensual. Its inspiration, however, was never really been in doubt. The misdirected criticisms of sensuality do not understand the purpose of the book, which is to emphasize the nobility of marriage.

Ezekiel

There were some who considered the Book of Ezekiel to be against the Mosaic Law. However, no specific examples were ever provided. The problem was again one of interpretation, not inspiration.

Proverbs

Proverbs had some who doubted it because of certain supposed inner contradictions. Yet a proper interpretation of the book will show this is not the case.

Why Was the Authority of Certain New Testament Books Questioned?

Some of the books that are now in the New Testament canon have been, at times, questioned as being inspired of God. They are known as the *antilegomena*, "the books spoken against." There were seven books whose authority was doubted by some members of the early church. The reasons vary from book to book.

Hebrews

The main problem that some of the early church members had with the Book of Hebrews was that it was written anonymously. Yet Hebrews is not the only anonymous New Testament book; the four Gospels, for instance, do not name their authors either. From the earliest times, the letter to the Hebrews was accepted everywhere but in Latin Christianity. The problem still was lack of a stated author. However, it was soon realized that the Book of Hebrews was orthodox in its content and deserved a place in the New Testament.

James

The main problem some had with James was the content. James put more emphasis on works than do the

other New Testament writings. But James is not so much theological as it is practical and fits a much-needed gap between the doctrine and practice of Christianity.

Second Peter

The most suspect of all the books [is 2 Peter](#). Basically, the reasons for questioning its authorship are the stylistic differences between it and 1 Peter. However, these stylistic differences can be explained by Peter's use of an amanuensis, or secretary, to do the writing for him.

Second and Third John

Second and Third John were questioned for several reasons. First, the author was not specifically stated he is called merely "the elder." Both letters were addressed to individuals, both are very brief, and neither have much theological content. Because of these factors there were not too many early writers who would quote from them.

Jude

Jude is a brief letter that gained immediate acceptance everywhere except Parthia, modern-day Iran. Jude was questioned for his use of the apocryphal Book of Enoch.

Revelation

It is no surprise that the Book of Revelation would meet some opposition due to the apocalyptic nature of the work. However, it had almost instant recognition everywhere except in Parthia. The great biblical scholar R. H. Charles wrote concerning the Book of Revelation:

Throughout the Christian church during the second century, there is hardly any other book in the New Testament so well received as Revelation (R. H. Charles, *Revelation, The International Critical Commentary*, vol. 1, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1906).

We must remember that Jesus promised His disciples would be guided into all truth. The authority of Jesus' disciples matched that of Himself. Those whose writings were accepted by them would share the same authority. These seven books were only questioned by some of the church, not all of it. They were eventually recognized by the whole church to be included in the New Testament canon.

What is the Apocrypha?

There are a group of writings which are considered part of Old Testament Scripture by the Roman Catholic church but are not accepted as inspired by the Protestant church and Judaism. These are known as the Apocrypha.

The word Apocrypha means "hidden." The Apocrypha refers to the fifteen books (fourteen if the Letter of Jeremiah is put with Baruch) written between the years 300 B.C. and 100 B.C. (except Esdras which was written about A.D. 100). Eleven of these fourteen books are considered Holy Scripture by the Roman Catholic church. When added to the Old Testament, they constitute only seven extra books because the others are attached to existing books. The Apocrypha is about the size of the New Testament.

Apocrypha and Apocryphal

Sometimes people confuse the terms Apocrypha and apocryphal. The term apocryphal is also applied to other books that are New Testament forgeries. An example of this would be the Gospel of Thomas, which claims to have been written by Jesus' disciple Thomas. The book, however is a forgery. The word Apocrypha is a specific term used to refer to the particular books that are considered Scripture by the Roman Catholic Church.

History

The Protestant reformers, particularly in the sixteenth century, pointed out many abuses in the Roman

Catholic church at that time. From 1545 to 1563 a church council met at Trent to answer some of their charges. Among their decisions was the pronouncement of these books as Holy Scripture. Before that time they were not regarded by the Roman Catholic church as sacred Scripture. The Protestant church rejects them for the following reasons:

No Claim

The primary reason for rejecting the Apocrypha as Scripture is that there is no claim within the books that they are inspired by God. This is in contrast to the canonical Scriptures which claim to record the revelation of God.

Never Cited

Though the New Testament cites directly or alludes to almost every book of the Old Testament as Scripture, it never cites the Apocrypha as being God's Word. If the Apocrypha were considered Scripture by the people living in the first century, we would certainly expect them to refer to it in some way.

The New Testament does refer to the Apocrypha in [Jude 14](#) and [Hebrews 11:35](#). but does not cite it as holy Scripture. It cites the works the same way Paul cited heathen poets ([Acts 17:28](#)). This demonstrates that the New Testament writers were familiar with the Apocrypha but did not consider them to be upon the same level as Old Testament Scripture.

Rejected by the Jews

The Jews have never considered these works to be inspired. On the contrary, they denied their inspiration. At the time of Christ we have the testimony of the Jewish writer Flavius Josephus that they were only twenty-two books to be inspired by God. The books of the Apocrypha were not among these.

Not on Early Lists

In the early years of the church it drew up various lists of the books it considered to be Scripture. The books of the Apocrypha do not appear on any list until the fourth century.

Rejected by Many Catholic Scholars

Many Roman Catholic scholars, through the Protestant Reformation, rejected the Apocrypha as Scripture. There was no unanimity of opinion among them that these books should be considered Scripture.

Demonstrable Errors

The Apocrypha also contains demonstrable errors. For example, Tobit was supposedly alive when Jereboam staged his revolt in 931 B.C. and was still alive when the Assyrians captured the Northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. This means that he lived over two hundred years! However, the Book of Tobit says he lived only 158 years (Tobit 1:3-5; 14:11). This is an obvious contradiction. Other examples could be cited. Those who believe in an inerrant Scripture cannot accept the Apocrypha as God's Word.

No Evidence of Inspiration

The books of the Apocrypha do not contain anything like predictive prophecy that would give evidence of their inspiration. If these books were inspired by God, then we should expect to see some internal evidence confirming it. But there is none.

Old Testament Complete

It is clear that in the first century the Old Testament was complete. The Hebrews accepted the same thirty-nine books, (although divided differently) that the Protestant church does today. Jesus put His stamp of approval on these books but said nothing concerning the Apocrypha. However, He did say that the Scriptures were the authoritative Word of God and could not be broken. Any adding to that which God has revealed is denounced in the strongest of terms. Therefore, we have the testimony of Jesus against the authenticity of the Apocrypha.

We conclude that the Apocrypha should not be considered canonical because the books do not demonstrate themselves to be upon the same level as Scripture. Jesus did not consider it part of His Old

Testament and we are told not to add or subtract anything from God's Word.

Did Jude Quote from the Book of Enoch?

The Book of Jude seemingly contains a quotation of the intertestamental Book of Enoch. The question results from a citation found in [Jude 14](#).

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints' ([Jude 14](#)).

Jude records a prophecy made by Enoch, who lived before the flood of Noah. Enoch predicted the coming of the Lord to judge wicked individuals. The Apostle Paul wrote of this same judgment ([2 Thessalonians 1:7-10](#)). This prophecy made by Enoch is not recorded in the Old Testament. Two questions arise: (1) Where did Jude obtain his information? (2) Was Jude's information correct?

During the period between the testaments the Book of Enoch was written. It contains this prophecy. Some assume that Jude obtained this prophecy from the Book of Enoch, but this is not the case. Jude does not quote from the Book of Enoch but rather directly from Enoch. This could have been by means of special revelation from God or from some now unknown written source. The source of Jude's quotation was the person Enoch. Where the Book of Enoch derived his information is another matter. It is possible that the source of the quotation found in the Book of Enoch was Jude, since there is no evidence as to the precise contents of the Book of Enoch until several centuries *after* Jude was written. Whatever the answer may be. It is not necessary to assume that Jude considered the Book of Enoch as authoritative.

Since we believe that Jude's writing was inspired by God, we take this information as being correct. It is not essential to know how Jude obtained this information. Jesus had promised that His disciples would be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who would guide them into all truth.

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak ([John 16:13](#)).

Because of Jesus' promise, the words of the New Testament writers were safeguarded from error.

We conclude that Jude did not quote from the Book of Enoch, but received the information in some other way.

What about Other Books that Claim Biblical Authority?

Throughout the history of the church many documents surfaced that claimed to have been written by the apostles or those intimately familiar with the life of Christ. However these works were written by someone other than the named author. These fraudulent works are known as the *pseudepigrapha* (forgeries). They are also known as apocryphal works, and were rejected by all. The early church father, Eusebius, called these books "totally absurd and impious." Over three hundred different works that fit into this category have been catalogued.

Other Gospels

Among the forgeries were a large number of apocryphal or false gospels. Origen, a third century writer, testified to the existence of other gospels when he wrote, "There are many who have tried to write gospels, but not all have been accepted."

The biblical scholar Edwin Yamauchi offers an appropriate comment:

The apocryphal gospels are non-canonical writings of a motley variety about the purported deeds and revelations of Jesus Christ. Though the Greek word apocrypha originally meant "hidden," the church fathers used it to describe spurious writings foisted as gospels. Irenaeus refers to 'an unspeakable number of apocryphal and spurious writings, which they themselves (i. e. the heretics) had forged to bewilder the minds of the foolish.' Although some of them were patterned after the canonical gospels, many bear little resemblance to them. As Origen noted, 'The Church possesses four Gospels, heresy a great many' (Edwin M. Yamauchi, "The Word From Nag Hammadi," *Christianity Today*, January 13, 1978, p. 19).

Gnostic Influence

Many of these works were influenced by gnosticism. The word gnostic means "one who has knowledge." The gnostics taught that salvation came by secret knowledge of God. The gnostic view of God is contrary to the Bible. In addition, the gnostics considered that all matter is evil.

An example of gnostic writing can be found in the Gospel of Philip. The original Gospel of Philip was probably written sometime during the second century A.D. The influence of gnosticism and its emphasis on secret knowledge can be clearly seen in this work. The Gospel of Philip reads,

The Logos said: If you know the truth the truth will make you free. Ignorance is a slave, knowledge is freedom. When we recognize the truth we shall find the fruits of truth in our hearts. If we unite with it, we will bring our fulfillment.

Different Level

Other statements show that they are on a different level than Scripture.

A Gentile man does not die, for he has never lived that he should die. Adam came into being from two virgins, from the Spirit and from the virgin earth. Because of this Christ was born of a virgin, in order that he might set in order the stumbling which came to pass at the beginning.

These fanciful statements betray their non-biblical source.

Second-Hand Sources

The pseudepigrapha, apart from being forgeries, were also written long after, in some cases hundreds of years after, the New Testament events. The writers were not eyewitnesses to the life of Christ or to the events of the early church. This is another reason to reject the testimony which they give.

Gospel of Thomas

One of the most prominent of all the forgeries is the Gospel of Thomas. The Gospel of Thomas was probably composed in Edessa in Syria about A.D. 140. Consisting of 114 sayings of Jesus, it is the most extensive collection of non-biblical sayings of Jesus that still exist. The Gospel of Thomas begins as follows:

These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote. And He said: Whosoever finds the explanation of these words shall not taste death.

We know that the Gospel of Thomas is a forgery for the following reasons:

Incorrect Name

The author is not Thomas. Whoever wrote the Gospel of Thomas used the incorrect name when referring to the Apostle Thomas as Didymus Judas Thomas. In the four Gospels, Thomas is referred to as either Didymus or Thomas, not both at once. Didymus is the word for "twin" in both Greek and Aramaic, so the author of the Gospel of Thomas must not have been aware of this linguistic connotation.

Secret Approach

The secret approach found in the Gospel of Thomas is typical of the writings of the gnostics. The four Gospels are open about the ways of salvation and the kingdom of God while the Gospel of Thomas views truth from a hidden vantage point.

There is no historical setting for the statements. The Gospel of Thomas is a compilation of sayings without the inclusion of important historical events as recorded in the Gospels. We are not told when or under what circumstances the statements were made.

Contradicts Four Gospels

Many of the sayings are contradictory to those we have in the Gospels. For example, saying 114 says:

Jesus said, 'See, I shall lead her, so that I will make her male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'

Different Jesus

The person of Jesus Christ is different than the one revealed in the Gospels. In the Gospels Jesus is God the Son, Second Person of the Trinity. In the Gospel of Thomas He is one who points the way by which an individual can attain the knowledge of God.

These reasons demonstrate that the Gospel of Thomas is a forgery rather than a legitimate work written by one of Jesus' apostles.

Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ

One alternative explanation of the life and ministry of Jesus that has caused considerable interest is the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ. This work was written by Levi Dowling (1844-1911). based upon communication he received from an alleged "universal mind." The Aquarian Gospel attempts to fill in some of the missing years of Jesus' youth as well as explain His wisdom by attributing it to contact with holy men of other religions. The result is a contradictory mixture of Christian science and occultic thought.

The name is derived from the astrological idea that a new Aquarian age has come upon us, bringing with it the need for a new spiritual gospel, the Aquarian gospel.

Content

The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ attempts to fill in some of the blanks in the life of Jesus. Some of the material in the Aquarian Gospel is borrowed from the ancient Gospel of James, a well-known forgery in the early years of the church. The most prominent part of the book deals with the education and travel of Jesus. According to the Aquarian Gospel, Jesus first studied under the Jewish teacher Hillel and then went to India to spend time with their holy men. His learning also supposedly took Him to Tibet, Persia, Assyria, Greece, and Egypt. It was in Egypt that Jesus was said to have joined the sacred brotherhood. He passed through seven degrees and emerged as the Logos. In Alexandria a council of seven sages was held where they formulated seven great religious postulates and ordained Jesus for the work of the ministry.

The Aquarian Gospel then rewrites the four gospels according to its own particular viewpoint. The end of the story has Jesus appearing in a materialized body to people in India, Persia, Greece, and other countries.

Evaluation

Like many previous attempts, the Aquarian Gospel attempts to give an explanation of the wisdom and character of Jesus apart from the biblical depiction. Dowling's reconstruction shows obvious borrowing from the Ancient Gospel of James, as well as familiarity with a nineteenth century works, Notovitch's

Unknown Life of Jesus Christ.

The book begins with an historical inaccuracy: "Augustus Caesar reigned and Herod Antipas was ruler in Jerusalem." This is an error because Antipas ruled in Galilee, never in Jerusalem.

A crucial problem with the Aquarian Gospel concerns its scenario of the source of Jesus' teachings. If Jesus obtained His wisdom from the masters of India, Greece, and other countries, then why doesn't His teaching reflect it? The teachings of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, are in direct conflict with every central belief of Hinduism, Buddhism, and the other religions with which He supposedly came into contact!

The simple fact is that we have in the Gospels a firsthand account of the life and ministry of Jesus. The Aquarian Gospel is a false portrait of the life of Christ, not based upon historical records or eyewitness testimony but rather upon the recollections of an ancient forgery and the imagination of a twentieth-century writer. It has no value whatsoever in providing new or accurate information on the life of Christ.

The Archko Volume

One of the most famous written hoaxes is the Archko Volume. The work is also known as the "Report of Pilate" or "Archko Library." The content of this work is an alleged report of the trial and death of Jesus made by Pontius Pilate to the Emperor Tiberius. Its existence can be traced back to Rev. W. D. Mahan of Boonville, Missouri, who published a thirty-two page pamphlet in 1879 titled, "A Correct Transcript of Pilate's Court."

The success of the "Report of Pilate" led Mahan to make some more "discoveries" including: an interview with the shepherds who were given the announcement of Christ's birth, Gamaliel's interview with Joseph and Mary, Eli's story of the Magi, and other previously unknown interviews surrounding the life and ministry of Jesus. Mahan claimed these "interviews" were translated from ancient manuscripts in Rome or Constantinople.

Edgar Goodspeed writes concerning the accuracy of the "interviews":

The picture of Jesus in his interview with Pilate is romantic and theatrical, and the Pilate reflected in the "Report" is historically improbable.

The whole work is a weak, crude fancy, a jumble of high-sounding but meaningless words, and hardly worth serious criticism. It is difficult to see how it could have deceived anyone.... Like the "Report of Pilate," these [the other interviews] bristle with childish blunders.... The supposed references to Josephus's *Jewish Wars*... simply do not exist. The statement that Josephus in his *Antiquities* refers to Jesus in more than fifty places is false... That Tacitus wrote his history of Agricola in A.D. 56 is of course an error; Tacitus was born in 55, and even if he had been able to write his father-in-law's biography at the age of one year, there was nothing yet to write, for Agricola himself was only nineteen (Edgar Goodspeed, *Famous Biblical Hoaxes*, pp. 33, 35).

As can be imagined, the "Report of Pilate" as well as the later interviews were immediately exposed as frauds. It was noticed, for instance, that entire pages of Eli's story of the Magi were copied verbatim from the novel Ben Hur.

Unhappily, people continue to read and believe these fraudulent works although they have no basis in fact.

The Lost Books of the Bible

One of the most often asked questions concerns the so-called "Lost Books of the Bible." A book with this title was produced in 1926. It was the reprint of William Hone's *Apocryphal New Testament*, first printed in 1820. Hone's book was copied from two earlier one's published in 1736 and 1737. Thus the materials found in the "Lost Books of the Bible" were written 250 years ago. Since the time of the original writing of *The Lost Books*, the field of manuscript studies has made tremendous advances but none of this has been taken into account by those who publish these works.

The contents of the "lost books" include the following:

Four Infancy Gospels:

They include: "The Birth of Mary," a work written in the middle of the second century; "The Protoevangelium of James," written about the same time; the first "Gospel of Infancy," composed about A.D. 400; "The Second Infancy Gospel," which in reality is a fragment of the Gospel of Thomas.

These were so-called infancy gospels that were written to fill in the details of the early unrecorded years of the life of Christ. These works include stories of Jesus forming clay figures of animals and birds which He makes walk, fly, and eat. Another account has a child who runs into Jesus falling down dead. These examples are representative of the fanciful nature of the accounts.

The Letter of King Abgar

This was supposedly a letter written to Jesus by Abgar, King of Edessa. Jesus' reply to the letter is also contained. These works were written in the third century.

Gospel of Nicodemus

This is also known as "The Acts of Pilate." It was written in the fourth or fifth century.

Other works found among the lost books include the Apostles' Creed and the spurious letter from Paul to the Laodiceans.

These books have been called "outlaw" Scriptures by some. But this is not the case, for none of these works were ever thought of as part of the New Testament. Anyone who claims these works were suppressed by the church is speaking out of ignorance or a desire to deceive.

It is obvious from the date of composition of these works that they cannot be considered on the same plane as Holy Scripture, which was written by eyewitnesses or people who recorded eyewitness testimony of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Contrast With Four Gospels

One hundred years ago F.W. Farrar wrote the following that is still true today:

The Four Gospels superseded all others and won their way into universal acceptance by their intrinsic value and authority. After so many salutary losses we still possess a rich collection of Apocryphal Gospels, and, if they serve no other good purpose, they have this value, that they prove for us undoubtedly the unique and transcendent superiority of the sacred records. These bear the stamp of absolute truthfulness, all the more decisively when placed in contrast with the writings which show signs of willful falsity. We escape their lying magic to find support and help from the genuine gospels. And here we take refuge with the greater confidence because the ruins which lie around the ancient archives of the Church look like a guarantee of the enduring strength and greatness of those archives themselves (F. W. Farrar, *The Messages of the Books*, p. 27).

A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, the editors of the *AnteNicene Library*, said the other gospels offer...

curious glimpses of the state of the Christian conscience, and of modes of thought in the first centuries of our era, the predominant impression which they leave on our minds is the immeasurable superiority, the unapproachable simplicity and the majesty of the Canonical writings.

We conclude that any other book apart from the New Testament that attempts to fill in the gaps of the life of Christ only reveals the superiority of the four Gospels.

[Has God Revealed Anything Further to Mankind Since the First Century?](https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/canon.cfm)

There is evidence that the canon of Scripture was complete in the first century. Has God, since that time, revealed anything that is to be added to Holy Scripture?

Claims Do Not Make It True

The mere claim that God spoke to an individual does not make it true. There has to be evidence to back up the claim. The question is, "Does the evidence support the claim that God spoke through them?" The Bible instructs us to test the spirits:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world ([1 John 4:1](#)).

When we test the claims of those who have brought forth a "new Scripture" we find them to be untrue.

The downfall of all the books that have had inspiration claimed for them is that they present a different revelation from what has previously been recorded. They contradict the Bible. For example, the Koran says that Jesus was not the Son of God and that He did not die upon the cross for the sins of the world.

The sacred books of Mormonism teach that there exist many gods rather than the one God the Bible speaks of. In addition, Mormonism teaches that each male can someday become a god himself, Mormonism also denies the doctrine of the Trinity, salvation by grace through faith, and the eternal punishment of the wicked.

No Book Qualifies

Every book written since the completion of the Bible that claims to be further revelation from God fails on the same ground. They all deny that Jesus Christ is God Himself, second Person of the Trinity. These works also deny salvation by grace through faith. They preached a different gospel. The Apostle Paul warned the church at Galatia about such people.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel... But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed ([Galatians 1:6, 8](#)).

No Evidence

Furthermore, there is no substantiating evidence such as fulfilled prophecy to demonstrate the books are of divine inspiration.

Thus, as we examine the various books that have been written since the completion of the New Testament that have claimed to be further revelation from God, we find them coming short of the mark. The Bible warns:

Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you and you be found a liar ([Proverbs 30:5,6](#)).

Can Anything Be Added to the Bible Today?

We have seen that the canon was closed in the first century, and that since then God has not revealed anything on the level with Holy Scripture.

Westminster Confession

"The Westminster Confession," a seventeenth-century statement of faith, says concerning the Bible,

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men ("Westminster Confession," 1:6).

According to this statement, which sums up the Protestant view of Scripture, nothing is to be added or subtracted from the Bible. The revelation from God to man has been completed.

No Direct Word

However, there is no direct word in the Bible that says God has stopped revealing Himself. Some have appealed to the following verses in the Book of Revelation.

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life ([Revelation 22:18,19](#)).

This is only speaking of the Book of Revelation. It is not a commandment against adding any other book to Scripture. If taken literally, then you could not have any other book in Scripture but the Book of Revelation! Yet there is a principle here that is clearly taught. No one is to add or to take away from the revealed Word of God.

Jude makes a statement that is pertinent to our discussion.

I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints ([Jude 3](#)).

This verse teaches that a body of truth from God has been delivered to man and that this faith has been wholly delivered. This seems to indicate that no further revelation from God is necessary. God has told us in Scripture everything that we need to know about who He is, who we are, and what will happen to the earth in the future.

We know the nature of God does not change:

For I am the Lord, I do not change ([Malachi 3:6](#)).

The Bible says clearly that the faith has been completely revealed. Therefore, if any new revelation were to come from God, it would be consistent with past revelations.

Even if a work met all of the above criteria, it would not necessarily be the Word of God. While theoretically it is possible that God could add something to what He has previously revealed, it is highly unlikely that this would be the case. The faith has already been delivered to mankind. Any further word from God to man is not necessary. The canon of Scripture is complete.

Conclusion

After considering the subject of the canon of Scripture we can make the following conclusions:

1. The term canon refers to the authoritative books of Scripture.
2. God is the One who decided which books should be placed in the Bible.
3. We know the correct books are in the Bible because of the testimony of Jesus

4. The Apocrypha, books considered inspired by the Roman Catholic church, do not give evidence of inspiration.
5. Recent books that have claimed Divine inspiration have proven themselves to be frauds.
6. The Scripture is complete. Nothing should be added or subtracted from it.

Thank you for your interest in the Blue Letter Bible and we hope that God will grant you continual blessing in your studies.

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