

Where Did the Bible Come From?

Where we discuss how we ought not think, 'I'm not aware of too many things, I know what I know, if you know what I mean. Textual Criticism... is a walk on slippery rocks. The Bible... is a light in the fog.' If you know what I mean.

In this class, we will discuss what the Old and New Testaments are and how they were collected and how we can trust what they say is what they always said so we can feel comfortable that they are accurate, that God did supernaturally preserve them – unlike any other book from antiquity – and we can trust them.

(I am also including several appendix sections about the differences in books, the cannon lists, and a couple pages of teachings on Second Temple literature.)

What is the Old Testament?

The Old testament was written over 1000 years by many authors and tells the story of God through the history of Israel:

- Writing began at the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt (Moses and the Exodus, c. 1445 BC).
- The story continues through their Kingdom years (David, Solomon, and the First Temple, c. 1043 BC).
- Through being conquered by other world powers (The major prophets, like Daniel, Ezekiel).
- Concluding with the return to Israel and the building of the second temple (Ezra, Nehemiah, c. 425 BC).

During the time of the second temple is when we see the collection of the narrative histories, stories and prophecies being put together into a set of texts that we see today.

This collection of writings is called by an acronym:

- T – **Torah**, which we usually refer to as the Law or Pentateuch (because: 5)
- N – **Nevi'im**, which means “prophets” and tells the history of Israel and the prophecies

K – **Ketuvim**, which means smashed tomatoes with sugar, which they put on hotdogs. Actual it is “writings” and has all the wisdom, poetry and additional stories.



(Bible Project: What is the Bible? Also below.)

Israel, and Christians, believe that “through all these literary works, God speaks to His people” (BP.)

These aren't just writings. These are the inspired scripture.

What is the New Testament?

The New Testament was written over 20-45 years (50-70/94 AD; estimates differ) from shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus through most of the first century. It includes:

- The narrative history of Jesus and the early church (Gospels, Acts).
- The letters apostles sent to churches (Paul, James, Peter, Jude, etc.)
- Books on theology (Romans, Hebrews).
- Apocalyptic prophecy (Revelation).

Including the New Testament together with the Old Testament our Bible looks like this:



IS THE BIBLE TRUSTWORTHY?

What Does “Canon” Mean?

Canon is simply “_____.” The word comes from the Hebrew and Greek words for reed or cane. We may think of a measuring stick or a ruler.

In terms of the New Testament, the canon is the authoritative rule for orthodox teaching (right teaching) and orthopraxy (right conduct.)

Christians believe that the canon of scripture contains the full and complete divine or supernatural revelation of God.

By what criteria were books ruled in or out? Here is a quick list of important questions:

- Was the book from the time period of the Apostles?
- Was the book widely accepted by Christians?
- Was the book written by an Apostle or disciple of an Apostle?
- Did the book contradict the Old Testament or teachings from the Gospels and Paul’s letters?

There were some books that were in circulation, and may have even been pretty early in history. But they did not fit these criteria and, even though historically important, are not considered inspired.

Also, importantly, these books still exist, have not been suppressed or destroyed. Christians weren’t hiding anything and many kept copies of these books with their other holy writings.

The Old Testament Canon

According to Jewish tradition, around 400 BC, Ezra and 120 other men of God held a Great Assembly to consider the canon of inspired works (believed to be the same assembly from Nehemiah 9-10 in the Bible. 2 Mac 2:13 refers to Nehemiah’s collection of the scriptures as well.)

Among the men we know that are recounted as being a part of this council were Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Daniel.

(Fun fact: Another guy who went was named Simeon the Just, who according to tradition met Alexander the Great and received honor from him. It has to be clear by now that the Bible is rooted in

history – see Second Temple writings – another reason to trust it and be interested in reading it!)

What did the council do? They debated including Ezekiel, Daniel and Esther in the canon, which was mostly debatable because they were writing while in exile. The “minor” (which means small writings, not unimportant) were debated because they were written by people on the council.

It is important to note that the vast majority of the books – all of them except for the few that were being discussed – were *already* considered scripture and had been for hundreds of years.

Remember, at this time, the Jews were just coming back from exile after decades in bondage and were working on reestablishing the Theocracy under God’s Law.

By the end of this council, which coincides with the last of the OT prophetic works, the TaNaK had 24 books and the collection was considered closed.

(Christians break up the 12 minor prophets into their own books, split Samuel, Kings, Chronicles in two books each, and break up Ezra/Nehemiah into two books, but we have the same content. This is why we have 39 OT books. See Appendix – Week 2.)

The New Testament Canon

It is important to note that within the life time of the apostles, all 27 books of the New Testament were written and the vast majority of them were accepted by all Christians.

Consider that Peter called Paul’s writings “scripture” (2 Peter 3:15,16, c.67-68 AD). 1 Clement (c.96 AD), maybe the earliest non-canonical writings by one of the first Apostolic Fathers, calls Peter and Paul “Righteous Pillars” when recounting their martyrdom (late 60s AD), which is a similar term used by Paul of Peter and James in (Gal 2:9,) “Pillars of Authority.”

So Paul’s writings existed and were widespread read from (modern) Europe to the Middle East to Africa by the late 60s AD.

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Luke, a member of Paul's team wrote Luke/Acts c. 60-62 AD and Luke relies on early Gospels and interviews the living Apostles (Luke 1:1-4).

Mark, a member of Peter's team, wrote his Gospel around 50-60 AD and is widely believed to be the earliest Gospel (because the others clearly use Mark as a source.)

Since these were very early writings, written by people who were Apostles or knew them directly (which everyone else knew), the Gospels and Paul's letters became accepted widespread throughout the world and were used as theology and doctrine by Christians. For the first 200 years or so of Christianity, these books were accepted by all Christians as "Scripture."

But Christians, generally depending on location, used additional books as well.

And the "Church Fathers" - influential leaders in Christianity, the earliest tied directly to the Apostles - continued to write letters and books, which were then widely circulated, added to the number of letters and books in circulation. They wrote about and quoted the books/letters we call the NT tens of thousands of times in their own letters.

Note: added to. Never: removed from.

There are rumors by non-believers, New Atheists, which I define as evangelical atheists, that the New Testament books weren't selected until the Council of Nicea in c. 360 AD. That is simply not true.

The earliest complete list of all the New Testament books we currently have in our Bible's is dated to that time, that is true.

But, at no time did any one group have control of the texts of the NT, because there are so many letters/books immediately in circulation that they could not have been removed from the people.

Consider that if, say Rome, (who everyone blames,) had all the books and all the control we would never have heard about the books that Ethiopian Christians found value in. The fact that Ethiopian Orthodox Christians have books that Rome doesn't approve of

is further evidence that they weren't in control of the canon.

So Who Chose the Books?

Christians did. _____.

The earliest list, the Muratorian Canon, is from c. 170 AD, and includes 19 NT books, with 5 more likely (the document is damaged.) The only missing books are James, 1 & 2 Peter. (They also add two books, Apocalypse of Peter and Wisdom of Solomon.)

Eusebius, c 325, wrote *Church History*, and listed out the books that were not uniformly accepted by all Christians, as well as those which were universally accepted. Same books were accepted: Gospels, Acts, letters, Romans, etc.

Athanasius, in 367 AD, provided the earliest extant list of the current New Testament.

There are a ton of early church literature that attest to the universal acceptance of almost all of the NT, including the most important ones about Jesus's life, death and resurrection (Gospels), the early church expansion (Acts,) the development of Christian theology (Paul's letters, Romans,) and the expectation of Christ's second coming (all of them.)

The Bible would be lesser without some of the books that were debated between different traditions (James, 2 Peter, Jude, 2 & 3 John, Hebrews and Revelation,) but we would still have everything we needed to know and follow Christ.

If you add in the Holy Spirit, then you have God Himself ensuring we have the correct books.

How Do We Know the Books Weren't Changed?

So we agree that we have the same books, but how do we know they weren't changed?

Aren't there a ton of errors in the manuscripts we have?

That's one of the biggest complaints I hear from non-believers. It's a good question.

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So does the Bible have errors? Did the people copying the manuscripts change them?

____, some did.



Before you call me a heretic and tell me I'm going to Hell, let me explain.

First, it's important to remember that Christians are seekers after the truth. We must never lie.

Second, Christians do not believe the ends justify the means. We must be righteous, even if it means being wrong or losing in the short term. (We always win in the end. Because: Heaven!)

That said, the fact is that there are changes to the manuscripts. There are typos. There are mistakes in copying.

What an Oral Culture Watches on TV:

Nothing. There are no TVs. And when there are no TVs, they talk to each other. Gaaaaaaaaasp!

And tell stories. The same stories over and over. And everyone knows them. If someone changes a story, everyone knows it. And rejects it.

Over time, the oral culture of the Jews changed to a partially written culture when they started writing down the stories, specifically Moses in about 1445 BC when we wrote down the old stories in the Pentateuch (the first five books.)

Over time, a group of Jews called the _____ started making copies. They took this job serious, yo.

They would count each letter on a page, the number each time a letter showed up in each book, even the middle letter of the entire Old Testament and then check to see if their copies were exactly right.

They were so great at this that we know that none of the Old Testament texts changed from the time of 600-700 AD, and because we found the Dead Sea Scrolls, we know that the texts we have are virtually unchanged going back to before Christ!

Virtually, huh? Yeah. For instance, the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, has 17 variants in over 1000 years: 10 spelling changes, 4 stylistic changes, 3 were in the Hebrew word for "light." None of the variants substantially alter the meaning of the text.

Back to oral culture, did you know that Jesus expressed his teachings in an easy to memorize form, similar to the Old Testament? A NT scholar, Rainer Riesner, determined that about 80% of the different sayings of Jesus were in some kind of parallelism, or poetry intended to make what he said memorable. Consider his parables and metaphors.

Jesus made it easy for Christians to remember what he said. And extremely easy to remember his point.

And that's the point for us: what did Jesus mean?

Here's another run-away moment: it is likely that the disciples wrote down the essential wisdom of Jesus, even if not the exact words of Jesus.

This explains several of the differences in texts in the Gospels. Example, Jesus speaking to Caiaphas:

- Mark 14:61-62, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of Heaven."
- Luke 22:69, "I am, and from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God."

In Jewish literature, "coming on the clouds" is a metaphor for judgement and power. Luke, writing to Greeks, explained the metaphor for us. Mark, writing the Jews, left it in. It means the same thing.

In case you worry about these types of explanations, consider 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, where we have Paul quoting an early creed (words like “delivered” and “received” are keys to recognizing that something oral is now being written down.)

This creed originated within 3 to 8 years after Jesus’ death. That means that the leaders of the church created an easy to remember statement of fundamental Christian beliefs right away, that it became widespread immediately (reaching Paul and the Corinthians), and that the people who actually knew and saw Jesus all testified to:

- Jesus’ death (3)
- For our sins (3)
- According to prophecy (4)
- Raised from the dead (4)
- On the third day (4)
- Appeared to many (5-8)
- There were 12 apostles (5)

If a nefarious group, wanted to make key changes to theology, they would be ineffectual because books were copied and in circulation almost immediately all over the world. Some of these very early copies still exist and we found them much later.

Consider *P66*, a fragment of John, which dates from before 200 AD, but we only found it in 1952 in Egypt. If changes were made in the 1700+ years since that book was written and hidden, we would know it. Yet there aren’t changes to the important theology of the Church (see creed above.)

One interesting change that does exist is that this very early manuscript does NOT have the story of the woman caught in adultery. Remember Jesus drawing on the ground. Remember not throwing the first stone? It’s not there.

And instead of hiding this, Christians make a note of it in your Bible. BibleGateway.com, and your NIV Bible, prominently display something like, “[The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53—8:11.]”

There are other changes to the text as well. The good news is that when you have 6000+ copies of the New Testament books, you can find the root causes of the changes (and undo them.)

Consider the scribe who has been tasked with copying a book. He may be Egyptian (Coptic Christian) and he reads the scroll or papyrus in front of him and it’s written in Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or another language. His job is to copy the text, but he knows that his readers – perhaps an important person – may not understand a metaphor or story, so he helpfully adds in an explanation in the margin.

That scroll is passed on to another scribe who sees the notation and doesn’t know it’s an addition so he adds it to the text.

Every person after them copies the same exact addition, thinking it is part of the original.

1500 years later, we have 100 variants with exactly the same addition. We also have 1000 copies of the book without that variant, many times older manuscripts. So we know it is additional. We don’t know the scribe’s name, but we see his handiwork through hundreds of copies.

In this same way we find misspellings, misunderstandings, additions and minor changes. And in this same way we can see when they were added and know for certain that they were added.

We can work backwards to find the original letter. This is called _____.

So are there changes? Yes. Do we know what they are? Yes. Are we honest about them? Yes.

Are there hidden or missing books? No. Did anyone ever make the Bible/pick the books of the Bible? No.

Can we trust the Bible we have is what it was when it was written? Yes.

Can we trust that the Bible accurately contains the message and deeds of Jesus? Yes.

(And we didn’t even have to talk about how we can know pretty much everything about early Christian theology and belief from non-Biblical sources! I’ll share that with you at a later time.)

IS THE BIBLE TRUSTWORTHY?

JEWISH V CHRISTIAN OT BOOKS

This helpful graphic shows how the Jewish Bible and Christian Old Testament books lineup. They are exactly the same.

Christians broke up several of the books into 2 parts, and also changed the order of some.

I found this from an online search and it comes from a now-defunct website.

Jewish OT 24 Books			Christian OT 39 Books		
The Law (Torah)			The Law (Torah)		
Genesis	1	1	1	Genesis	
Exodus	2	2	2	Exodus	
Leviticus	3	3	3	Leviticus	
Numbers	4	4	4	Numbers	
Deuteronomy	5	5	5	Deuteronomy	
Prophets (Nevi'im)			OT History		
Former Prophets			Pre-Exilic		
Joshua	6	6	6	Joshua	
Judges	7	7	7	Judges	
1 Samuel	8	8	8	Ruth	
2 Samuel	9	9	9	1 Samuel	
1 Kings	10	10	10	2 Samuel	
2 Kings	11	11	11	1 Kings	
Latter Prophets			12 2 Kings		
Isaiah	10	12	13	1 Chronicles	
Jeremiah	11	13	14	2 Chronicles	
Ezekiel	12	14	Post-Exilic		
Book of the Twelve			15 Ezra		
Hosea		15	16	Nehemiah	
Joel		16	17	Esther	
Amos		17	Wisdom		
Obadiah		18	18	Job	
Jonah		19	19	Psalms	
Micah	13	20	20	Proverbs	
Nahum		21	21	Ecclesiastes	
Habakkuk		22	22	Song of Songs	
Zephaniah		23	Major Prophets		
Haggai		24	23	Isaiah	
Zechariah		25	24	Jeremiah	
Malachi		26	25	Lamentations	
Writings (Kethuvim)			26	Ezekiel	
Psalms	14	27	27	Daniel	
Proverbs	15	28	Minor Prophets		
Job	16	29	28	Hosea	
Song of Songs	17	30	29	Joel	
Ruth	18	31	30	Amos	
Lamentations	19	32	31	Obadiah	
Ecclesiastes	20	33	32	Jonah	
Esther	21	34	33	Micah	
Daniel	22	35	34	Nahum	
Ezra	23	36	35	Habakkuk	
Nehemiah		37	36	Zephaniah	
1 Chronicles	24	38	37	Haggai	
2 Chronicles		39	38	Zechariah	
			39	Malachi	

EARLY LISTS OF NT CANON

This helpful side-by-side comparison (from Wikipedia) of some of the oldest lists of the New Testament. The evidence quite clearly shows that the vast majority of the New Testament was recognized as authoritative from the beginning of the church.

Remember: “No” or “Maybe” didn’t mean that was the right answer, only that the group that made the list felt that way or that the list is damage/unreadable. But you can see that over time consensus grew.

(Note: Marcion was a heretic who rejected the deity of Jesus, and was an early catalyst for Gnosticism in the church. I’m including his list here to show that even non-Christian heretics believed most of the books were authoritative soon after the books were completed.)

Books	Marcionite canon ^[23]	Muratorian fragment ^[24]	Peshitta <i>[citation needed]</i>	Codex Vaticanus ^[25]	Codex Sinaiticus ^[26]	Codex Alexandrinus ^[27]	Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus ^[28]
<i>Composition date</i>	c. 130–140	c. 170	?	c. 300–325	c. 330–360	c. 400–440	c. 450
Matthew	No	Probably ^[29]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mark	No	Probably ^[29]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Luke	Marcion ^[30]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
John	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Acts	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Romans	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1 Corinthians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 Corinthians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Galatians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ephesians	Laodiceans ^[31]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Philippians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Colossians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1 Thessalonians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 Thessalonians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe ^[28]
1 Timothy	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 Timothy	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Titus	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Philemon	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hebrews	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
James	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1 Peter	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 Peter	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1 John	No	Probably ^[32] ^[24]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 John	No	Maybe ^[32]	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe ^[28]
3 John	No	Maybe ^[32]	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jude	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Revelation	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
1 Clement	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
2 Clement	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Shepherd of Hermas	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Epistle of Barnabas	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Apocalypse of Peter	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Book of Wisdom	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

What are the Second Temple Writings?

These books are actually considered to be incredibly valuable for Christians and Jews to read as they bridge the gap between the Old and New Testaments.

Plus these are actually really cool:

- 1 Maccabees, I kid you not, starts with Alexander the Great conquering Israel! “After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian...had defeated King Darius of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king” (1 Mac 1:1)
- It includes Ptolemy and Cleopatra (Egypt), “So Ptolemy set out from Egypt, he and his daughter Cleopatra, and came to Ptolemais in the one hundred sixty-second year” (1 Mac 10:57).
- In 1 Mac 8, the Jews sent an envoy to the Roman senate, an emerging power at the time, to make an alliance.
- In 1 Mac 12, they make an alliance with freaking Sparta, who agrees to support the Jews because “King Arius of Sparta...[has]...found a document about the Spartans and the Jews indicating that we are related and that both of our nations are descended from Abraham” (1 Mac 12-21).

1 Maccabees also recounts the an important historical event. In 168, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (this doesn't mean “eureka!”, but “visible god,”) sacrificed a pig on the altar in the Second Temple and set up a statue to Zeus. This event is an example of the prophecy from Daniel (9:27, 11:31 and 12:11), which was reiterated in the New Testament as an “abomination that causes desolation.”

Hanukkah originates from the rededication of the temple after they cleansed it.

(We will talk about prophecy more in session 7, *You Down with PWP?*, but prophecies about the Abomination of Desolation from Daniel, and Jesus in the Gospels, could refer to this type of event happening more than once. Another such event was most likely the complete destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70, and may also have a future fulfillment prior to Jesus' return.)

In the New Testament, Jude, (possibly written by

another brother of Jesus, along with James,) quotes, 1 Enoch 1:9 in v14-15. And Enoch was found with the Dead Sea Scrolls, which means it was important if not scripture.

The question most Protestants have is, “Why aren't these in my Bible?” It's complicated.

First, let's talk about how the Christian traditions refer to them:

- **Catholics:** *deuterocanon*, which means “second canon” and considered a part of scripture, but not to be used as primary sources for theology. They include 7 books plus two additions to existing books (Esther and Daniel).
- **Eastern & Oriental Orthodox:** *deuterocanon* or *anagignoskomena*, which means “worthy of reading,” and considered inspired and important, but not used as primary sources for theology or in corporate worship services. They add an additional 8 books, plus Psalm 151. Syrian and Ethiopian churches have variations of the collection.
- **Protestants:** *apocrypha*, or “hidden things.” Not considered divinely inspired, so none of them are included in our Bibles.

Christians of all traditions consider books found in the original Hebrew and Greek, called the *protocanon*, and what we see in all of our Bibles.

Let me step back a bit. In the Old & New Testament, we see the text referring to books that no longer exist, like “The Book of the Wars of the Lord” (Num 21:14) and “The Book of Jashar” (Josh 10:13). This points to the truth that there were other books written throughout the history of Israel and the surrounding nations. But we don't have copies of all of them.

This is a central tenant of belief in the Bible: that we have the books that were divinely inspired because God divinely preserved them.

What's important to note is that all Christians agree these are helpful books – for both history and the intertestamental time period – and all of the traditions agree that these are not quite up to the same standard as the books in the Old and New Testament.