

THE CANONIZATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Request: “Could you give a brief summary of the dating of the OT and NT Canons?”

The Greek word for canon is kanon. It is derived from the Semitic word qaneh. It refers to that which is measured by a standard or norm or rule.

The canon was adopted to refer to a binding rule of God’s word. It was referred to the Scriptures as the binding rule of the faith of the church – “ho kanontes ekklesias” by Origen (185AD - 254AD).

However, the Greek word kanon is never used this way in the NT. Church history records that it was adopted to refer to a specific listing of 39 books of the OT and 27 books of the NT. “These books which were measured by the standard or test of divine inspiration and authority were adopted to be ‘God-breathed’ were included in the Canon.” (Unger, pg.174)

**This lesson will study five aspects of the brief history of
the Canonization of the Scriptures that we call the Bible.**

1. The completed Bible (66 books) is called the Canon of Holy Scriptures. It is interesting that the English word for Scripture is from Latin (scriptura).

The Greek word for Scripture is graphe (writing) (Rom.15:4) (prographo) [previously written]; (grapho) [written]; and (ton grapho) [Scripture]. It is a reference to the canonization of the OT.

- Luke 24:27, 32
- John 5:39-40; 7:38; 19:36-37
- 2 Tim.3:16-17
- 2 Pet.1:20-21

2. The canon of Scriptures transcends time, ages, and civilizations (Col.1:25-26).

It is infallible and eternal (Matt.5:18; 24:35; Luke 24:44-47).

The canon of Scriptures is not to be changed or substituted (Mark 7:13; Rev.22:18-19).

3. The Bible (completed canon of Scripture) is the best-documented and accurate copied book from the ancient world.

“No book has ever been so minutely studied, has had so many books written on it, has founded so vast a lit. of hymns, liturgies, devotional writings, sermons, has been so keenly assailed, has evoked such splendid defenses, as the Bible.” (I.S.B.E, pg.468)

“The Bible was written by about 40 men who engaged in writing it during a period of about 1600 years dating from 1500 BC to about 100 years after Christ.” (NAS Bible)

“The Bible is the record of God’s revelation of Himself to men in successive ages and dispensations (Eph.1:8-10; 3:5-9; Col.1:25-26). Till the revelation culminated in the advent of His Son, and the mission of the Spirit.” (ISBE, pg.467)

4. The Hebrew canon was compiled by a group of scholars called Masoretes. Thus the Hebrew Bible is called the Masoretic text.

“Josephus (37-100AD) said that the Jews held as sacred only 22 books (which include exactly the same as our present 39 books of the OT).” (Basic Theology by Ryrie, pg.121)

“In these matters, the Protestant canon has been affected by the Septuagint; the version of the OT in Greek dated about 250 -160BC.” (Unger, pg.174)

“Josephus asserts that the canon was completed and closed in the days of Artaxerxes (465 – 425BC) and that since that time, ‘not a soul has ventured to add or to remove or to alter a syllable’ of the ancient records (Contra Apionem 1:8).” (Unger. Pg.174)

“The prophets were not added to the Hebrew canon until between 300 – 200BC.” (Unger. Pg.175)

The concept of sacred Scriptures was an essential part of the OT (2 Tim.3:15-17; 2 Pet.1:20-21).

5. “The Apostles claim for their writing a public use (1 Thess.5:27; Col.4:16; Rev.22:15) and an authoritative power (1 Tim.4:1; 2 Thess.2:6; Rev.22:19), and Peter (2 Pet.3:15-16) places the Epistles of Paul in significant connection with ‘the other Scriptures.’”

“The Pauline epistles were circulating in collected form by the end of the first century AD. Justin Martyr, in the early second century, mentions the ‘memoirs of the apostles,’ which Christians called ‘gospels’ and which were regarded as on par with the OT.” (Wikipedia, pg.3)

By the end of the first century AD, the NT was being used to settle disputes of both life and church matters.

“From 170AD - 350AD, the testimony of Iranaeus Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian extends to the four gospels, Acts, 1 Peter, 1 John, 13 Epistles of St.Paul, and the Apocalypse; and with the exception of the Apocalypse, no one of these was ever afterward rejected or questioned till modern times.”(Unger, pg.178)

“By the early 200AD’s, Origen of Alexandria may have been using the same 27 books found in modern NT editions, though there were still disputes over the canonicity of Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation.” (Wikipedia)

“Thus, while there was a good measure of debate in the Early Church over the NT canon, the major writings were accepted by almost all Christians by the middle of the second century.” (Wikipedia)

“The first known list of 27 books which we recognize appears in the First Letter written by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, to the church when announcing the date of Easter in AD 367. Shortly afterwards we find Jerome and Augustine in the west defining the canon by listing these same 27 books.” (F.F. Bruce, pg.112)

“The council of Carthage (397AD) – It is generally agreed that this church council fixed the limits of the NT canon as including all 27 books as we have them today.” (Ryrie, pg.124)

“Since 397AD, the Christian church has considered the canon of the Bible to be completed.” (Basic theology by Ryrie, pg.120)

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