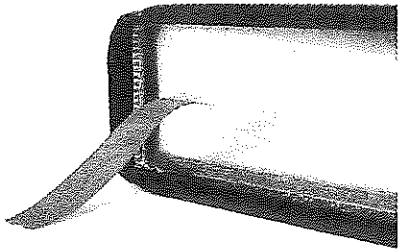


Canonicity of Scripture



Topic

Canonicity

Theme

God made it obvious which books were inspired Scriptures and therefore were canonical.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will be able to defend the truth that the sixty-six books of the Bible are the complete Word of God.

Materials

- Resource 4
- Various lengths of string
- Rulers

Scripture Focus

Luke 11:51; Acts 17:11, 12; Gal. 1:6, 7, 11, 12; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:21

Summary

This lesson explains canonicity and lays out the process early Christians used for identifying the books that should be part of the canon of Scriptures.

Outline

I. Definition of Canonicity

II. Five Tests of Canonicity

- A. Authority
- B. Writer
- C. Authenticity
- D. Power
- E. Reception

III. Importance of Canonicity

Memory Verse

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11, 12).

GETTING STARTED

LESSON 4

Measuring Up

Give each learner a piece of string. Make the lengths random but all less than twelve inches long. Have the learners guess at how long they think their string is down to the eighth inch. Provide several rulers for your learners to use to measure their strings. Acknowledge the learners who came closest to their guesses.

ASK: How well do you trust your ability to guess lengths? (Q1)

ASK: Name some situations in which you would want an exact measurement instead of a guess. (Q2)

The sixty-six books that make up the Bible all had to measure up before being accepted as Scripture. The measuring stick was strict. We will learn today about the standard by which each of the books was judged.

What Would You Say?

ASK: How would you respond if someone asked you how anyone could know every book in the Bible is supposed to be there and that none were left out?

ASK: How would you respond to the accusation that those who compiled the Bible left out books that didn't serve their purposes?

Attacking the integrity of the canonicity of the books of the Bible is a tactic people use to excuse themselves from the Bible's authority. But we can be confident that the Canon is complete, for all the books of the Bible have passed rigorous standards for being recognized as canonical.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Definition of Canonicity

The word *canon* comes from the Latin word, meaning *ruler, rule, model, standard*. The Romans borrowed this word from the Greek language (*kanon, kanna*), in which it meant a reed that was used as a measuring rod. In that sense a yardstick could be called a canon. In time, the word *canon* came to be used for items that had been measured and found to meet the standard.

In the earliest years of the Christian faith, believers recognized that certain books were *inspired* by God, or *breathed out* by Him, when they were written. These were recognized as the *canon* of Scripture.

II. Five Tests of Canonicity

God determined which writings were to be included in the Canon. The Holy Spirit led the people of Israel and then the people of the early church to recognize

which writings were inspired and were to be identified as Scriptures. Five basic principles guided the early Christians in recognizing which books were given by God.

A. Authority

The early Christians noticed whether a book expressed the authority of God.

READ: Genesis 15:1; 2 Samuel 7:4; Jeremiah 1:4. **ASK:** What common phrase is found in these verses? (Q3) *The word of the Lord came.*

Phrases that attribute words to the Lord clearly state that the words are not simply a man's idea or philosophy. Such statements are found at least 3,808 times in the Old Testament. In other words, God was careful to communicate that the Scriptures are authoritative.

In some of his epistles, the apostle Paul spoke of the authority of his writing.

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:23. **ASK:** What did Paul say about what he wrote? (Q4) *That he communicated what the Lord revealed to Him concerning the Lord's Supper.*

READ: Galatians 1:11, 12. **ASK:** What important doctrine did Paul say he received directly from God? (Q5) *The gospel.*

Paul recognized that nothing he said of his own authority would have been anything more than man's words. He even said that if he or anyone else tried to come up with his own gospel, then that person should be *accursed*, or *eternally condemned* (Gal. 1:8, 9). He fully understood that God was the sole authority for his epistles to the churches. Even his extensive training as a Pharisee didn't provide him with the necessary credentials to speak of his own authority.

All the Gospels contain quotations of Jesus Christ and accounts of God speaking from Heaven as well. Matthew 3:13–17, for example, includes words attributed to Jesus as well as a direct message from God in Heaven concerning Jesus.

Many books written over the years of Old and New Testament history did not have the authoritative ring of *thus saith the Lord*. While there may well have been truth in them, they were not recognized as being from God Himself.

B. Writer

Second Peter 1:21 says that God spoke through *holy men* in communicating the Scriptures. In recognizing which books were from God, the early Christians considered the writers of their books (Heb. 1:1). Were the Old Testament writers acknowledged as prophets, lawgivers, or leaders in Israel? Were the New Testament writers recognized as apostles or those who were backed by an apostle? Once the human writers were recognized as authorized by God, the early Christians needed to consider whether each book was written by the name it bears. For those books that don't list an author, they considered whether the book was written by the person traditionally recognized as the author. And for books that are not associated with an author directly or traditionally, they considered whether the book was written in the time period traditionally associated with the book. So books are not accepted as genuine when they appear to be forged or written later than claimed.

A careful examination of all sixty-six books of the Bible shows that every one of them is genuine. None of the books fails this canonicity test. Space doesn't allow us to delve into the genuineness test of every Bible book. So this lesson will focus on the genuineness of the Pentateuch, which has come under recent attack from within evangelicalism.

All five books of the Pentateuch have always been traditionally assigned to Moses. The evidence for his authorship is substantial.

READ: Exodus 17:14. **ASK:** What did God ask Moses to do? (Q6) *To write the account of the victory over the Amalekites.*

READ: Exodus 34:27. **ASK:** What did God want Moses to write about in this verse? (Q7) *God's covenant with Israel.*

Moses not only wrote about what God told him to write, but he also wrote that God told him to write about it. That is for our benefit. It gives us confidence that God intended for the history of His interaction with Israel to be recorded and that He intended for Moses to be the one to record that history.

Other places in the Pentateuch say that Moses recorded both the Lord's instructions to Israel (Exod. 24:4; Deut. 31:9, 24) and the records of their journeys with the Lord (Num. 33:2). Within the Pentateuch, Moses' writings are referred to as *the words of this law* and *the book of this law* (Deut. 28:58, 61). Outside the Pentateuch Joshua refers to them as *the book of the law of Moses* (Josh. 8:31) while Nehemiah calls the Pentateuch *the book of Moses* (Neh. 13:1). First Kings, 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Daniel also attribute the Pentateuch to Moses.

As shown in the previous lesson, some evangelical theologians believe the Pentateuch was naively based on myths, meaning the stories it contains are not actual historical events. Those same theologians believe Moses didn't write the books. So they would have to agree that a spurious writer made up God's commands to Moses to record historical events (Exod. 17:14; 34:27). For those theologians to claim that the Pentateuch should still be considered inspired is ludicrous. The evidence is clear that Moses wrote the Pentateuch and that he recorded real history under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

ASK: How important it is for you to know that the words the Pentateuch attributes to God were actually said by God and recorded by Moses? (Q8)

The New Testament gives further evidence to the fact that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Luke wrote that after Jesus rose from the dead He explained the Scriptures to the men on the road to Emmaus. Luke said Jesus began at *Moses* (Luke 24:27), a reference to the Pentateuch. The only reason Luke would call the Pentateuch *Moses* is if Moses had actually written the books. Luke again called the Pentateuch *Moses* in Acts 15:21 and Paul did the same in 2 Corinthians 3:15.

We must be careful not to let theologians talk us into doubting the genuineness of God's Word, as if they have more authority on the authors of the Scriptures than the Bible has itself.

READ: Galatians 1:6, 7. **ASK:** What warning did Paul give to the believers in

Galatia who had begun to follow a false gospel? (Q9) That those who change the gospel pervert it and bring trouble to those who fall for their convincing arguments.

READ: 1 John 4:1–6. **ASK:** What admonition did John give to believers?

(Q10) To test those who come to them with new doctrines to see if their teaching aligns with the truth in God's Word.

C. Authenticity

The question of authenticity deals with the content of Scripture. What does it say about God? Is its message consistent with the rest of the Bible? If a book contradicted other Scripture, then it would be suspect. The Bereans set an example by comparing Paul's message to existing Scripture to see whether what he said was in accord with other parts of the Word of God (Acts 17:11).

READ: Acts 17:12. **ASK:** What was the result of the Berean's faithful testing of the genuineness of Paul's teaching? *(Q11) Many of them believed.*

Jesus used the Old Testament while He was on earth, and He did so with approval of the text. The Scriptures Jesus used were organized differently than our Old Testaments today. In His Scriptures, Genesis was first and Chronicles (combined 1 and 2 Chronicles) was last with all the rest of our same Old Testament books in between. While speaking against some lawyers, he mentioned two murdered prophets (Luke 11:51). The first was Abel, whose murder is readily recognized as being in Genesis 4.

READ: Luke 11:51; 2 Chronicles 24:20, 21. **ASK:** What other murder did Jesus mention? *(Q12) The murder of Zechariah.*

Jesus spoke to the authority of the entire Old Testament by referring to historical events in the first book, Genesis, and in the last book, Chronicles. He essentially gave His stamp of approval on the first and last books and everything in between. We could say that Jesus used the Old Testament with such confidence that He regarded its historical records as adequate evidence to condemn the religious leaders of His day. Jesus' testimony regarding the Old Testament Scriptures is strong.

The testimony of all of Scripture is that is in incredibly harmonious. There is simply a lack of contradictory doctrines. That doesn't mean the books are not without their challenges. For example, on the surface it appears that Paul and James contradict each other when it comes to salvation. But a careful study reveals the difference is in what they emphasize. James didn't teach a works salvation as some would argue. Rather he taught that one's salvation will be evident in one's works (James 2:14–26). Paul, on the other hand, emphasized that salvation is not by works but by faith alone (Rom. 4:4, 5). Both emphases are important to understanding salvation and the Christian life. Paul brings them beautifully together in Ephesians 2:8–10.

D. Power

The fourth test of canonicity is the evidence that the book was inspired by

God. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the inspired Word of God is *quick, and powerful* and *piercing*. Its message powerfully transforms those who receive it (1 Thess. 2:13). The people of God were able to recognize transforming power in the books that are in the canon of Scripture.

READ: Hebrews 4:12. **ASK:** What books of the Bible in particular has God used to powerfully affect your life? (Q13)

ASK: How do the effects of God's Word help build your confidence in it? (Q14)

A good way to judge whether a book is inspired is to read it alongside other books that are not part of the Scriptures. The differences between the two become quite evident. For example, books from the Apocrypha, written from about 400 BC to the time of Christ, have a markedly different character than the books included in the canon of Scripture. They do not speak authoritatively; nor are they cohesive with the rest of Scripture.

E. Reception

The capstone of all questions and tests was if God's people recognized a book in the Bible as being from God when it was written and then read over the years. The question of what books belonged in the Jewish canon of Scripture had been settled centuries before the time of Christ. The scrolls containing the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24:44) had been collected in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

READ: Deuteronomy 31:9–13; Nehemiah 8:1–8. **ASK:** What did Moses command the priests to do? (Q15) *The priests were responsible to read God's Word to the people and enable them to understand it.*

The early leaders of the church quoted from the Epistles and the Gospels in the same way they quoted from the Old Testament books. Records of worship in the early church indicate that the books of the New Testament were read along with the Old Testament in the second century AD. Formal councils held by the early churches did not announce to the churches which books to use and which to reject. Rather, they offered formal statements that they were using the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments because they recognized them to be the Word of God.

The Council of Carthage in AD 397 was the first church council to recognize the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as belonging to the Canon. Though most of the New Testament books had already been considered canonical before then. The books of Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude were debated some but were eventually recognized. All of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament have proven to be indeed worthy of their place in the canon of Scripture.

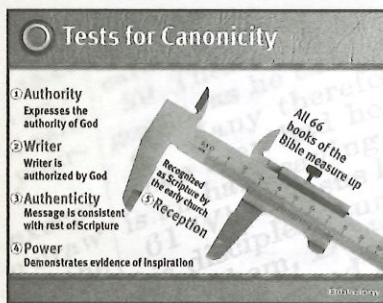
The Apocrypha was not accepted by the Jews, nor was it accepted by Christ or others in His time because those books contained historical inaccuracies and strange statements that were morally questionable. Christ never quoted from those books, even though He quoted from almost all the books of our Old Testament.

Apocrypha is a title that comes from Greek words that mean *hidden away* or *secret*. The Apocrypha includes 1 and 2 Maccabees, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Wisdom (Wisdom of Solomon), Tobit, Judith, Bel and the Dragon, Baruch, The Prayer of Manasses, The Song of the Three Holy Children, The History of Susanna, 1 and 2 Esdras, and additions to Esther.

Philo, a Jewish philosopher (20 BC–AD 40), quoted the Old Testament books, but he never included or recognized any of those inter-testamental books as sacred. The Jewish historian Josephus (AD 30–100) explicitly excluded the Apocrypha from the canon of Scripture.

No council of the Christian church gave credibility to the apocryphal books until four hundred years after the time of Christ. The early church actually spoke out against them. It was not until the Council of Trent (1546) that the Roman Catholic church acted to counter the Protestant movement and included the apocryphal books as belonging in the Bible. Just a reading of those books shows that their quality and reliability are not on the same par with inspired Scripture. That the Catholic church waited so long to make an official acceptance of the Apocrypha is a strong indication that the books were never canonical.

RESOURCE: Display resource 4 to review the tests for canonicity.



III. Importance of Canonicity

ASK: Why is it important for believers to be able to defend the canonicity of Scripture? (Q16) *The Bible is our authority on all that we believe. If we aren't sure which books are canonical, then we couldn't be absolutely sure about what we believed.*

Throughout the centuries, various religions have claimed that *extra* books are part of or equal to the sixty-six books of God's Word. As mentioned above, Roman Catholic Bibles contain fourteen additional books between the Old and New Testaments called the Apocrypha.

In 2003, *The Da Vinci Code*, a best-selling novel, alarmed the Christian world by suggesting, among other things, that (1) Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married; (2) Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, but just a *regular* guy; (3) the Bible and the deity of Jesus Christ are hoaxes concocted by Constantine so Christianity would appeal to the pagans under his rule.

By claiming that other Gnostic *books* that taught about Jesus' human traits were purposely left out of the Bible, author Dan Brown gave opportunity for many uncertain readers to further doubt the truth of the Bible. His influence is still reverberating today since being named one of the one hundred most influencing people in the world by Time Magazine in 2005. His novels have been translated into fifty-four different languages and have surpassed the two hundred million mark in sales.

The foundation of God's Word and our faith rests upon the deity of Jesus Christ. Satan will use whatever means possible to cause people to doubt the authenticity of the Bible. Any religion or form of *entertainment* that distorts the Biblical view of Christ or seeks to add to the Word of God offers an unbelieving world even greater reason to question Christianity. Therefore, it is vital that believers hold strongly to the canon of the sixty-six books of the Bible.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Ready to Defend

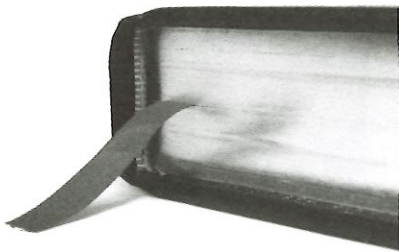
ASK: Summarize the canonicity of the Word of God in two or three sentences. (Q17)

ASK: Write a personal statement of your confidence that the sixty-six books of the Bible are the complete Word of God. (Q18)

Praise in Word and Action

ASK: Write out a praise to God that the sixty-six canonical books are known and compiled into the complete Word of God. (Q19)

ASK: How might you show your praise to God for assurance concerning the Bible's purity and completeness? (Q20)



Transmission of the Bible

Topic

Bible transmission

Theme

God expects careful attention to accuracy when transmitting Scripture.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will understand the basic history of the transmission of the Bible and will be burdened to share it with others.

Materials

- Resources 5 and 6
- Greek Bible
- Hebrew Bible

Scripture Focus

Phil. 1:21, 27–30; 2 Tim. 3:16

Summary

This lesson reviews the history of the transmission of the Bible including the early manuscripts and the later translations. The final section covers some basic principles for translating the Bible from its original languages.

Outline

I. Transmission of Scriptural Text

- A. Masoretic text
- B. Septuagint (LXX)
- C. Dead Sea Scrolls
- D. Ancient copies of the New Testament

II. History of the Bible

- A. Middle Ages
- B. Reformation
- C. English translations

III. Principles for Translation Work

- A. Have a high view of Scripture
- B. Be reasonably literal
- C. Work as a team

Memory Verse

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"
(2 Timothy 3:16).