

ISSUE

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BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

August 19,
2018

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McAnear
Ryan Matney
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott
Justin Smiley
Kevin Wise
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



The Canon of Scripture

By Kyle Pope

The word canon is a Greek word meaning “measuring line, or rule.” When used in reference to the Scriptures it refers to the collection of books recognized as authoritative and inspired. In our day it is often asserted that man alone decided (long after the texts were written) what would make up this “canon” of Scripture. For a few moments let’s consider how the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments came together.

The Old Testament

By the time of Jesus the thirty-nine books that are found in our English translations were already grouped together. The Jews arranged them in three sections: the *Law* (Genesis–Deuteronomy), the *Prophets* (Joshua–2 Kings, Isaiah–Ezekiel, and Hosea–Malachi) and the *Writings* (Psalms-Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and 1-2 Chronicles). Jesus demonstrates His own acceptance of these three groups of Scripture in Luke 24:44. He declared: “...**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**” (NKJV). The New Testament contains 312 quotes from almost every one of these books

The Apocrypha

During the 3rd-1st centuries BC fourteen books were written that are referred to as the *Apocrypha* meaning - “hidden writings.” These fourteen books are:

- **1 Esdras**—Which describes Cyrus and Darius’ treatment of the Jews.
- **2 Esdras** (or 4 Ezra)—Which claims to be a vision of God’s coming government of the world.
- **Tobit**—A Romance between an Israelite captive and a widow.
- **Judith**—A Legend of a Jewish woman who beheaded a Babylonian general.
- **An Extension to Esther**—Which contains additions to the book of Esther that attempt to show God’s work in the story.
- **Wisdom of Solomon**—A book of philosophy written by an Alexandrian Jew impersonating Solomon.
- **Ecclesiasticus** (or Wisdom of Sirach)—Proverbs written by a Jewish philosopher.
- **Baruch**—A text that claims

to be a manuscript addressed to the Babylonian exiles written by Jeremiah’s scribe.

- **Song of the Three Holy Children**—Additions to the book of Daniel.
- **History of Susanna**—Another addition to the book of Daniel describing a Jewish woman falsely accused of adultery.
- **Bel and the Dragon**—A further addition to the book of Daniel describing a contest Daniel staged to prove the falsehood of the Babylonian gods.
- **Prayer of Manasseh**—A text claiming to be a prayer of the king of Judah.
- **1 and 2 Maccabees** - Historical accounts of the Jews under the Seleucid rulers.

These books were never considered canonical by the Jews. The first century Jewish historian Josephus gives a clear explanation of what books were accepted by the Jews. He claims, “...there are only twenty-two books which contain the records of all the past times and are justly believed to be divine” (*Against Apion*, 1:8).^{*} Josephus does not include the Apocrypha within this description. While the Apocrypha was included within the Greek translation of the Old Testament made before the time of Christ known as the *Septuagint*, it was probably included as a historical supplement.

The Roman Catholic Church and some other denominations view the Apocrypha as canonical. Jerome, the fourth century Latin scholar, included it in his Latin translation of Scriptures known as the *Vulgate*. However, Jerome himself was the first to apply the name “Apocrypha” to these works, acknowledging them as “books of the church,” but not “books of the canon.” It was not until 1546 that the Roman Catholic council of Trent declared the

^{*} The Jews combined the two books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles into one book each; Ezra and Nehemiah into one book; the twelve Minor Prophets into one; and sometimes Ruth and Judges, and Lamentations and Jeremiah into one book each arriving at a total of 22 books.

Apocrypha to be “canonical.” This was largely in response to the rejection of these texts as canonical by many within the Protestant Reformation.

It is important to note that neither Jesus nor the apostles ever quoted from or made reference to these books. Thus, while we may appreciate the historical value of some books of the Apocrypha, they must be rejected as non-authoritative and uninspired.

The New Testament

The twenty-seven books that comprise the New Testament were written as separate epistles or narratives between AD 44 and 96. Copies of these works were made and circulated among the churches from the very beginning. This is evident from the earliest history we have after the New Testament. For example, an early Christian writer named Clement, writing to the church in Corinth in the early second century cites Paul’s letter to them, to teach against division (*To the Corinthians* 47). Justin Martyr writing in the middle of the second century, claimed that the “memoirs of the apostles,” which he said were already called “gospels,” were read in Christian worship (*First Apology* 66-67). The late second century apologist Irenaeus used New Testament books as the source of his authority and refers to all of them (except Philemon, 3 John and possibly Jude).

False doctrines that arose in the mid-second century made the need for consistency regarding what was accepted as New Testament Scripture of vital importance. A Gnostic named Marcion decided to establish his own “canon” based on his own Gnostic views. He rejected the Old Testament and all of the gospels except Luke (which he edited in accordance with his views). He accepted only ten of Paul’s writings and rejected Acts, Revelation, and the other epistles. Sometime

after Marcion, another Gnostic named Montanus claimed to receive a direct revelation from God. Montanus argued that the New Testament canon was not closed, but that ongoing revelation should continue. In response to this, Christian leaders formally began to contend that the New Testament canon was in fact closed.

Among those who argued that revelation was complete, was a Carthaginian named Tertullian. Although originally a Montanist, Tertullian late in the second century, like Irenaeus, came to believe that the books of the New Testament were complete. In the years after this, Christian writers and religious groups began to compose “canon lists” and to issue decrees in religious “councils” expressing their convictions regarding what books comprise the New Testament canon.

One of the earliest of these lists, written by an unknown author sometime in the second century is known as the *Muratorian Canon*, after its 18th century discoverer, Muratori. It lists



most of the New Testament books (although it leaves out Hebrews, Peter's epistles, James and 3 John). It also includes two apocryphal works, the *Revelation of Peter* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*. The Muratorian fragment is written in very poor Latin, and reflects either the ignorance of the scribe who copied it or its original author.

More scholarly lists, composed by the Greek scholar Origen (ca. 250) and the historian Eusebius (ca. 300), have also been preserved. These list all of the New Testament books, yet classify Hebrews, James, 2 Peter 2 and 3 John, and Jude as "disputed." It should not be surprising that it took some time for all the epistles to be circulated and fully accepted. Nor is it sur-

prising that there had to be a process of testing the works that were genuine and those that were not. During this time Christians had to contend with 1.) Gnostic texts deliberately written to alter traditional teachings (e.g. the *Gospel of Judas* and the *Gospel of Thomas*); 2.) Christian fiction that placed biblical figures in fictional situations (e.g. *Paul and Thecla* and the *Infancy Gospels*); and 3.) Early Christian religious writing (e.g. *First Clement* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*). This does not suggest that the preservation and truth of God's word was uncertain, but simply that men acting with freewill were expected to **"test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world"** (1 John 4:1).

In the years that followed there came to be more widespread acceptance of the twenty-seven books of our New Testament. In AD 367, Athanasius, a bishop of church in Alexandria, sent a letter urging churches in his area to accept the books of our current New Testament as complete and canonical. Leaders in the North African cities of Hippo (in 393) and Carthage (in 397) expressed agreement with Athanasius. In 405 the church in Rome acknowledged the same list, and there has been little serious challenge to this since then. We should not imagine that the compilation of these books was simply a matter of human effort. Jesus promised in Mark 13:31, **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."** The hand of God's providence has always been at work in both the preservation and the compilation of His word. We can have full confidence that the books contained in the Old and New Testaments are the full and complete revelation of God to man.

