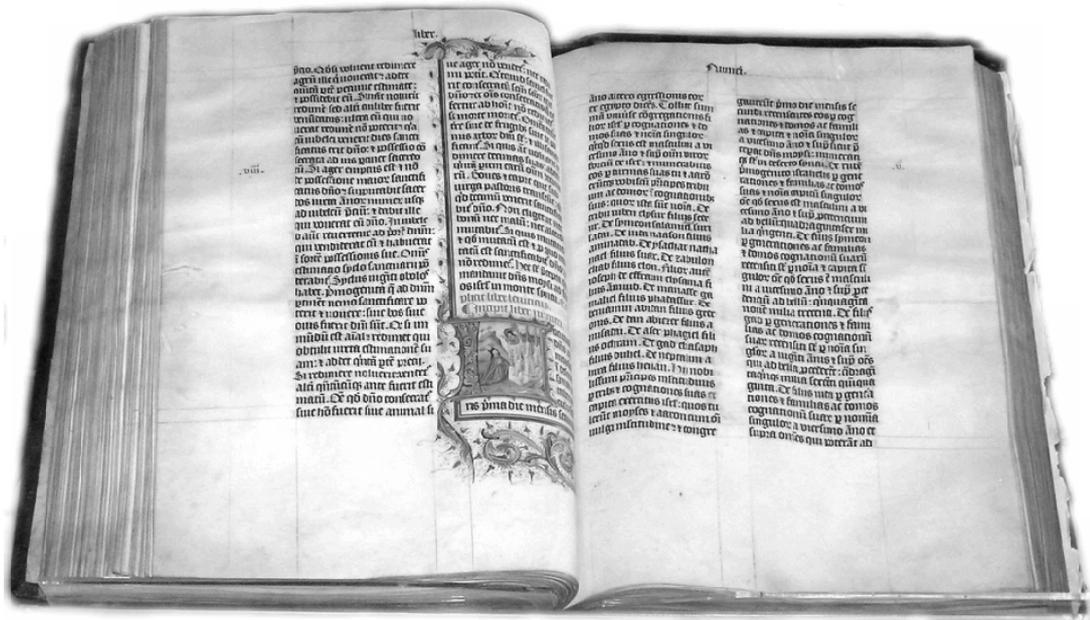


The Apocrypha and The Canon of Scripture



Biblethink.org.uk

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2013
Version 0.1

Summary

The Canon of scripture is the list of books which should be included in the Bible. The standard 66 books of the Bible have stood the test of time, but there are two alternative challenges to it, mainly made by those who wish to diminish the status of the Bible.

The conventional canon problem is whether one should include various books from the Greek Septuagint in the Bible, or whether these are merely books which express the thoughts of pious men in the period between the Testaments. The other issue is the existence of books from the second century AD and later which provide alternative views of Jesus and his teaching, mainly those of Gnostics. This article considers the conventional problem of the Canon; the question of the Gnostic books is considered in a different article (<http://biblethink.org.uk/pdffdocs/CanNTm.pdf>).

The main point of the Bible is that it is a collection of books inspired by God. If a book is inspired by God, it was inspired when it is written; the Church cannot make an inspired book uninspired, nor can it make a secular book in to an inspired one. The tests for inspiration are given us in the Bible:-

- Fulfilled Prophecy - Scripture makes predictions of future events which come to pass.
- Consistency with earlier revelation: Scripture has a consistent message which unscriptural works are likely to contradict.
- Citation by known prophets: If a known prophet (or apostle) says that a book is inspired, this is good evidence that it comes from God.
- Survival: God protects his word. If a book vanishes from sight it was either never inspired or God's purpose for the book is fulfilled.

In addition one can add the test of authorship and claim to be inspired.

The 66 books of the Bible satisfy these tests. We can be confident that they are inspired, and hence that they should be taken seriously as sources of information from God about his interactions with mankind. The apocryphal books all fail the tests above.

For more information visit:

<http://biblethink.org.uk/>

Version 0.1, December 2013

The Canon of Scripture

The Bible is the source of authority for Real Christians. It is the collection of books on which the teaching and practice of Christianity is based. It is therefore vitally important to know which books are correctly in the Bible and which books are not part of it. The Canon of scripture is the list of books which should be considered to be scriptural and which are purely human books.

This paper is about two questions:-

- How can one determine the real canon of scripture?
- What books should be in the real canon?

The Word Canon

The word "Canon" comes from the Greek word "Kanon", which originally meant "a measuring rod". By a natural extension of this meaning the word became used to refer to a standard or a rule. The canon of scripture is thus the list of books held as a standard of recognised scripture.

The problem cannot be solved by simply appealing to the traditions of churches, because different churches have different canons. The Standard canon of the modern Bible contains 66 books. The Old Testament in this is identical to the Jewish scriptures which contain the 39 books of the Old Testament (but not the 27 books of the New Testament). The Roman Catholic Church, however, includes additional books in the Old Testament. These are the books of the Apocrypha, although Roman Catholics would deny that they were apocryphal in any way. The Eastern Orthodox Church includes further additional books and the Coptic Church includes some of the works of post-apostolic authorities.

Lutherans have the same Old Testament as other Protestants, but some of the books of the New Testament are excluded.

The Problems of the Canon

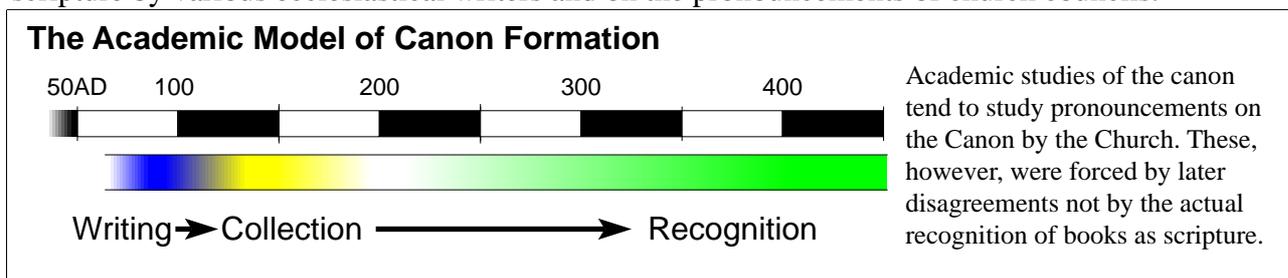
There are essentially two problems, the Old Testament problem and the New Testament problem.

- **The Old Testament problem** is the question of whether the additional books of the Roman Catholic (or Eastern Orthodox) canon should be considered as part of the Old Testament. Should Judith, Ecclesiasticus, 1 Maccabees and the additional parts of Daniel be considered to be scripture?
- **The New Testament problem** is the question of whether the Lutherans are right in excluding Hebrews, James, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude and the Revelation from the New Testament?

There are other problems as well in terms of recent discoveries of the Gnostic Gospels at Nag Hamadi in Egypt. However, the problem of these apocryphal writings is outside the scope of this paper. Link to [<http://biblethink.org.uk/pdfdocs/CanNTm.pdf>] to find another article on the New Testament Canon and the Gnostic Gospels.

Academic Theories of Canon Formation

If one reads a scholarly work on the subject of the Canon of Scripture one is likely to find that the usual method of proceeding is to look at the history of the church and comment on the uses of scripture by various ecclesiastical writers and on the pronouncements of church councils.



The Canon of Scripture

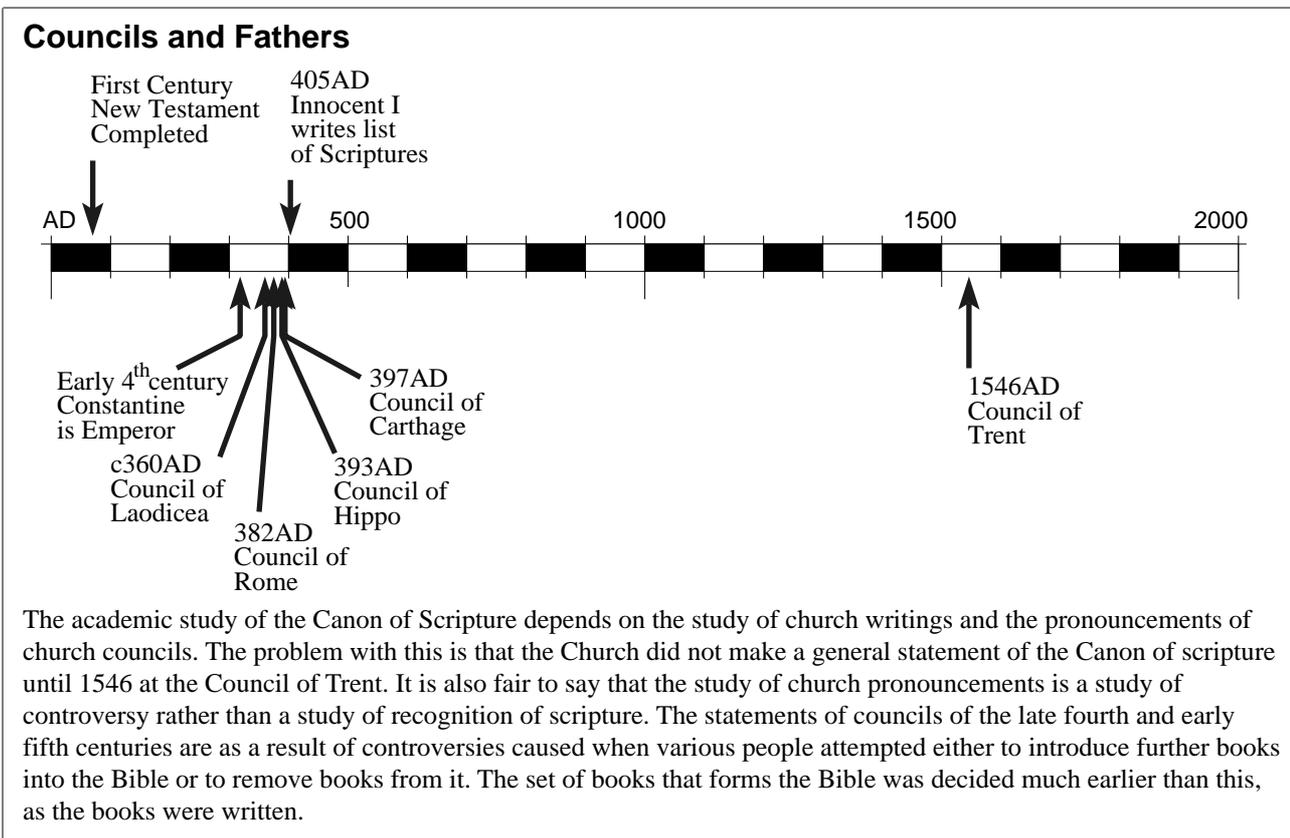
The underlying theory is that there are three stages to the production of the complete Bible. These are:-

- 1) **Writing:** The books are written down for local use. For example, the Apostle Paul writes a letter to the congregation at Ephesus.
- 2) **Collection:** Over decades collections of books considered useful for teaching and worship are made by various congregations. For example the authorities in Antioch might collect the letters of Paul from various different congregations in the eastern Mediterranean area.
- 3) **Recognition:** As a result of regular use the Church attributes divine origin to some or all of the books in its collection. These books become recognised as scripture and their recognition creates a canon of scripture.

This theory presumes a long time between the writing of the books and their recognition as scripture. The Encyclopedia Britannica, for example, asserts that the process of forming the Canon of Scripture was “long and flexible”.

Theories of this kind tend to be popular with the critical community because the collection and recognition period provides a gap between the time of Jesus and the Apostles and the time that the books were accepted as official scripture during which development might occur. The theories are also popular with Roman Catholic scholars because they imply that the Church has ownership of the Bible. Essentially the theory is based on the assumption that it is the process of recognition by the Church which makes a book a part of Scripture.

Studies of this kind are often replete with comments that “the Church existed before the Scripture” which are essentially polemical in their intention.



Having started with the assumption that the period of Canon formation was long, the academic studies go on to list the writings of Church Fathers and the deliberations of Church Councils which mention lists of books in the Bible. The problem with this approach is that the Roman Catholic Church did not produce a definitive list of the books of the Bible for many centuries. There were some local pronouncements in the fourth and early fifth centuries, but the Church did not make a definitive statement until the Council of Trent, which produced the statement *Decretum de Canonicis Scripturis* in 1546AD

The great problem of the academic approach can be summarised by the question: “Were the books of the Bible inspired by God before they were officially recognised as such by the Church?” As the words of the Bible were not changed by the church at the time of recognition they must have already been inspired. The idea that the Bible was inspired by God requires that the words were inspired from the moment of their writing. When the Church recognised them as authoritative books it was merely taking note of an existing fact. The books are scripture because they were revealed by God to their writers. They were therefore inspired and authoritative from the moment that they were penned. The Church did not make any difference to this.

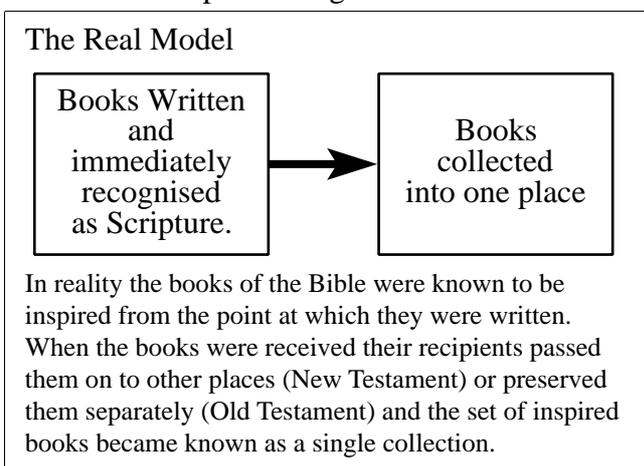
The Real Model

The real model is different. The books of the Bible were written from God and were already inspired when they were completed. The writer, at least, would know that they were authoritative. Writing and recognition thus happened at essentially the same time. Later on the books would be copied and passed on to recipients in addition to the original ones and within a short time there would be a collection of inspired and authoritative books.

This raises the question of the councils and writings of Church Fathers. The best explanation of what was recorded by these seems to be that very early on in the history of the Church, in the first and early second centuries, there was no problem with the Canon of scripture and the church was content with the scriptures that they had recognised. There is thus no record of a discussion of such matters in the Epistles of Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp or any other of the Apostolic Fathers. In the second half of the second century the issue became more important and Irenaeus of Lyons was constrained to point out that everyone knew that there were four Gospels.

In the mid to late second century Marcion tried to reduce the number of books accepted as scripture and at the same time various Gnostics attempted to add their own “hidden” Gospels to the Canon. The result was a controversy which brought forth comments from various Church writers and left its mark in the proceedings of various councils. The writers and councils made their statements to

affirm an existing position and their words show that they thought in these terms.



The Church became linked to the Roman Empire during the reign of Constantine in the early fourth century and Official copies of the Bible were produced. There was at this point no dispute over the canon of the New Testament, but the Greek Bible contained additional Old Testament books that were not in the Hebrew Old Testament. The question of whether the Old Testament Apocrypha should be added to the

The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was a large box or chest made of acacia wood covered with gold leaf; its lid was made of pure gold and supported a special area called the “mercy seat” and two statues of cherubim who shielded the mercy seat from view with their wings.

The Ark was the place where the Glory of God appeared to Israel and represented God’s presence with mankind. It was the most special of the contents of the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) and was only seen on one day in any year. Anything that was kept beside it (or inside it) was very special and was marked as being different from any ordinary object.

The Law of Moses was placed besides the Ark of the covenant. This shows that it was recognised as having come from God right at the start of Israel’s history.

known set of inspired books was debated in the fourth century and was not solved when Jerome produced the Vulgate in c400AD. In fact the arguments continued for centuries and it was on this issue that the Council of Trent came down on the wrong side. However, there was no point where the additional books of the Apocrypha were accepted by prophets as Scripture.

Evidence for Immediate Acceptance of the Old Testament

Consider the law of Moses. This Law was given to Moses over a period of time while the Israelites were crossing Sinai and preparing to enter the land of Canaan. During this period a

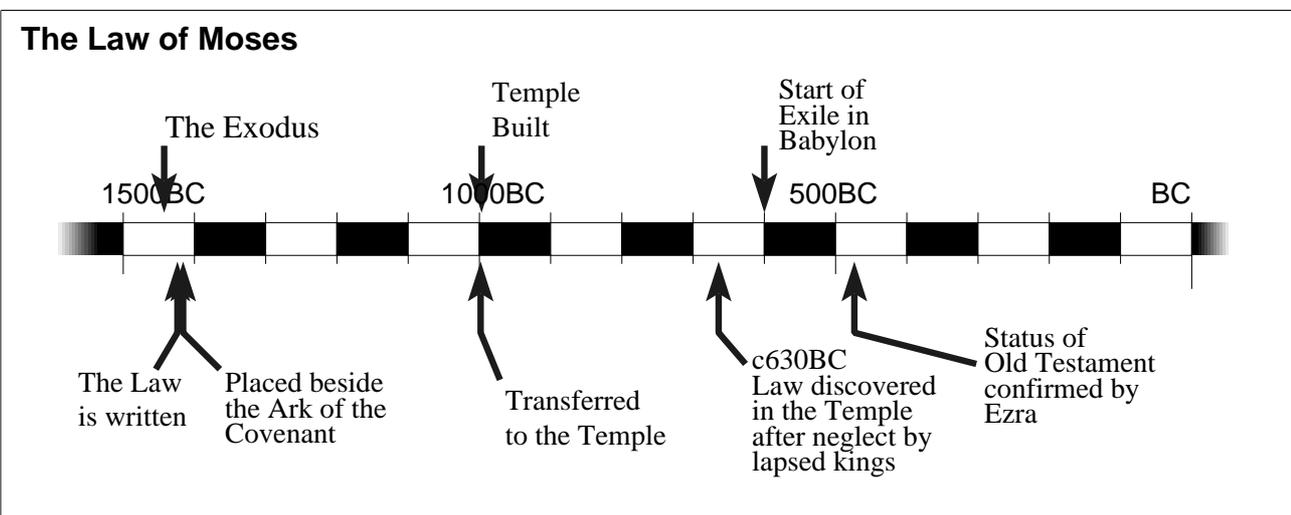
special chest was made; this is known as the Ark of the Covenant.

Exodus 25:10-20 describes the Ark of the Covenant. It was a box made of acacia wood , covered with gold and with long carrying handles. The testimony of God was placed in this box as God had commanded:-

you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. (Exodus 25:21)

The Ark of the Covenant represented the presence of God with the Israelites and only the most significant items were placed in it. In particular, however, the Ark was to contain the “Testimony”. Initially this was the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written but in time it would include the Law.

Deuteronomy 31:24-26 describes the writing of copies of the Law of Moses. One of these copies was to be placed “by the side of the Ark of the Covenant” as a witness to Israel. The Law of Moses had to be accessible to the people of Israel, but it was already acknowledged as a book from God. Quite probably the document that was laid up beside the Ark in Deuteronomy 31 only contained the first books of the Law, but the Book of Deuteronomy would be added to it soon afterwards.



The Canon of Scripture

In the reign of Solomon the Tabernacle was replaced by a permanent Temple built in stone and the Ark was laid up in it. Things that had been in the Ark were removed from it and stored in the Temple, so that the Ark was empty apart from the stones on which the Ten Commandments were carved (1 Kings 8:9). The books of the Law would be placed in the Temple at this time.

The book of the Law remained in the Temple until it was destroyed. This is confirmed for us by the events of the reign of King Josiah, recorded in 2 Chronicles 34 and 2 Kings 22. During the reign of the two previous kings, Manasseh and Amon, the service of God fell to a low ebb and the Temple in Jerusalem seems to have fallen into complete disuse. Josiah had it reopened and the book of the Law was found in it (2 Chronicles 34:14; 2 Kings 22:8).

What this sequence of passages tells us is that the books of the Law were recognised as scripture almost as soon as they were written and were then treated specially. Copies were deposited in a special place which showed the difference between them and other books. Initially the Law was kept with the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple in Jerusalem.

One can suppose that other books were recognised and added to the scripture as they were written.

The New Testament

The New Testament was also recognised as scripture immediately after it was written and was treated specially. There are a number of passages which present this picture.

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15,16)

This passage refers to the letters of the Apostle Paul as being like “the other scriptures”. This means that they were recognised as scripture by the time that 2 Peter was written. One can deduce that 2 Peter was written towards the end of 64AD (early 65AD at the latest) and by this time Paul was recognised as a writer of scripture.

For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The labourer deserves his wages.” (1 Timothy 5:18)

This passage refers to two sayings as being part of scripture. One of them is from the Old Testament but the other is only found in the Gospels. The Greek of the two references is slightly different and it is clear that the passage that is being quoted is from Luke 10:7.

Again, the words are described as coming from scripture. Luke’s Gospel must have been written between 58 and 62AD and 1 Timothy must have been written late in 62AD. Luke’s Gospel was recognised as Scripture very soon after it was completed.

Instances of Recognition of Inspired Words

Instance	Written / Spoken	Described as Inspired	Described by:
Letters of Paul	48-63 AD	64/65 AD	2 Peter 3:15,16
Gospel of Luke	58-62 AD	62 AD	1 Timothy 5:18
Words of Paul	49 AD	50 AD	1 Thessalonians 2:13

These are instances where the words of an apostle were recognised as inspired by God, and as a necessary part of scripture, soon after they were first delivered.

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And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

This passage indicates that the Thessalonians recognised the words of the Apostle Paul as having come from God. As 1 Thessalonians is the first letter that Paul wrote to Thessalonika the letter probably refers to verbal communication from the Apostle and his companions, but nevertheless these words were recognised as what they were - the words of God.

The followers of Jesus in the first century had special help in the task of recognising what were the words of God and what were merely the teachings of respected men. This was the gift of distinguishing between spirits (AV. discerning spirits). This gift allowed the recipient to discover whether an alleged prophecy from God was really inspired by him or was merely the thoughts of a human being. This gift appears in the list of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

It is therefore clear that not only did Christians of the New Testament period have the ability to discover whether words sent to them were from God, and hence potentially scripture, or were merely human wisdom.

Summary So Far

The findings of the sections above are:-

- The usual academic method of studying the Canon of scripture is based on the presumption that there was a long period in which the Canon developed and that it was Church decisions which were able to make books authoritative.
- This approach is fundamentally flawed. The inspiration of the book is conferred by God when the book is written and does not depend on later recognition by the Church.
- The books of the Bible were inspired by God at the time of their writing and were recognised as scripture very soon afterwards. They were then treated as separate books from those which were not inspired.
- The test of Canonicity is one of inspiration not one of Church recognition.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Immediately after the resurrection of Jesus there was no New Testament and the followers of Jesus were reliant on direct revelation from God in order to know the detail of the Gospel. The early followers of Jesus received various abilities and elements of guidance from God which are known as "Gifts of the Holy Spirit". Among these were the ability to act as prophets, the ability to speak in foreign languages, the ability to work miracles and the ability to decide whether someone who claimed to speak from God was really doing this or speaking on their own behalf.

Different members of early congregations received different gifts. The congregation was therefore reliant on its various members to work together in order to receive the full benefit of God's spirit.

The gifts finally passed away with the Apostles and are no longer available.

This leads to a very important principle. To resolve the question of whether a particular book is Scripture or not one shouldn't ask the question "Is it canonical?" but rather the question "Is it inspired?" If the book is inspired it should be taken seriously and not ignored. If an inspired book is not recognised by the Church, or an uninspired book is taken as canonical, this simply means that the Church is wrong.

Tests for Inspiration

The Bible provides four tests to allow one to decide whether a book is inspired or not.

Fulfilled Predictive Prophecy

As the Israelites approached the promised land and the death of Moses came near, they were told that there would be other prophets to show them what God had revealed.

And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:21,22)

This passage is about the problem of how to identify a real prophet of God. Moses had received a message from God and had passed it on to the Israelites, but he was about to die and messages from God would have to come through other people. The problem was how one might identify a prophet from God and distinguish such a prophet from an impostor.

The method identified by the passage is that of a sign which might be a miracle spoken of in advance or might be a prediction of future events. To determine the Canon of Scripture the prediction of future events is more likely to be useful as it requires additional evidence to show that the miracle is a real one. It is much simpler to deal with fulfilled prophecy.

The books of the Bible contain a considerable amount of prophecy, some fulfilled soon after the books were written and some much later. This means that people who lived shortly after the prophet were able to tell that the prophecy was from God, and those who live in the present day can look at more recent prophecy for which the evidence is still fresh.

Consistency

The test of fulfilled predictions is important, but it is not the only test. A test of consistency is given in Deuteronomy 13.

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3)

If the words of the prophet contain teaching which is inconsistent with the message of scripture from an earlier time then the prophet is false. One cannot accept a book as inspired by God if it is not consistent with other books known to come from God. This test of consistency is itself a consistent element of the Bible. It reappears in the New Testament in several places.

For example, consider the first Epistle of John:-

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (1 John 4:1-3)

This part of the passage concentrates on only one element of the Apostles' teaching, the fact that Jesus had come in the fullness of human flesh. However, verse 6 goes on to talk about the authority of the Apostles:-

We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:6)

The teaching of the Apostles was from God, guaranteed by Jesus and by the miracles that the Apostles worked. The teaching of others who claimed to have the Spirit of God needed to be consistent with this message if one was to accept that it also came from God. If someone produced an alleged revelation or authoritative statement which did not agree with the teaching of the Apostles then that person was not inspired and their teaching could be ignored.

Galatians contains an even clearer example:-

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8)

This shows how even the Apostles were to be subjected to the same test; was what they said consistent with what had gone before? Any words, or any teacher, who contradicted the words of established revelation from God were to be rejected. The point is so important that it is repeated in the next verse.

Citation

The third test is that of citation. If a known prophet quotes the words of an earlier book as scripture then one knows that that book is inspired by God and hence authoritative. This is why we find passages like this one from Nehemiah:

They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8)

Here the established prophet is the writer of the book of Nehemiah. He endorses the Law as "The Law of God" and not merely the Law of Moses. This is an assertion that the Law of Moses is from God and that it is hence to be treated as inspired Scripture.

There are very many places where the New Testament quotes the Old Testament. If one accepts Jesus and the Apostles as being inspired by God then one has to accept the Old Testament on their witness.

Preservation

The fourth and final test is one of preservation. The Word of God is given for a purpose, and it can be expected to achieve that purpose.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall

Tests for Inspiration

To summarise, for a book to be accepted as a part of inspired scripture it should satisfy some of the following:-

- **Fulfilled Prophecy:** The book should contain predictions which have been fulfilled
- **Consistency with Other Scripture:** The book should have a message which is consistent with that of other books known to be scripture.
- **Citation:** If the book is quoted as scripture by another prophet this shows it is inspired
- **Preservation:** If the book has not been preserved through the ages it is either not inspired or its purpose is fulfilled. It cannot be part of scripture.
- **Authorship:** A book that is written by a known prophet is likely to be scripture.
- **Claim to Inspiration:** One would expect an inspired book to claim to be inspired.

The Canon of Scripture

not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10,11)

Here we are told that the Word of God will only be withdrawn when it has achieved the purpose for which God has sent it. If a book is lost, then either it was never inspired by God or God's purpose for that revelation is fulfilled. Thus a book which was lost cannot be taken as a lost element of scripture.

This means that works like the book of Jashar, or Paul's lost letter to the Laodiceans, were not intended to be scripture, even though they might have been inspired. If they were inspired their purpose is fulfilled and they are no longer necessary.

Minor Tests of Inspiration

In addition to the above four tests there are two minor tests which can be used to filter out some of the more outrageous claims to inspiration. These are the tests of Claim to Inspiration and of Authorship.

- **Claim to Inspiration:** This test is based on the idea that if a writer doesn't claim that the words he writes are inspired by God then one should conclude that they are not to be considered part of Scripture. The reverse is not necessarily the case. One can show that Elpis Israel is not scripture because, although it is consistent with the message of the Bible as a whole its writer never claimed to be inspired by God. Joseph Smith did claim to be inspired by God when he wrote the Book of Mormon, but one can discount this claim because the Book of Mormon is not consistent with the teaching of the Bible.
- **Authorship:** This test looks at the person who wrote the book in question. If the book was written by someone who was known to be the writer of inspired material it would be expected that that book would be inspired and hence scriptural. However, this is only indicative; if the book fails any of the other tests then Authorship alone is not sufficient to reinstate it. 3 John, for example, is clearly written by the same person who wrote the other letters of John and the Gospel of John. The association with John would make a prima-facie case that the third letter of John is inspired.

Other Canons of the Old Testament

Church	Additional Books
Roman Catholic Church	1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus/Sirach, Baruch, The Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees Additions to Esther and Daniel
Eastern Orthodox Church	All the additional books of the Roman Catholic Church, 3 Esdras, 4 Esdras, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees One further psalm (Psalm 151)

In addition to the standard books of the Old Testament some churches have additional books. This table shows the books added to the standard set of 39 by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

The Old Testament Problem

The basic problem of the Old Testament is that the Jewish canon of 39 books is augmented by a further 10 books in the Roman Catholic tradition to make 49 books and by four more books in the Eastern Orthodox tradition to give a total of 53 books. Besides the additional books there are additional chapters to the book of Daniel and further additions to the book of Esther.

The Septuagint

The Septuagint is a translation of the Old Testament into Greek along with a few additional books. The traditional account indicates that the whole Old Testament was translated into Greek in the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, just before the middle of the third century BC.

More detailed study indicates that the Law of Moses was definitely translated in the third century; there are citations of it in the works of second century writers and manuscript fragments from the second century BC have also been discovered.

However, there is little evidence of the rest of the Old Testament at this early date. One can be certain that the whole of the Old Testament had been translated by the end of the first century AD. Manuscripts of various books from before the time of Jesus are available in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Oxhrhynchus papyri. The Septuagint is often quoted word-for-word in the New Testament.

Origins of the Additional Books

The additional books generally come from the Septuagint. The Septuagint was a translation of the Jewish scriptures into Greek in intertestamental times. The initial translation, which possibly included only the Law of Moses, was made in the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who reigned Egypt from 285 to 246BC. This translation would be held in a library in Alexandria (probably THE great library) where it would be added to at various times with other pieces of Jewish literature. By the time of Jesus the whole of the Old Testament had been translated and had become public; fragments of books from the Septuagint have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Septuagint would probably have been written as a collection of separate scrolls, and in a Greek

library like the one at Alexandria they would be kept together in a box or a pigeon-hole. It is very likely that other Jewish literature or history would be kept with these translations in the same box by the Gentile librarians of Alexandria who could not be expected to distinguish inspired books from secular ones. Thus the additional books of Maccabees, Sirach, Wisdom and the like would be held with the books of the Old Testament and when the contents of the box were copied and bound together into a single codex this would contain apocryphal books.

The additional sections of Esther and Daniel are attributable to the style of translation in Bible times. It was common for the translation method known as "Targum" to be used; this would combine a translation of the original with commentary and folk tales. One Targum of Esther, for example, includes a fanciful variant of the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the famous story of the Queen of Sheba and the hoopoe bird. It is quite possible that such a translation method would be used for some of the books of the Old Testament, especially when the whole project was overseen by Gentile scholars.

Alexandria was a very influential centre in the ancient world and continued to be so when Constantine became emperor and the Church suddenly had full access to the intellectual assets of the state. Alexandria was an especially influential centre of Christianity and it is not surprising that the Alexandrian version of the Old Testament became popular, especially as the Church spoke Greek and had cut its ties with Judaism and Hebrew almost completely.

The Hebrew Old Testament

The Hebrew Bible is the Old Testament. This is divided into three sections as follows:-

The Law	The Prophets	The Writings
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms
Exodus	Judges	Proverbs
Leviticus	Samuel	Job
Numbers	Kings	Song of Songs
Deuteronomy	Isaiah	Ruth
	Jeremiah	Lamentations
	Ezekial	Ecclesiastes
	The Twelve	Esther
		Daniel
		Ezra/Nehemia
		Chronicles

The Hebrew Bible contains only 24 books because some of the books of the modern Old Testament are grouped together (1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Ezra and Nehemiah, The twelve minor prophets, 1 and 2 Chronicles).

It is divided into three sections (The Law, The Prophets and The Writing[s]). A reference to the Old Testament as 24 books or as comprising three sections is thus a reference to the Hebrew canon.

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The Books of the Septuagint

The Septuagint is divided into five sections rather than the three sections of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Law	History	Wisdom	Minor Prophets	Prophets
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms	Hosea	Isaiah
Exodus	Judges	<i>[Psalm 151]</i>	Amos	Jeremiah
Leviticus	Ruth	<i>[Prayer of Manasseh]</i>	Micah	<i>Baruch</i>
Numbers	I Samuel	Job	Joel	Lamentations
Deuteronomy	II Samuel	Proverbs	Obadiah	Letter of Jeremiah
	I Kings	Ecclesiastes	Jonah	Ezekiel
	II Kings	Song of Solomon	Nahum	Daniel+ <i>additions</i>
	I Chronicles	<i>Wisdom</i>	Habakkuk	<i>[4 Maccabees]</i>
	II Chronicles	<i>Sirach/Ecclesiasticus</i>	Zephaniah	
	1 Esdras	<i>[Psalms of Solomon]</i>	Haggai	
	Ezra-Nehemiah		Zachariah	
	<i>Tobit or Tobias</i>		Malachi	
	<i>Judith</i>			
	<i>Esther+additions</i>			
	<i>1 Maccabees</i>			
	<i>2 Maccabees</i>			
	<i>[3 Maccabees]</i>			

Not all the additional books in the Septuagint have made their way into the Roman Catholic Canon; those not in the Roman Catholic canon are surrounded by square brackets.

The Structure of the Old Testament

The Septuagint left its mark on the later Christian Bible in that the order of books in the Septuagint is the order of books in the modern Christian Old Testament.

The Hebrew Old Testament is in three sections: The Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Neviim*) and the Writings (*Khetuvim*). There are 24 books (occasionally 22 books) in the Hebrew Old Testament; books like 1 and 2 Samuel or 1 and 2 Kings are put together, as are Ezra and Nehemiah, and the minor prophets form a single book (the twelve).

The Greek Old Testament comes in five sections: The Law, the Histories, the Writings, the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. The books are kept separate so that the 24 books of the Hebrew Old Testament become 39 books; however the material is the same in both books; it is merely the arrangement that is different.

The three section / 24 book Old Testament is characteristic of the Hebrew Canon which never contained the Apocrypha. The Apocryphal books only appear in the Greek, five section, Old Testament.

Fulfilled Predictions in Prophecy

One of the major features of the Old Testament is the amount of predictive prophecy in it. About 11% of the Old Testament is clear predictive prophecy (a further 6% is figurative prediction of the future) and all the elements of this which were to happen before the return of Jesus are fulfilled. This is a solid witness to the inspiration of the Old Testament. The Apocrypha contains no fulfilled predictive prophecy. This marks it out as completely different from the bulk of the Hebrew Old Testament.

However it is important to realise that this test, on its own, is only indicative. While the existence of fulfilled prophecy is good evidence of inspiration, the absence of such prophecy is not a guarantee that the book is not inspired. Neither the Song of Solomon nor the Book of Ruth contains direct predictive prophecy, but it would be sensible to consider them to be inspired and authoritative.

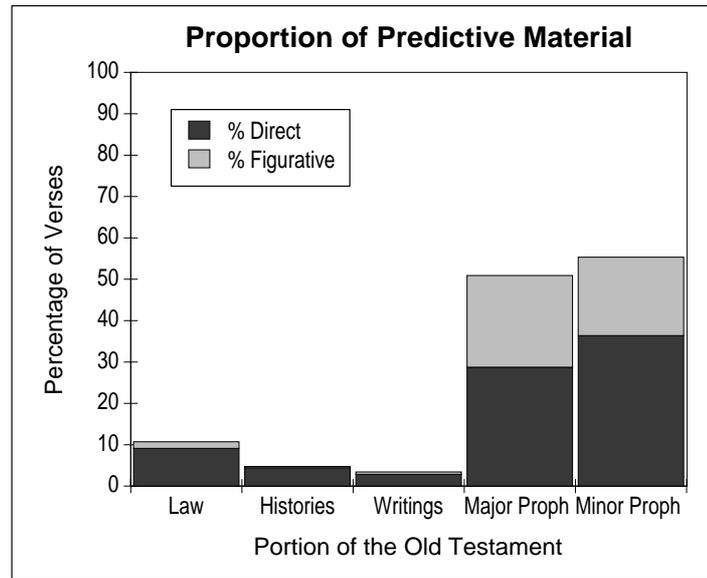
Consistency

The second criterion in the list is that of consistency with earlier revelation, and indeed with the rest of the Bible. A full study of the apocrypha is required to show the full scale of the differences, but even without this one can see that there are some discrepancies between the Apocrypha and the rest of the Bible. For example, 2 Maccabees teaches that those who die can have sins purged from them by the prayer and sacrifice of the living and also gives an apparent example of a dead holy person interceding on behalf of those alive on earth. Neither of these is shared with the rest of Scripture.

Citation

The next criterion is that of citation. The New Testament clearly quotes the Old Testament in a way which shows that the Old Testament is Scripture. There are numerous places where the quotations are long and detailed and many more where there are passing references. Green estimates that about 10% of the recorded words of Jesus are quotations from the Old Testament, and Jesus always quotes the Old Testament with approval.

Prophecy in the Old Testament



All the portions of the standard Old Testament contain predictions of future events, and all the predictions from before the return of Jesus are fulfilled. This is excellent evidence of divine inspiration.

Maccabees Purgatory & Intercession

The Old Testament apocrypha contains teachings which are not found anywhere else in the Bible. Here are two examples:-

Purgatory and Atonement for the Dead

For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.

(2 Maccabees 12:44,45)

Intercession of Saints

Onias, who had been high priest, a noble and good man, of modest bearing and gentle manner, one who spoke fittingly and had been trained from childhood in all that belongs to excellence was praying with outstretched hands for the whole body of the Jews.

(2 Maccabees 15:11)

For example, consider the way that Isaiah 9 is cited in Matthew 4 (See box on next page). The quotation of Isaiah by Matthew is extensive: it contains 35 words in Greek. It is described with approval; the action of Jesus is taken so that the word of the prophet should be fulfilled. Clearly Matthew 4 considers Isaiah to be inspired by God.

The New Testament contains a minimum of 420 extensive quotations like this of the Old Testament. In addition there are far more short quotations and many allusions.

Matthew 4 and Isaiah 9

One of the places where Jesus quotes the message of Isaiah is in Matthew 4:-

so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:-

“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”
(Matthew 4:14-16)

The passage quoted is from Isaiah 9:-

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt *the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali*, but in the latter time he has made glorious *the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.* (Isaiah 9:1,2)

Notice that Jesus quotes a long passage from Isaiah so that there is no doubt of where he is quoting from, and that he introduces it with a comment that Isaiah was a prophet and that his words would be fulfilled.

The New Testament also contains six citations of secular Greek writings and one allusion to an obscure work of Jewish apocalyptic, but these are quoted in a quite different way. There is no appeal to them as authorities; they are clearly not considered to be scripture.

There are **no** places where the New Testament cites the Old Testament Apocrypha.

Occasionally one finds someone who produces the list of possible connections from the Nestle-Aland New Testament, but this is intended to refer to places where a mediaeval monk might include a quotation from the Apocrypha in the text by mistake and not a direct list of quotations. For example, the list contains an example where Matthew 4:15 might be linked to 1 Maccabees 5:15 (See box). However, only three words are involved in the quotation, the word “Galilee of the Gentiles”. In 1 Maccabees there are only two words, and both of these are different from the wording in Matthew (one by only one letter but the other is completely

different). It is most likely that both are quoting from the same passage in Isaiah 9, but as they are both translations of a Hebrew original there are translation variants between them. Nestle-Aland lists the correspondence because a copyist may accidentally include the Maccabees wording instead of the original Matthew text.

There is a similar alleged citation of Sirach 51:26 by Matthew 11:29. However, a full analysis shows that only three words in the two passages are the same, and these are out of order. One would expect more than twice as many to be the same, and the order to be identical if Sirach were being quoted by Matthew.

New Testament References to the Entire Old Testament

Besides direct quotations of the Old Testament the New Testament sometimes refers to the Old Testament as a whole. When this happens it is clear that the Hebrew Old Testament, not the Greek, is intended. The Hebrew Old Testament doesn't include the Apocrypha.

Matthew 9 and 1 Maccabees 5

One of the places where a claim exists that the Gospel quotes from the apocrypha is Matthew 9. However, the claim doesn't stand up to examination.

The Passage in 1 Maccabees:

They said that against them had gathered together men of Ptolemais and Tyre and Sidon and all Galilee of the Gentiles (Galilias allophulon), to annihilate us. (1 Maccabees 5:15)

The Passage in Matthew

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles (Galilaia ton ethnon)...
(Matthew 4:15)

The passage that the claim says is quoted is very short - only two words in Greek. This contrasts with two whole verses in the case of the Gospel quotation of Isaiah. Not only that, but the Greek wording of the phrase which the claim says is quoted is, in fact, quite different.

It is clear that Matthew is not quoting from the Apocrypha here. Instead Matthew and 1 Maccabees are both quoting from Isaiah. Isaiah was written in Hebrew and the other two in Greek and there is variation in the translation of the phrase.

A similar analysis can be carried out of the other claims that the New Testament quotes from the Apocrypha.

For Example, consider Luke 24:-

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44)

Here Jesus is clearly endorsing the Old Testament. He tells us that "everything... must be fulfilled". The way that Jesus refers to the Old Testament is significant. He refers to the three sections of the Hebrew Old Testament rather than the five of the Septuagint. These sections are describes as the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms - the Psalms are the first book of the writings and the largest. It is the Hebrew Old Testament that Jesus is endorsing.

Paul and the Old Testament

The Apostle Paul refers to the Old Testament in a very significant way in Romans:-

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. (Romans 3:1,2)

This passage tells us that the Jews were given custody of the Old Testament scriptures. This means that the Old Testament consists only of the books preserved by the Jews; this is the conventional canon excluding the Apocrypha. The Apocryphal books were only preserved in Greek, in Gentile libraries such as the one in Alexandria. They were never adopted as scripture by the Jews, but only by the Gentile Christian church. They are clearly not in Paul's idea of inspired Scripture.

Comments from the Apocrypha

Finally, one can consider a couple of references from the Apocrypha itself. The first of these is from the prologue to the book of Sirach. This part of the book purports to describe where the book came from:-

...my grandfather Jesus [ben Sirach], after devoting himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our fathers... (Sirach Prologue)

This passage describes the Canon of Scripture in terms of the three part Hebrew Canon. It also plays down any claim to be revelation.

The second passage is from 2 Esdras. This is a passage characteristic of those who wish to add another book to an established canon under the name of someone who has died long before but in whose name the book was given:-

And when the forty days were ended the most high spoke to me saying: ›Make public the twenty four books you wrote first and let the worthy and the unworthy read them, but keep the seventy that were written last in order to give them to the wise among your people. (2 Esdras 14:45,46)

This passage refers to the 24 books of the Hebrew Old Testament as being the public Canon of Scripture. The 70 hidden books are mentioned to allow for the occasional "discovery" of a new book by the people who produced 2 Esdras. As Ezra was a Hebrew speaker and writer who

Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew (with a small portion of the related language Aramaic). The books were copied by Jewish scribes and the master copies were held in the temple in Jerusalem. Effectively the Jewish community was the guardian of the books of the Old Testament.

In the fourth century BC Alexander the Great conquered the Persian empire and introduced Greek (hellenistic) culture to the eastern world. Greek became the dominant language, and important cities like Alexandria and Pergamon maintained large libraries of books in Greek. The Old Testament was translated into Greek and copies were held in these libraries; other Jewish books were translated or written in Greek and added to these, again by Gentile librarians.

The Jews were only the custodians of the standard Old Testament. The Apocrypha is not included in the Jewish Scriptures.

The Canon of Scripture

Jesus Cites the Old Testament

The following statistical analysis is from the parallel Bible, edited by J. P. Green. It shows that, out of nearly 4,000 verses of the Gospels, 1,865 record quotations of the Old Testament by Jesus. This is 5% of the entire wording of the Gospels, and 10% of the recorded words of Jesus.

	Verses			Percent		
	Total verses	Words of Jesus	Old Testament Quotations	Words of Jesus	Old Testament Quotations	Of Jesus' Words
Matthew	1,181	603	83	51%	7%	14%
Mark	609	275	34	45%	6%	12%
Luke	1,251	570	42	46%	3%	7%
John	879	417	20	47%	2%	5%
Total	3,920	1,865	179	48%	5%	10%

The highest proportion of words taken from the Old Testament is in Matthew and the least in John. Nevertheless, a high proportion of Jesus' words are taken from the Old Testament. Jesus never quotes the Apocrypha.

Jesus always quotes the Old Testament in a way which shows he considers it an authoritative message from God.

occasionally provided translations of Hebrew into Aramaic he is unlikely to have produced 2 Esdras, which seems to have been composed in Greek. The passage thus shows both a confirmation of the 24 book Hebrew Canon and shows unmistakable signs of being written by someone other than the name attached to the book.

A final quotation from 1 Maccabees indicates that no prophet was involved in writing the Apocrypha.

So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should arise a prophet to tell them what to do with them. (1 Maccabees 4:46)

According to this passage there was no prophet available at the time when the altar was reconstructed, and there must still have been no prophet available when 1 Maccabees was written or that prophet would have been able to pronounce on the correct treatment of the old stones.

Effectively the Old Testament Apocrypha declares itself to be outside the Canon of Scripture.

This is not to deny the usefulness of at least parts of it. 1 and 2 Maccabees, for example, are good sources for the history of the Jews between the Old and New Testaments, but they are not inspired by God as Scripture.

The New Testament Problem

The New Testament problem is that Martin Luther rejected six of the books of the New Testament. These are Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and The Revelation.

These epistles appear in some writings of second century Christian authors; James, for example, appears in the Shepherd of Hermas and the works of Irenaeus of Lyons. However, there was some debate about the position of the general epistles in the fifth century AD but for the main part these books were considered to be part of Scripture up to the reformation and even then they were accepted by everyone except for Lutherans.

Martin Luther objected to the inclusion of these books in the Bible he did so on the grounds of whether they agreed with his doctrine rather than any other reason. James was rejected as a "right strawy epistle" because it clearly teaches that the way one lives one's life is important to salvation

and not merely one's intellectual beliefs. Luther was fixed on an idea of salvation by faith alone - "Sole Fide" - by which he meant only one's beliefs. Hebrews was rejected because it contained points similar to the teaching of James. The Revelation was rejected because it clearly teaches the Millennium (this is why Clement of Alexandria had problems with it in the third century), 1 and 3 John because they are insignificant in length and 2 Peter and Jude because they are similar and Luther didn't believe that a real Apostle would be called Judas.

However, as soon as one admits that Lutheran doctrine might, in places, be less reliable than the Bible the difficulties vanish. There are really no positive reasons for rejecting these books.

All the books mentioned are in complete and detailed harmony with the rest of the Bible. Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, Jude and the Revelation contain fulfilled predictions and the books have evidence of apostolic authorship.

One can therefore accept all the New Testament books as scripture. Even the Lutherans have allowed these books back into their Bibles in the centuries after Luther. The position of these books in the New Testament is now only an issue raised as a cheap shot by people attempting to attack the Bible.

Conclusion

The only reasonable conclusion that one can draw from a study such as this is that the Bible contains 66 inspired books, although the way that they are grouped and the order in which they may appear could vary. It is the question of inspiration that is important and all 66 books show signs of having been inspired by God.

Why then, do some churches insist on variant Canons and why do they complicate the idea that the books of the Bible were inspired from the moment of writing? One might suspect that the answer is that it is for the same reason that the Bible is banned by totalitarian regimes. The Bible is a dangerous book which can set people thinking and persuade them to act justly and compassionately, and this tends to undermine supreme human authority. The canons and traditions with which the Bible is often surrounded are an attempt to cage the Bible, or at least to keep it on a chain. By doing this one might manage to prevent it from undermining traditional authority.

Real Christians, of course, can have no separate authoritative tradition. We can only rely on the powerful Word of God.

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