

How did we get the Bible?

We remember from our last lesson that we do not have the **autographs** of any book in the Bible; that is, we do not have the original copies. Does this mean that the Bible is unreliable? Not at all.



When we talk about the Bible, we are referring to a collection of 66 books; 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Before we can make any conclusions about the reliability of the books, we must determine which books should be a part of the Bible.

During the time that the books of the Bible were penned, many other writings were circulating as well. How do we determine which writings should be a part of the Bible and which should not be considered to be inspired by God?

All writings that are considered to be a part of the Bible are called the **canon** of Scripture. The English word canon is a transliteration of the Greek word *kanon* and the Hebrew *qaneh*. The word originally meant a *reed*. It came to mean a measuring instrument. The Bible canon is made up of those writings which have been “measured” and accepted to be inspired by God.

The Old Testament canon was fixed by the time of Jesus. Both Jesus and the apostles often quoted from the Old Testament demonstrating that they viewed it as authoritative.

1. To what parts of the Old Testament does Jesus refer in Luke 24:44?

2. What do the following verses indicate about the Old Testament canon? (Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 16:16-17; John 1:45)

3. Who did Jesus mention in Luke 11:51 and what does it signify?

(Hint, the Old Testament in the days of Jesus was in a different order than in our Bibles today. In the first century the book of 2 Chronicles was the last book in the O.T. – See 2 Chronicles 20:20-21.)

Josephus was a well known historian in the first century. He claimed there were 22 books that should be counted as Scripture. The Jews in the first century considered the 12 minor prophets to be one book; and Judges-Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Jeremiah-Lamentations were each counted as one book. Therefore, these 22 books equal the 39 that we have in our Old Testaments today. Josephus wrote that Malachi was the last inspired writer and completed the canon of Hebrew Scripture. He viewed all that was written afterwards as non-canonical. (<http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/1972>)

In the third century A.D., **Origen** also agrees that there are 22 books in the Old Testament and lists the same books as Josephus.

The **Mishna** is a written collection of Jewish oral law written in the second century A.D. The books listed as being a part of Scripture are the same ones that we have in our Bibles today.

A group of Jewish rabbis met at **Jamnia** in Judea to discuss the canon in A.D. 90. They concluded that the books that make up the Hebrew Bible are the same books we have in our Bibles today.

What About the Apocrypha?

There were many writings made during the time of the Bible, that claim to be about people and events surrounding the Bible; however they are not considered by most to be a part of the canon. The best known of these are the pseudepigraphal and the apocryphal writings. Some of these books claim Adam, Enoch, Barnabas, Thomas, Paul, and others as authors. They contain stories that claim to be about Pilate, Paul, Peter, and even Jesus.

The apocryphal writings are numerous and the best known of these writings is what is known today as the Apocrypha. The Apocrypha, which means “hidden away” writings is considered to be canonical by the Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, and Greek Orthodox Churches though their canons vary from one another.



The Hebrew canon never included the Apocrypha, but some early Christian canons did. Some early Christian writings quote from the Apocrypha and Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria believed them to be canonical. The Catholic Church's Council of Hippo (A.D. 393), the Third Council of Carthage (A.D. 397), the Sixth Council of Carthage (A.D. 419), and the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent (A.D. 1546) all accepted the Apocrypha as a part of the canon.

The question then is “why don't we accept the Apocrypha as canonical?” Some of the reasons are: 1) They were written after Old Testament revelations ceased and before New Testament revelations began. 2) Many of the apocryphal additions to the Old Testament contain errors and contradictions about geography, chronology, and historical details. 3) The Hebrew Bible did not include them. 4) The majority of Jews never believed them to be inspired Scripture. 5) Jesus, nor any New Testament writer ever quoted from the Apocrypha. 6) The Essene community that copied the Dead Sea Scrolls never referred to the Apocrypha as being Scripture. 7) The books of the Apocrypha, unlike the Old Testament books, do not claim to be inspired from God. 8) Some of the Apocrypha contradicts Biblical teaching elsewhere. (<http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/1972>); (<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/aid/v3/n1/look-at-the-canon&vPrint=1>); (<http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/111-the-apocrypha-inspired-of-god>).

The Old Testament pseudepigrapha (meaning false inscriptions) are additional writings from about 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. that claim false authorship. These claims alone would exclude them from consideration for being a part of the canon, but the whole tenor of these writings prove them to be of poor quality and full of contradictions.