

## Lesson 4 Composition and Canonization of Scripture

### Word to Know:

Canon: The official list of books recognized by the church and Holy Scripture as inspired by God.

Composition: The state of being placed together, united, combined, compiled

Unity: Agreement, uniformity, consistency

Some people who believe God doesn't exist say that God's Word shouldn't be consulted to see if the Bible is from Him or not. But on what basis is such a claim valid?

### **Introduction**

If I were to write a letter to Bill, and Bill wanted to know if I really wrote it, then the first thing he should do is ask me! If Bill asked Joe, who didn't have first-hand knowledge of my letter, whether I had written the letter to Bill, is that satisfactory? No. The best person to ask is me.

This illustration applies to our question. If anyone knows what God wrote to the human race, it is God. There is no greater self-authenticating voice than that of the True One who created all things. Self-authentication is commonplace among all of us: if you want to know what I think about something, or dreamt about last night, there is only one person in the world you can ask for certainty.

Some people who believe God doesn't exist say that God's Word shouldn't be consulted to see if the Bible is from Him or not. But on what basis is such a claim valid? It is illogical to assume that the letter written by me to Bill is off limits for study. In such a situation, these people are trying to get you to trust their reasoning over God's.

**NOTHING CAN FULLY AUTHENTICATE GOD'S WORD OTHER THAN GOD HIMSELF.**

But don't be led astray by such a fallacy: one should check God's Word regardless of such a claim. Nothing can fully authenticate God's Word other than God Himself; otherwise there is an authority greater than or equal to God, and if that were so, then God wouldn't be God—the supreme authority. So, when looking at the Bible, one should not lay it aside, but rather stand firm on it as their foundation for looking at the question: did the Bible come from God?

Can the canon of Scripture (what God has written to man) be placed in the judgment seat of fallible man to determine if it came from God or not? If so, then God is no longer the authority, nor is His Word, but, instead, fallible, autonomous human reasoning. Man, in essence, is sitting

in judgment of God. This is called humanism, where man is seen as the greatest of all things and determiner of truth, as opposed to God.

Rather, we should start with the Word of God as the axiom (absolute beginning) and verify that God's Word will "self authenticate" itself... In other words, let God be the judge whether or not the Bible is His Word. This stance...starts with the Word of God and uses it as its own Words as a confirmation that the books are indeed from God. With this perspective, Jesus Christ, being God, will be used as the beginning of the analysis for both the Old and New Testament books of the canon.<sup>1</sup>

## I. Composition: Putting the Scripture together

### A. Human Writers

The collection of books we call the Bible is not just a collection of human writings. It was not written by a single talented author. "No one person planned it, wrote it, published it, translated it, or distributed it to the people of the world."<sup>2</sup>

The Bible was written by forty different authors from all walks of life over a period of 1600 years. "Among them were a king, soldier, fisherman, herdsman, legislator, prophet, priest, physician, and rabbi.

Their homes and educational backgrounds were different, as were their natural talents and gifts. For example, King David was a gifted poet, and Luke was a medical doctor. Paul was a theologian, and Mark was a news reporter.

None of the authors lived a perfect life, and yet God used them to write his infallible Book. When we read the Book, we can feel the human touch while we sense the divine presence."<sup>3</sup>

Because God is the Divine Author of all Scripture and He inspired all the human authors in their writings, there is perfect **UNITY** throughout the entire Bible. Under God's direction there are no contradictions to be found anywhere in the Bible.

It is a miracle of God that 40 authors contributed to the Bible over 1600 years and there is no disagreement anywhere in the entire Bible!

### B. Human Writings

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<sup>1</sup> <https://answersingenesis.org/the-word-of-God/a-look-at-the-canon/>

<sup>2</sup> *Journey of the Bible*, Irving L. Jensen, World Wide Publications, 1990, pg. 57

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg. 62

The writers of the Bible used different vocabularies and different writing styles. They wrote on different subjects. These included history, poetry, law, parables, biography, autobiography, letters, testimonies, prophecy, and doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

At different times in history different writing materials were used.

1. Papyrus: This was similar to **paper**. It was made of flat strips of sheets of the inner layer of the bark of a reed plant.
2. Parchment: This was more durable and permanent than Papyrus. Parchment was made from **dried skins of animal**. Most ancient text that exist today are written on parchment.
3. Pen and Ink: Pens were made of a sharpened reed. Ink was often made of charcoal, tree gum, and water.
4. Roll: Instead of a book having pages and a cover like our books today. Parchment sheets were sewn together to make a long roll, that could range from 30 feet to 90 feet (9 meters to 27 meters) in length.

Divisions in the written text: The writers did not use chapter and verse division like we do today. The first Bible to use chapters and verses was Stephanus's Latin edition of 1555. The first English Bible to used chapters and verses was the Geneva Bible of 1560.

## **II. Canonization: Which writings are **Scripture**?**

The word CANON comes from the root word for "reed," or "cane." A reed was a rod used for measuring.

Just as the Holy Spirit inspired the Scripture, so He also guided men and women of God to recognize and identify which writings meet the requirements to be called Scripture.

What we call the CANON, is the list of 66 books that have always been recognized by God's people as inspired writings. The Old Testament is made of 39 of these books. The New Testament has 27 books.

### **A. The Canon of the **Old Testament****

The Jews had clearly defined the Old Testament writings as Scripture before Christ came to earth. They did not have the books of the Old Testament arranged in the same order as we do today, but they were all included.

The Jewish Canon listed Old Testament books in three categories:

1. The Law, which was the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

2. The Prophets which included all the major and minor prophetic books
3. The Writings

B. The Canon of the **New Testament**

At first, the churches had no need to define what made a book special and equal to the Old Testament Scriptures. If the letter came from Paul or Peter, that was sufficient. However, it was not long before others began writing additional letters and gospels either to fill the gaps or to propagate their own ideas. Some tests became necessary, and during the first 200 years, five tests were used at various times.

1. **Apostolic**—does it come from an apostle?

The first Christians asked, “Was it written by an apostle or under the direction of an apostle?” They expected this just as the Jews had expected theirs to be underwritten by the prophets. Paul was insistent that his readers should be reassured that the letters they received actually came from his pen (e.g., 2 *Thessalonians* 3:17).

2. **Authentic**—does it have the ring of truth?

The authoritative voice of the prophets, “This is what the Lord says,” is matched by the apostles’ claim to write not the words of men but the words of God (1 *Thessalonians* 2:13). It was the internal witness of the texts themselves that was strong evidence of canonicity.

3. **Ancient**—has it been used from the earliest times?

Most of the false writings were rejected simply because they were too new to be apostolic. Early in the fourth century, Athanasius listed the New Testament canon as we know it today and claimed that these were the books “received by us through tradition as belonging to the Canon.”

4. **Accepted**—are most of the churches using it?

Since, as we have seen, it took time for letters to circulate among the churches, it is all the more significant that 23 of the 27 books were almost universally accepted well before the middle of the second century.

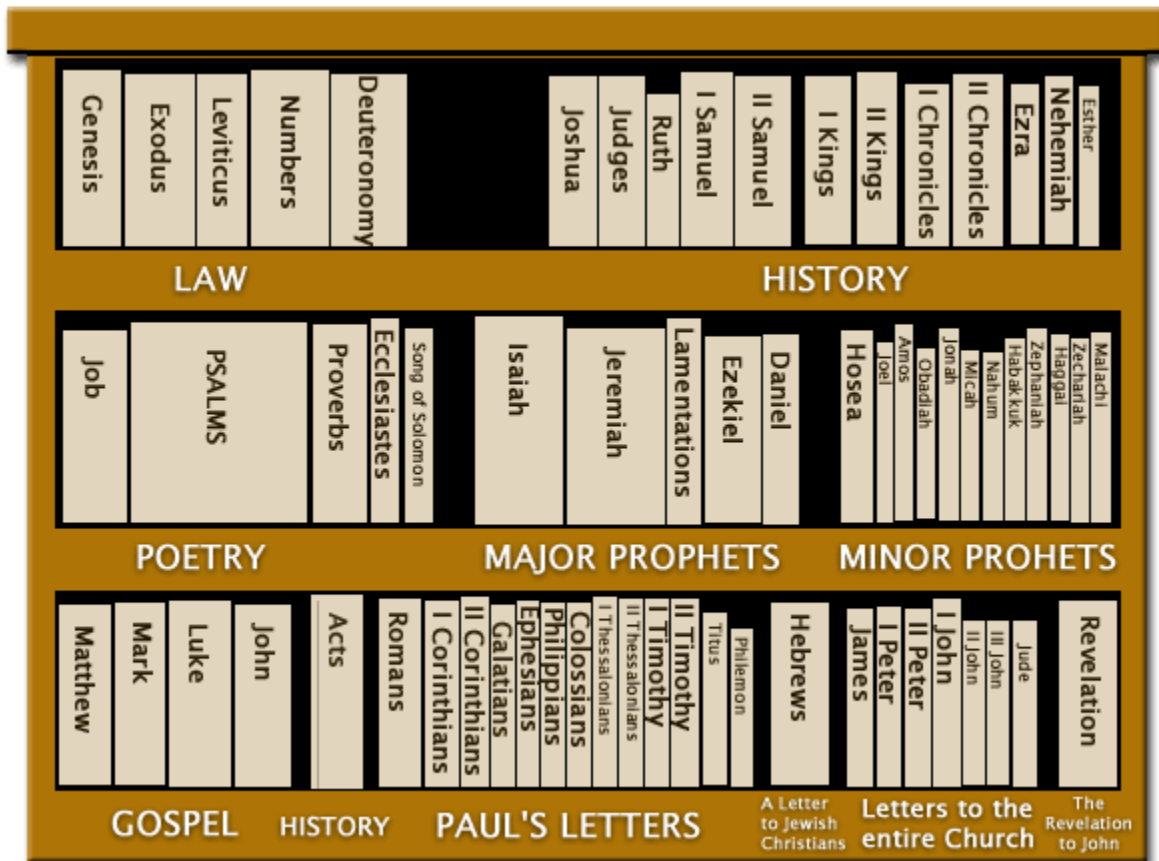
When tradition carries the weight of the overwhelming majority of churches throughout the widely scattered Christian communities across the vast Roman Empire, with no one church controlling the beliefs of all the others, it has to be taken seriously.

5. **Accurate**—does it conform to the orthodox teaching of the churches?

There was widespread agreement among the churches across the empire as to the content of the Christian message. Irenaeus asked the question whether a particular

writing was consistent with what the churches taught. This is what ruled out so much of the heretical material immediately.<sup>5</sup>

## The Canon of the Bible



As Bible believers, we understand that God not only inspired the scriptures to human writers, preserved His Word to every generation, but He also guided the hands of those who assembled the 66 books so that we now have exactly what God wants in the Bible...Nothing more, nothing less.

The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. (Psalm 12:6-7 KJV)

<sup>5</sup> <https://answersingenesis.org/the-word-of-god/why-66-books/>