

Week 2. The Canon of the Old Testament

- I. What is Canon? What criteria?

- II. Formation of the Canon of the Old Testament

What is the meaning of “Canon”?

- Kanon (gk.) = a (straight) rod, used as a rule → a rule or a standard.
- “*Canon of scripture*” means the books that have been admitted into scripture.
- Canon can also mean a summary of Christian teaching: “*canon of faith*”

Criteria for Canonicity – General

1. Key is AUTHORITATIVENESS.....

.....not just that it is ancient, been read for ages,
is informative and helpful to God's people.

.....not just a record of REVELATION, but

The Bible is a PERMANENT WRITTEN RECORD.

2. ACCEPTANCE BY CHRIST. Jesus and
apostles referred to “the scriptures”. Whole
mission of Jesus (Mk. 14:49).

Closure of OT canon (by Jews)-- Overview

- 1) **Law** (Pentateuch): by 5th century BC at latest
- 2) **Prophets**: by end of 3rd century BC
- 3) **The Writings** (Hagiographa): at the Jewish synod of Jamnia in AD 90 (at the latest)

Jesus referred to a 3-way grouping: Luke 24:44;
cf. “law and prophets” Matt 7:12.

Criteria for Canonicity of the Pentateuch (and OT)

Israel recognized that **books** of Moses have *Divine AUTHORITY*, because the Old Covenant was:

- Recorded in a book (Ex. 24:7).
- Written as a memorial (Ex 17:14)
- Written as a witness (Deut 31:24-26)
- Accepted by both Jews and Samaritans.

Oral tradition is held as *unreliable*:

- Example: the teaching of Moses had been forgotten in Hilkiah's time. Law read and respected when re-found during Josiah's reign (2 Kings 22-23).

Written word only is abiding and permanent.

Prophets and “The Writings”—19 book (Jewish categorization)

- **8 Books of Prophets**
- Historical books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
- Oracular books: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and “the Twelve” (minor prophets)
- **11 books composed the Writings**
- Lyrical and wisdom: Psalm, Job, Proverbs, Eccles., Song of songs, Lamentations
- Historical: Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, Ruth

Criteria for Canonicity of Prophets and Sacred Writings

Canonical, *if linked to Pentateuch*, without adding to it:

- Joshua includes a reminder of the covenant in final chapter (24:1-25).

Or, *if inspired by the Spirit*

- Psalmists were inspired: Ps 72:20; 2 Sam 23:2 (“his word was on my tongue”), as were wise men (Ecclesiastes 12:11ff).
- Proverbs were the work of divine wisdom (Proverbs 8:1-9:6, e.g., “the Lord possessed me” v. 22).
- Prophets spoke by power of Spirit (e.g., Ezekiel)

The Septuagint (LXX)

331BC. Alexander the Great conquers Israel and Egypt..... Greek language spreads.

- 70 (72) elders translate Hebrew scriptures.
- Use of LXX became widespread, especially in Alexandria.
- LXX used by early church: Stephen (Acts 7), Paul (e.g. Acts 17), but not Jesus in Luke 4.
- Apocryphal books gradually added to the LXX.

What about the Apocrypha?

(i) Canon of OT in East

Eastern Church :

- a) **Justin Martyr** (only LXX reliable).
- b) **Melito**, Bishop of Sardis (38 books, not Esther);
- c) **Origen** [Alexandria; Caesarea AD 240] the Hexpla: 6 versions in Hebrew and Greek; Origen included the “Letter of Jeremiah”; on/off for 1 Enoch;
- d) **Athanasius**, AD 367, listed 22 books = 38 OT books (not Esther), plus Baruch and Letter of Jeremiah. Recommends Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach, Judith, Tobit as non-canonical “edifying” books (other “apocryphal” books to be avoided altogether).
- e) **Laodicea Council** AD 363. Esther added
- f) **Orthodox Church**. 1642, 1672. LXX confirmed as genuine scripture, i.e., a non-original language considered canonical.

What about the Apocrypha?

(ii) Canon in West

- **Translations into Latin began**, Carthage, AD 150 – from the “Septuagint plus”, i.e., LXX including most apocryphal books, but not 1 Enoch.
- **Tertullian** (Carthage). Regarded Wisdom, Song of Three Hebrews, Bel and the Dragon as canonical; uncertain for Judith; Highly regarded 1 Enoch and Sibylline Oracles.
- **Jerome** (b. 346). For Pope Damasus, Jerome revised Gospels+Psalms in Latin 384. **Vulgate completed in 405 AD from original 22 (24) Hebrew books, i.e., it excluded apocrypha.**
- **Augustine**. Councils in Carthage, 397: accepted several apocryphal writings in canon.

What books are included in the Apocrypha?

- I and II Esdras
- Tobit**
- Judith**
- Rest of Esther
- Wisdom of Solomon**
- Sirach**
(Ecclesiasticus)
- Baruch**
- Susanna
- Bel and Dragon
- Prayer of Manasseh
- Prayer of Azariah
- I and II Maccabees**

** = included in Roman Catholic Bibles.

Canon prior to the Reformation

- Hugh of St. Victor (12th Century Abbot in Paris). Did not accept apocrypha as canon (influence of Jerome, who distinguished between books that confirm doctrine (e.g., Tobit, for attitudes towards persecution) and those profitable for ethical lessons.)
- Wycliffe (1395) – 1st Bible in English -- included the apocrypha, since in common version of the Vulgate.

Reformation and CounterReformation

- **Luther: “sola scriptura”** – but which? Returned to Jerome – Apocrypha annexed to German Bible—useful to read. Luther could not accept 2 Maccabees 12:45 as authority of doctrine of praying for the dead. Also “I hate Esther”. Main criteria: “what teaches Christ”.
- **Coverdale’s English Bible 1535.** followed Luther’s example (Tyndale’s – uncompleted – probably would have).
- **Olivetian’s French Bible 1535.** included Apocrypha as annex
- **Great Bible, 5th ed. 1541** omitted qualifier distinguishing Apocrypha from Canon.
- **Council of Trent, 1545.** Vulgate was declared as authoritative (canonical).
- **Clementine Vulgate, 1592** Added 3, 4 Esdras and Prayer of Manasseh. Translated as English Douay Bible.

Post-Reformation

- **Church of England.** Accepted Jerome's view. **Apocrypha declared non-canonical**
- **King James 1611** included apocrypha. Puritans did not want it! (Bunyan found comfort in Eccles.)
- **1600s. Church of England wavered:** In 1644, apocrypha “not of divine inspiration” (idem. in Westminster Confession). But in 1660, it reappeared in Anglican lectionaries.
- **1973 Common Bible.** Selected “deuterocanonical” books accepted by ecumenical leaders.

Questions on the Apocrypha

- Have you read any of the apocryphal books?
 - If yes, did you find them edifying and inspiring? Would you recommend them?
 - If no, is it because:
 - a) You believe you could be wrongly influenced (always taught to steer away from them)?
 - b) You were not aware of their usefulness (e.g., as declared by Jerome or the Reformers)?
 - c) Don't have a copy?
- Does it really matter if they are in or out of the Old Testament?