

Week 3: The Canon and Transmission of the Bible

*Grudem_{ST} 3; Grudem_{BD} **; Ryrie 15*

**** Canonicity is determined by God. A book is not inspired because men made it canonical; it is canonical because God inspired it.** (Geisler, 220)

The Canon of Scripture: (Grudem, Ryrie)

- A. **Definition:** *The list of all the books that belong in the Bible* (Grudem, 54)
- B. Derivation – from the Greek word *kanon*, referring to a “rule” or “measuring instrument.”
- C. Meaning – a list of books that met certain rules, and that these books become our rule of life.
- D. Biblical canon has been considered complete and closed since Council of Carthage in 397 AD.

The Old Testament Canon & Transmission: (Grudem, Geisler, Ryrie)

- A. Began with the Ten Commandments written by God Himself (Ex. 31:18)
- B. Moses then added the words of the law in a book (Deut. 31:24-26)
- C. Joshua continued (Josh. 24:25-26) in spite of Deut 4:2, proving his writings were divinely inspired
- D. To the Books of the Law were added the Prophets and the Writings until Malachi’s time roughly during the reign of Artaxerxes of Persia (464-423 BC). (cf Luke 24:44-45)
- E. OT canon must have been closed by Jesus’ day (cf Luke 11:51?). He and the NT writers quote the OT over 250 times including every Book except Esther, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.
- F. The Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37-100) claimed that no writing since Artaxerxes was found worthy of equal credit of the earlier writings “because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.” He said the Jews held as sacred only 22 books (same as our 39) (Against Apion, 1, 8).
- G. The Dead Sea Scrolls (~150 BC – 70 AD) are some of the earliest surviving Hebrew manuscripts of the OT. About 40% of the 972 scrolls are biblical. Every OT book is represented except Esther.
- H. The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa) contains the entire book, and is virtually identical to texts 1000 years later (Aleppo and Leningrad Codices), and the standard Hebrew Text in use today (*BHS*).
- I. So, the OT we have today is virtually the same as it was over 2,000 years ago!

The New Testament Canon & Transmission: (Grudem, Geisler, Metzger, Ryrie)

- A. Began with the writings or authority of the Apostles (cf Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20)
- B. Church immediately regarded 20 of the 27 NT books as canonical (minus Heb, Jas, 2Pet, 2John, 3John, Jude & Rev)
- C. At the Council of Carthage in 397 AD, the limits of the NT canon were fixed at 27 books
- D. Over 5700 manuscripts of the Greek NT are extant. 99 of these date earlier than 400 AD, and as many as 18 are from the 1st and 2nd Centuries and contain over 40% of the NT (Wallace, CSNTM).
- E. In addition to the Greek manuscripts, we have over 20,000 manuscripts of NT translations into other languages (Latin, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Arabic, etc...)
- F. In addition to the texts, we have over 1,000,000 quotations of the NT by the early church leaders
- G. While many textual variations do exist in these manuscripts, none affect any major doctrine of the NT. All known manuscripts and variants were compiled in ‘editions’ used for English translations.

Apocryphal (hidden, spurious) & Pseudepigraphical (falsely attributed) Books: (Grudem, Ryrie)

- A. The Jewish leaders did not regard any of these writings as canonical.
- B. While a few early church leaders accepted some of these writings as Scripture, they were not included in the finalized list at the Council of Carthage in 397 AD.
- C. The Roman Catholic Church, in response to the Reformation in 1517, canonized much of the apocrypha at the Council of Trent in 1546.

Questions:

1. Why is it important for a Christian to know which writings are part of the canon and which are not?
2. Have you had doubts or questions about the canonicity of any parts of Scripture?
3. Other cults have claimed present-day revelations that are equal to the Bible in authority. What reasons can you give to indicate the falsity of those claims?
4. Should we read the apocryphal writings? If so, how should we understand them? What affect should they have on us today?
5. What if a long lost letter from Paul were discovered (1Cor 5:9)? Should it be considered Scripture?