

The Canon of the Bible

What is a canon?

- 2 Tim 3:16.
 - Paul tells us that "all scripture" is inspired.
 - Scripture literally means "writings", but Paul is obviously not referring to everything ever written.
 - Instead, he understood that there was a body of literature, called "scripture" or more fully "holy scripture", that was inspired.
- But what is this body of literature? How do we know which books should be included and which are not?
- "Canon" comes from a Greek word which means "rule" or "standard". The canon of scripture is the definitive list of which books are holy scripture.

How many books are in the Canon?

- 5 - Samaritans
- 22/24 - Most Jews
- 66 - Most Protestants
- 73 - Roman Catholics
- 76/79 - Most Orthodox
- 81 - Orthodox Tewahedo
- As you can see, the number of books considered to be scripture and therefore "inspired" varies widely depending on who you ask. Over the next few lessons we will explore what the differences are, the history behind these canons, and ask "how can we know which books belong in the Bible?"

The Torah

- The first five books of the bible are called the torah (law) or pentateuch.
- They are attributed to Moses
- These books are foundational to the Bible and no one would exclude them.
- The rest of the Bible leans on and recognises the authority of these books.
- Joshua 1:8; Daniel 9:11-13; John 7:19

The Hebrew Bible

- This term is used to refer to the Bible used by Jews.
- It is also called the Tanakh, which stands for Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings)
- It consists of 24 books in these 3 sections. These books correspond exactly to the 39 books of the protestant old testament. They are only counted and ordered differently.
 - Torah (Law) = 5 books of Moses.
 - Nevi'im (Prophets)
 - The Former Prophets (4 books) = Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
 - The Latter Prophets (4 books) = Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (This includes all the minor prophets from Hosea to Malachi)
 - Ketuvim (Writings)
 - Poetic (3 books) = Psalms, Proverbs, Job
 - Megillot/Scrolls (5 books) = Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther
 - (3 books) = Daniel, Ezra (containing Ezra and Nehemiah), Chronicles
- Josephus (1st century Jewish historian) mentions a 22 book canon with different divisions, but does not list them. He probably combined Judges with Ruth, and Jeremiah with Lamentations.
 - 5 books of Moses
 - 13 books of Prophets
 - 4 books of "hymns... and precepts"
- While the term tanakh came much later, this two or threefold division of scripture is seen already in the new testament, affirming this collection of books as scripture.
 - Matthew 22:40; Luke 24:44

A note about Ezra-Nehemiah

- The Greek form of the name Ezra is Esdras.
- Confusingly there are up to four books which have been called Ezra/Esdras, and different lists number them differently, which causes confusion.
 - The familiar books of **Ezra-Nehemiah** are sometimes separated and called 1-2 Esdras/Ezra. At other times, they are counted as one, and variously called Ezra, 1 Ezra, or 2 Esdras.
 - A greek version of the same book exists, with some differences. In English it is most often referred to as **1 Esdras**, but has also been called 2 Ezra, 3 Esdras/Ezra, or Greek Ezra
 - Another, very different, book is variously called **2 Esdras**, 4 Esdras or Latin Ezra. It is also sometimes divided into three parts (4-6 Ezra)

The New Testament

- Jews do not accept any of the books of the New Testament, because they do not accept that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the old testament.
- But essentially all Christians are agreed on the collection of 27 books which we now have.
 - We will discuss this in more detail in a future lesson

The Apocrypha

- There are quite a number of books written during the period between the old and new testaments that have been held highly by Christians, but which have not been universally accepted as inspired scripture.
- These books are called the apocrypha (hidden), or Deuterocanon (2nd canon).
- Protestants do not accept any of these books as inspired, though they have often spoken highly of their spiritual value.
- Roman Catholics include the 39 books of the old testament, as well as
 - Additions to the book of Esther
 - Additions to the book of Daniel (The prayer of Azariah, Susanah, Bel and the Dragon)
 - Tobit
 - Judith
 - 1-2 Maccabees
 - Wisdom of Solomon
 - Sirach
 - Baruch (inc. Letter of Jeremiah)

- Orthodox include:
 - Additions to Job
 - Psalm 151
 - Protestant + Catholic books
 - Prayer of Manasseh
 - 1-2 Esdras
 - 3-4 Maccabees
- Tewahedo include:
 - Protestant + Most Catholic + Some Orthodox books
 - 1-3 Ethiopic Maccabees (Meqabyan)
 - 1 Enoch
 - Jubilees
 - 4 Baruch
- Besides these books, there seems to be an innumerable variety of books (old testament and new testament apocrypha) that people at some time somewhere have included in scripture or near to it.
- Are these lists just arbitrary? Are there any reasons why we should accept certain books and not others? And who should decide? We will consider this question more next week.