

Answering Questions About The Word of God

“For the word of God is living and
powerful...”

– Hebrews 4:11

Overview of this lesson:

- 1. Has the Bible been corrupted over time?**
- 2. Is the Bible really inspired by God?**
- 3. Does the Bible include the right books?**
- 4. Is the Bible full of contradictions?**

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

1. Reliability of the Old Testament text
2. Reliability of the New Testament text
3. How did Jesus, the Apostles view the OT?
4. What about God's preservation of the Bible?

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

1. Reliability of the Old Testament text

- *Textual evidence for the OT is absolutely massive:* roughly 10,000 manuscripts 300 BC – 900 AD
- *Scribal tradition:* Sopherim, Talmudists, Masoretes
 - No writing from memory, only copied authentic mss.
 - Dubious documents destroyed
 - Enormous significance to culture, rabbinical teaching
 - Counted words, letters; identified middle letters, words; extensive rules about spacing/columns
 - Could tell if a single consonant was missing from whole Bible, just by examining the rows/columns/spaces

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

1. Reliability of the Old Testament text

- *Dead Sea Scrolls*: Roughly 10,000 OT fragments dating from 150 BC to 70 AD
 - All OT books included except Esther
 - Complete (or nearly complete) copies of Psalms, Isaiah
 - Extended OT textual evidence back by 1000 years
 - Isaiah scrolls date back to 125 BC, and match the OT text from 1000 years later in >95% of the text
 - Remaining ~5% accounted for by obvious slips of pen
 - e.g. 17 letters variant in Isaiah 53; 14 = minor errors, writing style; 3 letters left form “light” in vs. 11 (footnote)

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

1. Reliability of the Old Testament text

“Because of [the faithfulness of the Masoretes], we have today a form of the Hebrew text which in all essentials duplicates the recension which was considered authoritative in the days of Christ and the apostles, if not a century earlier...As W. F. Albright has said, ‘We may rest assured that the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible, though not infallible, has been preserved with an accuracy perhaps unparalleled in any other Near Eastern literature.’”

— Gleason Archer (Survey of the Old Testament, 65)

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

2. Reliability of the New Testament text

- *Textual evidence for the OT:*
 - 5500+ Gr. MSS and 19000+ translations
- *Quotations of early Christians:*
 - 35,000+ quotations from before 400 AD from just seven of the multitude of writers (MacDowell 43)
- *Circumstantial evidence:*
 - Oral tradition typically retains fixed form
 - Eyewitness still alive before/while gospels recorded
 - Negative accounts and martyrdom of the apostles
 - Extra-Biblical accounts of Jesus' life

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

2. Reliability of the New Testament text

“The proportion of words virtually accepted on all hands as raised above doubt is very great, not less, on a rough computation, than $7/8$ of the whole. The remaining $1/8$ therefore, formed in great part by changes of order and other comparative trivialities, constitutes the whole area of criticism. . . .the amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation is but a small fraction of the residuary variation, and can hardly form more than $1/1000$ part of the entire text”

– Westcott and Hort (*New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2-3)

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

Assignment:

- What did Jesus say about the Scriptures compared to the traditions of men?
- Give three examples of Jesus' view of the Old Testament Scriptures.
- Give two examples that Jesus viewed the Old Testament as preserved accurately.

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

3. How did Jesus view the Old Testament?

- Jesus did not view the Scriptures as merely the traditional writings and philosophies of men
 - See Matt 15:1-9 (w. Mark 7:9ff)
- Jesus viewed the Scriptures as inspired by God and unbreakable, undeniable truth
 - Matt 5:17-18; Luke 24:44; John 10:34-36;
- Jesus viewed the Old Testament as both complete and accurately preserved
 - Luke 11:51 (note: Abel to Zechariah means Genesis to II Chronicles, the last book in the Hebrew Bible)
 - Luke 16:31,24:27,44; Matt 22:23-45

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

In fact, Jesus referenced and quoted the Old Testament, even some of the most controversial passages, as historically accurate:

- Creation of Adam and Eve, Matt 19:4-5
- Cain and Abel, Luke 11:50-51
- Noah, the ark, and the great flood, Matt 24:38-39
- Lot, his wife, and the destruction of the cities on the plain, Luke 17:28-32
- Moses at the burning bush, Matt 22:29-32
- The manna in the wilderness, John 6:31-51
- Moses and the bronze serpent, John 3:14
- Jonah and the repentance of Ninevah, Matt 12:39-41
- David and the showbread, Matt 12:3-4
- Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Matt 12:42
- Elijah and the widow of Zarepheth in Sidon, Luke 4:25-26
- Elisha and Naaman the leper, Luke 4:27

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

Assignment:

Can you find passages outside the four gospels to illustrate that the apostles also viewed the Old Testament (and even the gospels) as:

- Entirely different than the traditional writings of men?
- Inspired truth?
- Accurately preserved through the course of time?

Has The Bible Been Corrupted?

Assignment: Passages outside the gospels demonstrating that the NT writers viewed the OT (and even the NT writings) as:

- *Entirely different than the traditional writings of men:*
 - Col 2:8-10, 16-23; II Pet 1:20; I Cor 1:18-25
 - Careful: “tradition” is used in an authoritative way, too! (see II Cor 11:2; II Thes 2:15, 3:6.)
- *Inspired truth:*
 - II Thes 2:13; II Tim 4:14-17; I Cor 2:6-13, 14:37
 - Even the NT! I Tim 5:18; I Cor 11:23ff, 15:3f; II Pet 3:15-16
- *Accurately preserved through the course of time:*
 - Acts 18:28; Gal 3:16; I Pet 1:24-25; any OT quotation!

Is The Bible Really Inspired?

1. Claim and meaning of *inspiration*
2. Evidence for supernatural inspiration:
 - Continuity of the Bible
 - Character of the Bible
 - Preservation and survival of the Bible
 - Fulfilled prophecies of the Bible
 - Missing human elements of the Bible

Is The Bible Really Inspired?

Such an important question, from the existence of God (Ps 19) to the reality of the afterlife (Rev 21) – is the Bible really inspired truth?

- **The Bible claims to be inspired**
 - II Tim 3:16f; I Cor 2:7-13; etc.
 - *Is it really possible to consider it a “good” book, or Jesus a “good” teacher if these are false claims?*
- **How does the Bible define inspiration?**
 - “*Inspired*” means God breathed every word
 - See previous verses, plus II Sam 23:2; Eze 1:3; etc.
 - With preservation of personality/style of authors, cf. II Pet 3:15-16; Rom 10:1; the Psalms; etc.

Is The Bible Really Inspired?

- 1. Continuity** – Composed through 40 generations, ~1500 years, ~40 *very* different authors...
 - One continuous, comprehensive, amazing story
 - Agreement on historical/geographical data
 - Facts and figures about multitudes of people, places, things, events
 - Controversial issues
 - *Could these books of just been selectively sampled?*

Is The Bible Really Inspired?

- 2. Character** – Honest truth, even about “heroes”; literary genres; impact on the world...
- *“Behold the works of our philosophers; with all their pompous diction, how mean and contemptible they are by comparison with the Scriptures! Is it possible that a book at once so simple and so sublime should be merely the work of man?”*
 - Jean-Jacques Rousseau
 - In all of man’s accomplishments, what book has the world *ever* produced that can even compare to the Bible in poetry, history, morality, etc.?

Is The Bible Really Inspired?

3. Preservation and survival – cf. Ps 100:5; I Pet 2:24-25; Heb 4:12; etc.

– *“A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put. No other book has been so chopped, knived, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology...has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? ...The Bible is still loved by millions, read by millions, and studied by millions.”*

– Bernard Ramm

Is The Bible Really Inspired?

- 4. Fulfilled prophecy** – Many religious books claim divine inspiration; none but the Bible contains any significant amount of predictive prophecy.
- Deut 18:20-21 ... A VERY high standard!
 - *Could they all have been engineered by Christians?*
 - What about the details of Christ's death?
 - *Could they all have been coincidences?*
 - Peter Stoner calculated a probability of 10^{-17} for just 7 prophecies being coincidentally fulfilled in Christ!
 - *Could they all have been predicted?*
 - Assyria, Sennacherib spare Jerusalem
 - Rise of the Babylonian and Persian empires
 - Details of Christ's crucifixion and burial



Is The Bible Really Inspired?

- 5. Missing human element** – If it was written by men, where are their fingerprints? Where are the:
- Embellished narratives, curious details?
 - Glossed-over or omitted errors of protagonists?
 - Ignorant or prejudiced ideas, teachings, philosophies?
 - Disagreement on controversial issues?
 - Mistakes and discord in facts, figures, story, characters, history?

Is The Bible Really Inspired?

“If [the biblical critic] tells me that something in a Gospel is legend or romance, I want to know how many legends and romances he has read, how well his palate is trained in detecting them by the flavour; not how many years he has spent on that Gospel....Read the dialogues [in John]: that with the Samaritan woman at the well, or that which follows the healing of the man born blind. Look at its pictures: Jesus (if I may use the word) doodling with his finger in the dust; the unforgettable “and it was night” (John 13:30). I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this.”

- C.S. Lewis

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

1. Did any church canonize the Bible?
 - A. *The Old Testament Canon*
 - B. *The New Testament Canon*
2. What about the Old Testament Apocrypha?
 - A. *Existence of other ancient Judaic writings*
 - B. *Arguments for the inclusion of the Apocrypha*
 - C. *Evidence against the inclusion of the Apocrypha*
3. What about the New Testament apocrypha?
 - A. Large Number of Writings Around the NT
 - B. The Core, Fringe and Apocryphal Canons
 - C. Tests of New Testament Canonicity
 - D. Do the Extracanonial Books Have Value?

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

1. Did any church, synod, or religious group canonize the Bible?

- *Popular misconception:* The Bible was canonized by the Catholic Church during the Synod of Hippo (393 AD), Council of Carthage (397 AD), and First Council of Nicaea (325 AD)
- “From [the Church] alone we know what books belong to the Bible. At the Council of Trent she enumerated the books which must be considered "as sacred and canonical". (Catholic Encyclopedia)

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

A. The Old Testament Canon

- The Old Testament canon was already established long before any of these synods or councils, in fact since before Jesus Christ .
- *“From the death of Moses until Artaxerxes...the prophets who followed after Moses recorded their deeds in thirteen books. The remaining four comprise hymns to God and rules of ethical conduct for men...the Holy Spirit departed after the death of Haggai, Zecharaiah, and Malachi. Thus Judaism defined the limits of the canon that was and still is accepted within the Jewish community.”* (Josephus, *Contra Apion*, c. 95 AD)

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

- The time of Artaxerxes marks the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Zechariah and Malachi: according to Josephus, the Old Testament canon was complete around 400 BC.
- Jesus endorsed and approved of the Hebrew Scriptures *in their extant form in His day*
 - Note His numerous and meticulous quotations from the Old Testament (e.g. Matthew 22)
 - “*from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah*” (Luke 11:51), i.e. from Genesis to 2 Chronicles, first and last in the Jewish Bible
 - See also Luke 16:29,31; 24:27,44

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The New Testament Canon

- The four gospels were together accepted universally as Scripture before the close of the 1st Century:
 - I Tim 5:18 quotes Luke 10:7 as “Scripture” (c. 63 AD)
 - Other passages also imply that the Christians of the 1st Century had the gospels available to study and read (e.g. I Cor 11:23-25 w. Luke 22:19-20; I Cor 15:3-4; Jam 1:25; I John 1:1-4; etc.)
 - *“It is evident that by AD 180 the idea of the fourfold Gospel had become so axiomatic throughout Christendom that it could be referred to as an established fact as obvious and inevitable and natural as the four cardinal points of the compass (as we call them) or the four winds”* (Bruce, *The Books And The Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, citing Irenaeus).

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

- The letters of Paul were also together accepted universally as Scripture before the close of the 1st Century:
 - 2 Peter 3:15-16 cites Paul's letters as "Scripture" (c. 60 AD)
 - Col 4:16; I Cor 4:17 – Paul's letters were to be copied and distributed...
 - *...because they were inspired: the standard of Scripture* (I Cor 14:37; II Thes 2:13; II Tim 3:16; II Pet 1:20-21)
 - This extends to the other apostles and inspired writers, all of whom died before the end of the 2nd Century (See 2 Pet 1:14-16; Rev 1-3, implying wide distribution; etc.)

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

- At least by 65 AD, the New Testament Scriptures were being gathered together to form the New Testament canon.
- These books were selected because of their authorship and content, not because of whatever the church of any particular day liked or disliked.
- The books of the New Testament were collected and preserved because they were inspired truth; they were Scripture from the moment of their composition.
- God has never given any man the authority to accept or reject His word, as if the inspiration of Scripture depends on the acceptance of mankind.

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

Thus, it can be answered with certainty that no church or synod, Roman Catholic or otherwise, was responsible for “canonizing” the Scriptures:

- “The development of the Biblical Canon took several centuries, and was nearly complete by the time the Muratorian fragment was written, over 150 years before the [First Nicaean] council. Regional councils such as the Synod of Hippo in 393 and Council of Carthage in 397 gave formal recognition to the canon, but by then the canon was well ingrained in the church. Additionally no discussion or decisions regarding Gnostic Gospels were made by the council.”

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

2. What about the Old Testament Apocrypha?

- “From [the Church] alone we know what books belong to the Bible. At the Council of Trent she enumerated the books which must be considered "as sacred and canonical“ ...Protestant copies usually lack the seven books (viz: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and First and Second Maccabees) and parts of books (viz: Esther 10:4-16:24, and Daniel 3:24-90; 13:1-14:42) which are not found in the Jewish editions of the Old Testament.”

Catholic Encyclopedia, *Bible*

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

2. What about the Old Testament Apocrypha?

- “From [the Church] alone we know what books belong to the Bible. At the Council of Trent she enumerated the books which must be considered "as sacred and canonical“ ...Protestant copies usually lack the seven books (viz: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and First and Second Maccabees) and parts of books (viz: Esther 10:4-16:24, and Daniel 3:24-90; 13:1-14:42) which are not found in the Jewish editions of the Old Testament.”

Catholic Encyclopedia, *Bible*

***Apocryphal*: def. “Of dubious origin”**

- noun (often used with a singular verb)
 1. (initial capital letter) a group of 14 books, not considered canonical, included in the Septuagint and the Vulgate as part of the Old Testament, but usually omitted from Protestant editions of the Bible.
 2. various religious writings of uncertain origin regarded by some as inspired, but rejected by most authorities.
 3. writings, statements, etc., of doubtful authorship or authenticity.

***Apocryphal*: def. “Of dubious origin”**

Example of secular usage:

“The style that always uses the serial comma may be less likely to result in ambiguity. Consider the apocryphal book dedication quoted by Teresa Nielsen Hayden:

‘To my parents, Ayn Rand and God.’ ”

Wikipedia, *Serial Comma*, Aug 24, 2010

Nielsen Hayden, Teresa (1994). *Making Book*. Framingham, Massachusetts: The NESFA Press. pp. 143.

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

A. Existence of Other Ancient Judaic Writings

- At least 17 extra-Biblical, Jewish writings are referenced in the Old Testament
 - e.g. Num 21:14; Josh 10:13; I Kings 11:41; etc.
- Some versions of the Septuagint include many apocryphal writings, though none before the 4th century (influenced by Augustine, 354-430 AD)
 - Largely believed to be traditions and folklore arising around the Biblical texts that eventually became mixed in with Scripture (see Wegner, *Journey from Texts to Translations*, 120)

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. Arguments that the Apocrypha should be considered part of the OT Scriptures

- New Testament allusions to the Apocrypha (e.g. Jude 14)
- Some copies of the Septuagint, often quoted by New Testament, include the Apocrypha
- Some Apocryphal writings were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls
- Artwork from early Christians shows knowledge of the Apocrypha
- Some early Christians, mainly in the West, accepted some of the Apocrypha as Scripture (e.g. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria)

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

C. Evidence that the Apocrypha are not and were never part of the OT Scriptures

- *Josephus* (c. 37-100 AD): all literature written after Malachi (approximately 400 BC) never appeared as part of the Jewish Scripture (see *Contra Apion*, full quote above).
- *Talmud*: “Since the death of the last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the Holy Spirit [of prophetic inspiration] departed from Israel” (see *Tosfeta Sota* 13:2).
- *Historical accounts* of Philo of Alexandria (c. 20-50 AD), the apocryphal 2 Esdras (c. 1st Century AD), Melito of Sardis (c. 170 AD), Origen (c. 185-253 AD), etc. all indicate that the Scriptures of Christ’s day did not include the Apocrypha

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

C. Evidence that the Apocrypha were never part of the OT Scriptures

- *Jesus*: No recorded quotations from the Apocrypha, approved the “Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” available *in His day* (Luke 24:44), and viewed the Scriptures as ending at the time of Zechariah (Luke 11:51)
- *New Testament*: No quotations or authoritative allusions to Apocryphal writings (those often listed are far-fetched)
- *Dead Sea Scrolls*: Include fragments from all the books of the Hebrew Bible (minus Esther), but only two small fragments from the Apocrypha (i.e. Tobit and Sirach; among other secular writings)

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

C. Evidence that the Apocrypha were never part of the OT Scriptures

- *Apocryphal books themselves:*
 - Never claim inspiration (totally opposite to the Old Testament books)
 - Historical inaccuracies (e.g. Tobit is said to have lived 158 years, but he is referenced as alive in both 931 BC and 722 BC; Judith refers to Nebuchadnezzar as king of the Assyrians; etc.)
 - Theological statements that contradict the Old Testament (e.g. Sirach and Tobit state that sin can be atoned by alms giving; II Maccabees teaches the dead can be saved by prayers and sacrifices of money from the living; etc.)

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

C. Evidence that the Apocrypha were never part of the OT Scriptures

- *Writings of early Christians*: the vast majority of early Christians, including Melito, Origin, Cyril, and Jerome, rejected the Apocrypha
 - Not until Augustine (c. 350 AD) were they widely accepted
- The 16th Century Council of Trent ratified the Apocrypha in order to support the doctrines of purgatory and indulgences (see Wegner 126)
 - At the Council, Martin Luther argued *against* their canonization, citing the New Testament, Jewish traditional teaching, and the writings of early Christians

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

3. What about the New Testament apocryphal writings (e.g. the Gnostic Gospels)?

- A. Large Number of Writings Around the NT
- B. The Core, Fringe and Apocryphal Canons
- C. Tests of New Testament Canonicity
- D. Do the Extracanonial Books Have Value?

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

A. Large Number of Writings Around the NT

- NT developed in literary cultures (Jewish, Roman and Greek)
 - Think of the number of religious books written today!
- Other gospel accounts existed, even in the 1st century (see Luke 1:1 with John 21:24-25)
 - *Agrapha* (i.e. “not written”) – words of Jesus that were not recorded in the four gospels, but remained in oral tradition
 - e.g. Acts 20:35; I Thes 4:15ff; Luke 23:34; Mark 16 extras(?)
 - Others cited by Irenaeus, Origen, Justin Martyr, etc.
- Other letters of inspired men existed that were not preserved or widely circulated (see I Cor 5:9; Col 4:6)

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

A. Large Number of Writings Around the NT

- *New Testament Apocrypha* – not well defined...
 - “various Christian writings that were not included in the canonic NT” (see Wegner 153)...can be subdivided:
 - Writings of “church fathers” (e.g. I and II Clement)
 - Works meant to actually supplement the NT (e.g. Didache)
- Sometimes extracanonical books were used for reading and study – not considered inspired, but useful
 - See the Muratorian Fragment, c. 190 AD
- Even into the 5th Century, there were a few apocryphal books being cited as canonical by early Christians
 - For example, Irenaeus (130-202 AD) cites I Clement, Shepherd of Hermas as canonical books

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The NT: Canonized in pieces over time

There was not uncertainty concerning *most* NT books – only a few of them (*and for good reasons*)

- **Core Canon** – Universally and immediately accepted
 - e.g. The four Gospels and Paul's letters
- **Fringe Canon** – Widely accepted, but doubted by a few: either delayed canonization or rejection
 - Hebrews, Revelation, Shepherd of Hermas, I Clement
- **Apocryphal Canon** – Widely rejected, possibly enjoying only brief moments of isolated popularity
 - The gospels of Mary, Thomas, Judas, etc.

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The NT: Canonized in pieces over time

Fringe Canon – reasons for skepticism:

- **Hebrews:** cited very early (c. 100 AD) and accepted by churches in the East – *but* the questionable authorship led the churches in the West to doubt.
- **James:** cited first in extant writings of the 200s AD, accepted as canonical by Origen and Eusebias – *but* questionable authorship led to delayed acceptance.
- **Jude:** widely accepted as canonical by the end of the 100s AD – *but* authorship questioned (see Jude 17)

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The NT: Canonized in pieces over time

Fringe Canon – reasons for skepticism:

- **I John:** cited early (c. 100 AD), but widely accepted by the time of Irenaeus (c. 180 AD)
 - John's late writings all suffered similar distrust because of their late date (after all other apostles had died)
 - II and III John were rejected by some because of their brevity and personal nature
- **Revelation:** Quoted at least as early as 150 AD, but doubts concerning authorship led to skepticism in the Eastern churches
 - John might have used a scribe, causing some language irregularities

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The NT: Canonized in pieces over time

Fringe Canon – reasons for skepticism:

- **I Peter:** cited early (c. 100 AD) and included in most canons beyond 150 AD, notably *excluding* the Muratorian Fragment
 - Remember: the end of the Fragment is missing!
- **II Peter:** cited by Irenaeus but missing from some notable authors (e.g. Muratorion Canon, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Eusebius) due to apparently limited circulation
 - Accepted by Hippolytus, Origen, Athanasius and others
 - Some doubted authorship since they apparently observed a difference in style and vocabulary compared to I Peter

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The NT: Canonized in pieces over time

Fringe Canon – reasons for skepticism:

- Slow interaction between the Western and Eastern churches eventually ironed out their disagreements about the “General Epistles” (i.e. Hebrews through III John)
- e.g. The Western churches finally convinced the Eastern churches concerning Revelation, while accepting the Pauline authorship of Hebrews due to influence from the East
- This agreement continued up to the middle-high Middle Ages, when scholars (e.g. Aquinas and Luther) renewed questions about the canon (cf. Wegner 146)...leading to the Council of Trent (c. 1550)!

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The NT: Canonized in pieces over time

Fringe Canon – rejected books:

- Some other writings were commonly used for reading and learning that were never widely accepted as canonical but made it into some lists and bound canons
- **Didache:** c. 50-120 AD, other acts/teachings of the apostles – included by Clement of Alexandria and Origen; listed as apocrypha by Eusebius and Athanasius
- **Shepherd of Hermas:** c. 150 AD, included by Irenaeus, Clement of A., Origen, Tertullian; listed as apocrypha by Eusebius, Athanasius, Muratorian Fragment (stating that it was written “only recently”)

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The NT: Canonized in pieces over time

Fringe Canon – rejected books:

Others sometimes considered canonical:

- Epistle of Barnabas, c. 80-120 AD
- I Clement, c. 80-140 AD
- Apocalypse of Peter, c. 100-150 AD
- Acts of Paul, c. 150-200 AD

➤ **Read them and test them:** How do they compare to the canonical books? Do they claim inspiration? Is it evident that they were written with an agenda in mind?

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The NT: Canonized in pieces over time

Apocryphal Canon – rejected books:

- Book never widely accepted as Scripture, largely spoken *against* as heretical
- Mostly composed long after the apostles and eyewitnesses of Christ were dead
- None even mentioned in early writings until after 130-150 AD (the time of Irenaeus)
- These books were read and known – not hidden in conspiracy – but rejected due to inferiority

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The NT: Canonized in pieces over time

Apocryphal Canon – rejected books:

“And although, beloved, the former are in the canon and the latter serve as reading matter, yet mention is nowhere made of the apocrypha; rather they are a fabrication of the heretics, who write them down when it pleases them and generously assign to them an early date of composition in order that they may be able to draw upon them as supposedly ancient writings and have in them occasion to deceive the guileless.”

– Athanasius of Alexandria, *39th Festal Letter*, 367 AD

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

B. The NT: Canonized in pieces over time

Apocryphal Canon – rejected books:

“There is current also [an epistle] to the Laodiceans, [and] another to the Alexandrians, [both] forged in Paul's name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church—for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey.”

– Muratorian Fragment, c. 190 AD

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

C. Tests of New Testament Canonicty

➤ Who was the author?

- Was it an apostle, inspired person, eyewitness?
- cf. John 21:20-25; I John 1:1-4; etc.
- In the case of the NT Canon: **apostles** (Matt 28:18-20), **immediate followers of the apostles** (cf. Phil 3:17), and **Christ's own family** (cf. Matt 13:55; Acts 1:14; Gal 1:19)
- Authorship was vitally important to the early church, and they were in the best position to know the author
- See Muratorian Fragment, Athanasius, etc.

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

C. Tests of New Testament Canonicty

- **Does the book agree with established truth?**
 - **Not** a circular argument because the church had:
 1. **OT Scriptures** (see Luke 24:44; II Tim 3:14-15; etc.)
 2. **Core canon** (see Rom 16:26; I Cor 15:3f; I Tim 5:18; II Pet 3:16; etc.)
 3. **Extensive traditions of *all the churches*** (I Tim 3:15; I Cor 4:17; Phil 3:17; Acts 2:42, 20:27; etc.)
 - Books written later that contradicted this information (e.g. gospel of Thomas, gospel of Peter, etc.) rejected by all but a few individuals

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

C. Tests of New Testament Canonicty

- **Was the book accepted early and universally?**
 - Careful: acceptance alone did not “canonize” a book!
 - But: whether or not a book was widely accepted as Scripture is great evidence to its authorship and inspiration
 - Did the early Christians quote from the book in question?
 - Did the early Christians speak against the book as heretical?
 - All important information in testing these books!

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

D. Do the extracanonical books have value?

- Excellent for comparison to NT books: giving great confidence in the existing canon!
- Good source of historical data concerning events from 400 years before to 200 years after the time of Christ.
- Some of the books were read and revered by early Christians: *what do you learn from them?*
- Help textual critics to better understand the original languages in the New Testament.

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

D. Do the extracanonical books have value?

- Sometimes people suggest these books should be included in the New Testament.
- **Read them and test them:** How do they compare to the canonical books?
 - Were they written long after the apostles died? Were they ever quoted and accepted by early Christians?
 - Do they claim inspiration? Do they contradict universally accepted scripture?
 - Is it evident they were written with an agenda in mind other than spiritual growth and understanding?
 - Do they compare to the NT canon in terms of value, wisdom, relevance, universal applicability?

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

D. Do the extracanonical books have value?

Two things are certain:

1. These books were not hidden or suppressed, but read and tested by early Christians and rejected as non-inspired and non-authoritative.
 - Read the quotations on the following slides.
2. By the time of the councils and synods of the fourth century and beyond, the 27 books of the NT had **already long been accepted by the churches of the world**, and the apocrypha rejected from the canon.

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

D. Do the extracanonical books have value?

- “We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church. But Hermas wrote the *Shepherd* very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after [their] time..”

– Muratorian Fragment, c. 190 AD

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

D. Do the extracanonial books have value?

- “The church receives only four gospels; heretics have many, such as the gospel of the Egyptians, the gospel of Thomas, etc. These we read, that we may not seem to be ignorant to those who think they know something extraordinary, if they are acquainted with those things which are recorded in these books..”

– Origen, *Homily on Luke*, c. 200 AD

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

D. Do the extracanonical books have value?

- “...there are also other books besides these, which have not indeed been put in the canon, but have been appointed by the Fathers as reading-matter for those who have just come forward and which to be instructed in the doctrine of piety: the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, Esther, Judith, Tobias, the so-called Teaching [Didache] of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. And although, beloved, the former are in the canon and the latter serve as reading matter.”

– Athanasius of Alexandria, *39th Festal Letter*, 367 AD

Does The Bible Include The Right Books?

D. Do the extracanoncal books have value?

- “It is safe to say that a comparison of the accepted books with those rejected may be relied upon, for those books which were accepted are far superior in value to the others...I have no hesitancy in saying that I am perfectly satisfied to let the common sense of the world decide upon the superiority of the accepted text.”

– Dr. Frank Crane, *Lost Books of the Bible*, Pg. 13

Good References for the Canon and extracanonical books:

- Bruce, F.F. *The Books and the Parchments*.
- Bruce, F.F. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*
- Comfort, Philip W. *Essential Guide To Bible Versions*.
- Kenyon, Frederic G. *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*
- Lightfoot, Neil R. *How We Got The Bible*.
- McDowell, Josh. *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*.
- Wegner, Paul. *The Journey From Text To Translation: The Origin And Development Of The Bible*
- www.tektonics.org/lp/ntcanon.html
- www.ntcanon.org/index.shtml
- www.earlychristianwritings.com

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

1. The reality of Bible difficulties
2. Difficulties are not necessarily contradictions
3. Difficulties caused by misreading the context
4. Did you check footnotes, other translations?

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

A. The reality of Bible difficulties

- **Read II Pet 3:14-18** – some passages are certainly more difficult than others to understand.
- Scriptural difficulties are exacerbated by:
 - *Absence of wisdom, knowledge* – Prov 10:14, 12:1; Matt 22:29; Acts 18:26; Rom 10:1-3 with Prov 19:2
 - *False teachings* – Luke 11:52; I Tim 4:1-5; Tit 1:10-16
 - *Prejudiced thinking* – Prov 12:15, 14:12; Matt 15:1-20; John 8:31-47; II Pet 2:12

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

B. *Difficulties* are not contradictions...

- **Contradiction:** impossible for two statements to at the same time be true.
- **Common claim:** “The Bible is full of contradictions.”
 - *Good response:* “Can you give an example of a contradiction in the Bible?”
 - *If yes:* “Have you checked the context carefully and considered any footnotes, textual variations?”
 - *If no:* Have in mind one or two passages commonly and mistakenly cited as Bible contradictions.

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

C. Difficulties with misreading the context

- Are the passages *really* contradictions?
 - If there a logical way to reconcile the two statements, there is no contradiction!
- *Compare Matt 27:44 with Luke 23:39-43*
 - The thief observed many things *after* mocking Christ, e.g. Christ's compassion (John 19:25ff) and forgiveness (Luke 23:34).
 - Other observers of the crucifixion were moved to believe in Christ (e.g. Matt 27:54).
 - Is it logically possible that the thief changed his mind?

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

C. Difficulties with misreading the context

- Are the passages *really* contradictions?
- *Compare Acts 1:18-19 with Matt 27:3-10*
 - Is it logically possible that *both* of these accounts are true? Do they *really* contradict each other?
 - *Matt 27*: Judas actively did something to himself (i.e. hanged himself).
 - *Acts 1*: At some point later, something passively happened to him (i.e. his body fell and burst).
 - Is it not plausible that both of these events happened?

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

C. Difficulties with misreading the context

- Are the passages *really* even parallel?
 - Some events in the Bible are very similar to other events at different times and places.
- *Compare the beatitudes of Matthew 5 and Luke 6*
 - Are these really two conflicting accounts of the same event? Carefully read the contexts!
 - Even if the event was the same, the passages would not be contradictory whatsoever:
 - One author would simply be adding details that the other author omitted for whatever reason.

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

C. Difficulties with misreading the context

- Are the passages *really* even parallel?
- *Compare Genesis 1 with Genesis 2:4-22*
 - Does Genesis 2 really read like a creation account? Where is the creation of the Sun, oceans, etc.?
 - Doesn't it appear that Genesis 1 and 2 emphasize different aspects of creation?
 - *Genesis 1*: A chronological overview of the days of creation.
 - *Genesis 2*: An enhanced view of the creation of man, and specifically God's creation of Eden.

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

C. Difficulties with misreading the context

- Are the verses *contradictory* or *complementary*?
- Both the “Beatitudes” accounts and the account of creation in Gen 1-2 illustrate this difference:
- Some passages, told from a different perspective, add details that their parallel passages omit.
- Only contradict if both accounts cannot be true.
- **Other examples:** five accounts of Christ’s resurrection; four accounts of Christ before Pilate; three accounts (etc.) of Paul’s conversion; etc.

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

D. Did you check footnotes, other translations?

- **Remember:** the original manuscripts were inspired, **not** their subsequent copies and translations!
- Differing parallel accounts of numbers are *sometimes* due to copyist errors.
 - e.g. II Kings 8:26 and II Chron 22:2
- Some passages that are strangely worded or otherwise difficult contain scribal/translator errors.
 - e.g. John 5:3-4; Acts 15:34 (is this comment really needed to reconcile Acts 15:22,33 and 40?); I Cor 14:38; Phil 2:6; I Pet 3:21; etc.

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

“As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied the alleged contradictions between the biblical record and the evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly verified and strengthened by the discovery that almost every problem in Scripture that has ever been discovered by man, from ancient times until now, has been dealt with in a completely satisfactory manner by the biblical text itself – or else by objective archaeological information.”

– Dr. Gleason Archer, *The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

“But when we begin to examine the instances brought forward in support of it [i.e. alleged contradictions in the Bible], they are found to be cases of *difficult*, not of *impossible*, harmony. And it is abundantly plain that it must be shown to be *impossible* to harmonize any two statements on any natural supposition before they can be asserted to be inconsistent.”

– Dr. Norman Geisler, *Decide for Yourself:
How History Reviews the Bible*

Is The Bible Full Of Contradictions?

Moreover, I may be allowed to say that the more thoroughly I have investigated the subject the more clearly have I seen the flimsy and disingenuous character of the objections alleged by infidels. And, whether or not my labors shall result in inducing a similar belief in the minds of my readers, I cannot but avow, as the issue of my investigations, the profound conviction that *every difficulty and discrepancy in the scriptures is, and will yet be seen to be, capable of a fair and reasonable solution.*

— John Haley, *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*

Good References for alleged Bible contradictions:

- Haley, John W. *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*. Many editions available, including one for free on Google Books (1874)
- Archer, Gleason L. *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. First published in 1982, updated in 2001.
- Tuck, Robert. *A Handbook of Scientific and Literary Bible Difficulties*. Many editions available, including one for free on Google Books (1890)
- Geisler, Norman and Howe, Thomas. *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation* (2008). This book was previously called *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties*, but has been updated and expanded.
- Kaiser, Walter C., et al. *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (1996). This book includes five volumes in one: hard sayings of the Old Testament (2 volumes), the New Testament, Paul, and Jesus.
- A host of useful websites, including:
 - <http://www.apologeticspress.org/allegeddiscrepancies/>
 - <http://www.carm.org/bible-difficulties/genesis-deuteronomy>
 - <http://www.lookinguntojesus.net/answering.htm>

For further reading on the topics covered in this lesson, please see their more comprehensive treatment in “Getting To Know The Book of Books” by Daniel W. Bailey, available under the *Bibles Classes* tab at:

www.greaterbuffalochurchofchrist.com